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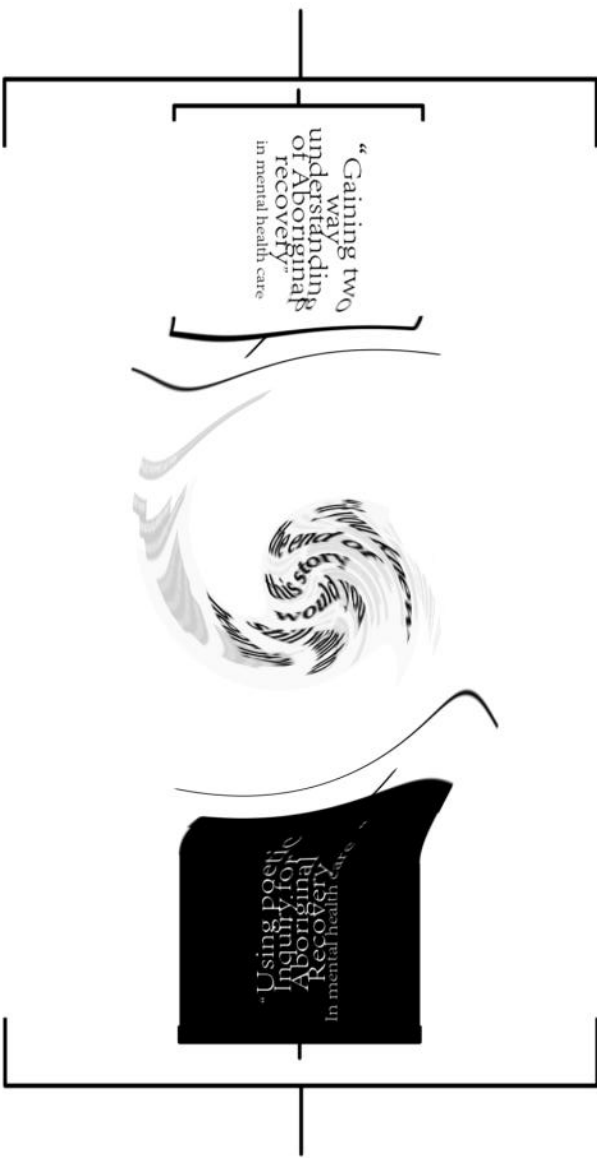
“Using poetic
Inquiry for
Aboriginal
Recovery”
In mental health care

“if you knew
the end of
this story
would you
still want to
hear it?”

“Gaining two
way
understanding
of Aboriginal
recovery”
in mental health care

“An intentionally blank page is a page that is devoid of content, and may be unexpected. Such pages may serve purposes ranging from place-holding to space-filling and content separation. Sometimes, these pages carry a notice such as, “This page [is] intentionally left blank”. Such notices typically appear in printed works, such as legal documents, manuals and exam papers, in which the reader might otherwise suspect that the blank pages are due to a printing error and where missing pages might have serious consequences. Intentionally blank pages are usually the result of printing conventions and techniques ... ”¹

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentionally_blank_page accessed October 27, 2014



"Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal recovery" in mental health care

The story of recovery

"Using poetry Inquiry for the Aboriginal Recovery" in mental health care

<This page [is] intentionally left blank.>

“ . . . ”

:Using a Non-Bracketed Narrative to Story Recovery in Aboriginal Mental Health Care

Vicki-Lea Saunders

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Healthcare Sciences,
Division of Tropical Health and Medicine,
James Cook University.

January 2016

Dedication



For my father/s
Who taught me to see
The forests in a tree

For my mother/s,
Who taught me to read
The words you now see

For my sisters, nephews and Nick for all
that you do
And for all my relations, with whom I write
to

And for You,
Who in reading
write these words into view...

Uwalla, ooka min diya, niya noogalla nulla.
Yant el our ou,²

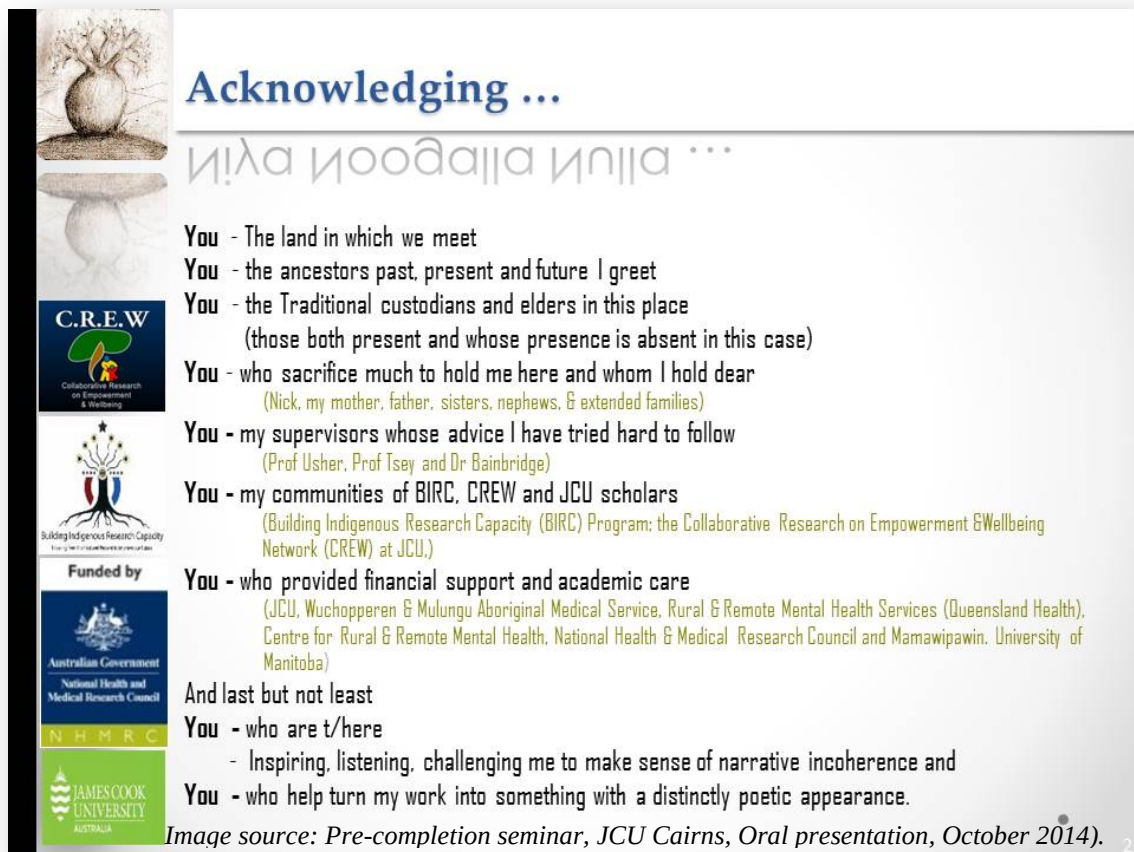
² These words (re)present a way of greeting and of welcoming others into a space in the language/s of my father's *Gunggari* ancestors. Throughout the dissertation select phrases and words from *Gunggari* and other (Australian) Aboriginal languages, have been carefully placed in a particular font (Agency FB, fontsize 12, italics). Sometimes the English translations for these words are left absent. This has been done not to confuse but to introduce untranslated spaces within this text for the reader to read into and to reflect or echo how *Gunggari* words are more often now spoken and 'heard'. For aesthetic, rhetorical, methodological and ethical reasons these untranslated spaces are embedded in the form and content of this dissertation. The rationale for placing these spaces in text is to respond to imperatives often inscribed in mental health care reform and research (NHMRC, 2002, NMHC 2013, Slade, Slade, Amering & Oades, 2008) namely the need to listen, to amplify 'consumer voices' in mental health care and to conduct and to write research in more participatory and engaged ways. Leaving untranslated words and phrases invites the reader to participate in the creative processes of meaning making that these spaces introduce. English is a language sometimes used, read, written or heard in different ways by people that the English word 'Aboriginal' inscribes (Harkins 1994), particularly in places where mental health care is provided for or by them. As a consequence sometimes there are simply no English words for what Aboriginal people have to say.

Acknowledging | Niya Noogalla Nulla

Statements of Source and Contribution

Since writing never occurs in isolation from the people with whom (and for whom) it is written, I use a phrase from the *Gunggari* languages of my father's ancestors, *Niya Noogalla Nulla*, to acknowledge You who have generously, and patiently, supported the development and creation of this dissertation. Translated as "I see you" in English (Lynette Nixon, pers. comm. 2012), 'Niya Noogalla Nulla' is used here to acknowledge your presence and role in the creation of this text.

Figure 1: Acknowledgements.



Acknowledging ...
niya noogalla nulla ...

You - The land in which we meet
You - the ancestors past, present and future I greet
You - the Traditional custodians and elders in this place
(those both present and whose presence is absent in this case)
You - who sacrifice much to hold me here and whom I hold dear
(Nick, my mother, father, sisters, nephews, & extended families)
You - my supervisors whose advice I have tried hard to follow
(Prof Usher, Prof Tsey and Dr Bainbridge)
You - my communities of BIRC, CREW and JCU scholars
(Building Indigenous Research Capacity (BIRC) Program; the Collaborative Research on Empowerment & Wellbeing Network (CREW) at JCU.)
You - who provided financial support and academic care
(JCU, Wuchopperen & Mulungu Aboriginal Medical Service, Rural & Remote Mental Health Services (Queensland Health), Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health, National Health & Medical Research Council and Mamawipawin. University of Manitoba)
And last but not least
You - who are t/here
- Inspiring, listening, challenging me to make sense of narrative incoherence and
You - who help turn my work into something with a distinctly poetic appearance.

Image source: Pre-completion seminar, JCU Cairns, Oral presentation, October 2014).

This dissertation was produced under the direction of Professor Kim Usher, Professor Komla Tsey and Dr Roxanne Bainbridge and I particularly acknowledge their contribution in the preparation of this work. I also acknowledge many others for their contributions to this work.

- a) My family - Rosemary Sallway, Trudy Bain, Kimi Waterson, Toni Jensen, James Bain, Bayden Corbett, Damien Corbett, Kody Jensen, Liam Jensen, Aunty Phyllis Saunders, Ray Stanley, Charmaine Keefe, Patsy Saunders, Warren Saunders, Debbie Saunders, Bradley Saunders, Sue Saunders, Sean Saunders, Matt Saunders, Andrew Saunders, Uncle Mal Saunders, Uncle Ray Saunders and ...
- b) Intellectual contribution and cultural advice: Professor Juanita Sherwood, Aunty Irene Ryder, Aunty Ethel Munns, Saraeva Nixon, Vanessa Moore, Lynnete Nixon, Gayle Munn, Uncle Alfred Smallwood, Uncle Ernie Hoolihan, Val Alberts, Kelvin Thomson, Cynthia Payne, Associate Professor Gracelyn Smallwood, Professor Roianne West, Dr Yvette Roe, Senimelia Kingsborough, Randal Ross, Aunty Dianna Ross, Associate Professor Lynore Geia, Irene Nai, Che Stow, Professor Adrian Miller, Kirsty Leo, Robyn Hooley, Uncle Lawrence Omeenyo, Corrallee Cassidy, Patrick Omeenyo, Irene Namok, Dr Lynne Russell, Tash Rerekura, Dr Arlene Laliberté, Dr Sandy Campbell, Tim, Max, Deanne Hellsten, Debra Bennell, Rosaria Quartermaine, Gail Wason, Gail Mabo, Chris Richardson, Professor Yvonne Cadet James, Dr Vinita Mosby, Dr Josephine Bourne, Dr Jenny Fraser, Sharon Moore, Trina Jackson, Associate Professor Kiera Ladner, Myra Tait, Dr Judith Bartlett, Dr Barry Lavalley, Associate Professor Yoni Luxford, Laimena Muwadda, members of the TheMHS Indigenous subcommittee 2012 and affiliated members of the Building Indigenous Research Capacity (BIRC) program at JCU, and ...
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- e) Administrative and Postgraduate support: SONMN, IHU, SPHTM, JCU, Chris Brown, Karen Ives, Associate Professor David Lindsay, Associate Professor Sue Gair and ...
- f) Financial Support: Nick and my family, my friends, NHMRC, BIRC, JCU, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Care, Mamawipawin, University of Manitoba and ...

The poetic essays that form the substantive chapters of this dissertation (the chapters entitled prologue and epilogue) originally appeared in the following journals:

- *Journal of Poetry Therapy*
- *The Qualitative Report*

I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint those essays in this form. I would also like to take this occasion to acknowledge in print my obligations to my family, my friends and those colleagues who have contributed—whether they are aware of it or not—to the direction that my work has taken me in over the years. Every reasonable effort has been made to gain permission and acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

I particularly acknowledge the scholars within the Building Indigenous Research Capacity (BIRC) program and the Collaborative Research on Empowerment and Wellbeing (CREW) network at James Cook University (JCU), and affiliated scholars and community members for sharing their time, their stories, and their support

... and for listening.

Niya noogalla nulla

Table of Contents

Dedication	vi
Acknowledging <i>Niya Naagalla Nulla</i>	vii
Table of Contents	x
Acronyms	1
Thesis Abstract.....	1
Foreword Coda.....	3
Entitling the non-bracketed story	2
Prefacing	5
Writing about writing how to read this story	10
Before I begin	17
The gaze, the lens and the view/ the thesis, the poem and the text	19
References	21
Prologue Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery.....	24
Abstracting	25
Introducing	25
Bracketing the story	29
Closing the brackets ...”	35
Acknowledging	37
References	38
“...” If you knew the end of a story	41
Poem as thesis <i>Niya Naagalla Nulla</i>	42
Palimpsest	44
Epilogue Using poetic inquiry for Aboriginal Recovery	46
Abstracting:	47
Introducing	47
Applying research poetry	52
References	60
Postscript Statement of Methodology	64
Opening statement “Methodologically speaking”	65
Statement of intent the poem and the story	66
Speaking methodologically the text	70
Mapping inquiry	75
Ars poetica What good is a poem.....	83
Statement of impact and significance	105
Concluding statement coda	109

Beginning at the end Storying Aboriginal Recovery	113
References	121
Appendices.....	134
Appendix A: Collection of research poems (2009-2015)	134
Appendix B: Select details from the Storytellers involved	173
Appendix C: Publications	177
Appendix D: Conference Presentations	179
Appendix E: Statement of Ethics	196

Table of figures

Figure 1: Acknowledgements.	vii
Figure 2: “Aka’s poem” Alternative title: “ <i>Dadirri</i> : an ethical moment”	5
Figure 3: Dissertation Map 2	3
Figure 4: Dissertation Map 1	4
Figure 5: Queensland Bottle Tree	8
Figure 6: “Entitling”	14
Figure 7:”Do you see what I see?” Alternative title: “through his uncle’s eyes” ...	18
Figure 8: Research is ... a dirty word	20
Figure 9: Metaphors of methodology	64
Figure 10: “Talk for me Sis”.....	68
Figure 11: Researching questions and questioning research	74
Figure 12: What is poetic inquiry like?	77
Figure 13: Metaphors and methodological elements.....	78
Figure 14: The chiasmic structure of this research narrative.....	78
Figure 15: The reader, the text and the poem	89
Figure 16: Methodology and “data’ maps	90
Figure 17: Research processes and products	92
Figure 18: What does the poetic as research look like?.....	97
Figure 19: Researching Designs	100
Figure 20: The writing model posited by Murray (1980).....	102
Figure 21: A 3D reading: painting with words	107
Figure 22: Storying Aboriginal recovery (Spiritual healing).....	113
Figure 23: Evidencing Recovery outcomes in Aboriginal mental health care.	118
Figure 24: "... "	119

List of tables

Table 1: Dissertation outline.....	3
Table 2: Relating Texts – the Aboriginal concept of time.....	57

Acronyms

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIR	Arts informed research
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIMHi	Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative
BIRC	Building Indigenous Research Capacity program
CREW	Collaborative Research on Empowerment And Wellbeing Team
CRRMH	Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IHU	Indigenous Health Unit
JCU	James Cook University
JCU GRS	James Cook University Graduate Research School
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NMHC	Australian National Mental Health Commission
NQ	North Queensland, Australia
QMHC	Queensland Mental Health Commission
RRMHS(QH)	Rural and Remote Mental Health Services, Queensland Health
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
SONMN	School of Nursing, Midwifery and Nutrition
SPHTMRS	School of Public Health, Tropical Medicine and Rehabilitation Sciences
TheMHS	The Mental Health Service (biannual Conference)
UQ	University of Queensland

Thesis Abstract

Two poetic essays, a poem and a palimpsest (or a page from which previous writings have been erased) are central to this work. Each element (re)presents the focus of this inquiry in a different way. This inquiry focusses on a particular type of story ending not often told of, and by, Aboriginal people using or working in mental health care services. As a category of story ending, it is sometimes identified by a word and as a social movement in mental health care widely referred to as Recovery. As a word, Recovery was not commonly used in the places where this inquiry occurred (although over time it became more so). Nor, as a story ending, is it one often told about Aboriginal Australian people accessing mental health care services in North Queensland. As such this inquiry was, and is, focussed on listening to how Aboriginal people are storied in mental health care and how these stories end.

Rhetorically and poetically this dissertation poses the following question: *“If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?”* The underlying thesis and the underlying propositional statement it posits therefore addresses what appears to be a rhetorical and possibly unanswerable question—a deliberate intent by the author. Arts informed research practices (AIR) and poetic inquiry were chosen from amongst those available to make clear the assumptions and stance underlying its positioning as a research project. Poetic inquiry is/was used, not only as a way to position, represent and express the research findings, but importantly as a means through which the aspirations of transformative research paradigms and arts activism may be enacted or made possible or visible. Re-positioned as expressive inquiry or minor research and (re)presented using poetic inquiry, this text is presented in a non-traditional dissertation structure. The three separate narrative beginnings this dissertation contains were constructed to engage with the values and principles underpinning critical, transformative and decolonising research paradigms. Each beginning uses poetry and images as representational, expressive and enactive strategies for storytelling and inquiry. To say this more simply I used Arts informed research practices to listen deeply for stories of recovery amidst those told in Aboriginal mental health care.

Data for this inquiry were gathered over a five-year period, through reading, writing and yarning (or informal, in-depth conversations) with three central storytellers and 21 additional people working in, or accessing, mental health care services in North Queensland. The three central storytellers are all Aboriginal mothers with decades of personal and professional experiences with/in Aboriginal mental health care and service delivery. They have also worked, or still work, as nurses. Their experiences include those experienced as mental health care consumers, practitioners, activists, advocates and carers, and each of the central storytellers were living in North Queensland, Australia when this inquiry began. Interpretation of their stories occurred through collaborative yarning to identify key narrative

themes. The research questions posed, and this dissertation as a research[ed] response, were drawn from these yarns. Data for this inquiry consists of ‘text/s’ that are oral, visual and written in form. Data analysis involved reworking and (re)presenting these texts and the key concerns or themes that yarning about them uncovered. The outcomes of inquiry or research artefacts were also used to generate opportunities for further data collection, validation and creative synthesis. This was done through the creation of a series of collaborative poems and images to respond to the concerns and questions raised iteratively throughout inquiry. In this text these concerns are organised into key moments and themes named (and embedded) using Aboriginal words: *Binan Goonj*, *Dadirri* and *Niya Noogalla Nulla*. In this text select words from Aboriginal languages are sometimes used or placed to create a translational and untranslated space. To take a relational approach to writing, to write with rather than about those involved in inquiring, involved adopting a stance towards writing that is dialogic, inclusive and respectful of multiple perspectives and voice. Throughout this inquiry, I asked repeatedly “*What is it that needs to be said?*”

In approaching writing as a research methodology, my role as researcher and author shifted subtly towards that of scribe, where authority or credibility rests in how well the words used resonate with or echo those whose ‘voices’ originally (created/spoke/authored) them. Each of the poems, images and poetic essays used to recreate and express ‘the participant voice’ in this work has been verified by at least one or more of the twenty-five people formally involved in shaping their creation. This was done not so much for accuracy but for verisimilitude (or similarity/proximity to ‘truth’). To do that I asked each storyteller, “*Does what I say, still say what you meant? Does this (text) still say what you feel needs to be said?*”

Poetry, as well as the narrative skills that reading and writing poetry engages with, can be helpful in sensitising health care providers and students to the viewpoints of others in their daily lives. The poems and images placed throughout allude to the ongoing struggle for Aboriginal Australian people to engage with models (and texts) of mental health care and within recovery-oriented research, policy, and practice contexts that have been described as mono-cultural and colonising. They also invite the reader, researchers, mental health care providers and others to empathically/reflexively participate in answering the two research questions this work presents: “*If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?*” and “*How many stories of living Aboriginally mentally well and recovered do you know?*” It invites the reader to read into these questions and to respond in ways that might affect the social, attitudinal and paradigm shift advocated for in recovery oriented policy and practice directives. In effect the way you, the reader, choose to respond to these questions is what substantiates or grounds the underlying hypothesis and aesthetic purpose for this text. .



Before reading this dissertation an invitation is extended to the reader to first listen to the audiovisual file that is enclosed and/or linked within this text. This dissertation has not been written in a traditional manner. This text is submitted as a companion document for the palimpsest and audiovisual file that accompany it. Within the audiovisual file are the oral, visual and performative elements of research (re)presentation that centre poetic forms of inquiry. This text has been written to echo or reflect that which is contained in the sounds and images that the audiovisual file contains. By inviting the reader to listen, and to listen in a different way before reading, the reader is also invited to 'listen' to the alternate forms in which this text is read and/or storied into being.

“Composing poetry becomes a cultural tool to make sense of the day-to-day lived experience of the inner world of what it is like to be a multiply-positioned self”. (Weibe, 2012, p. 44).

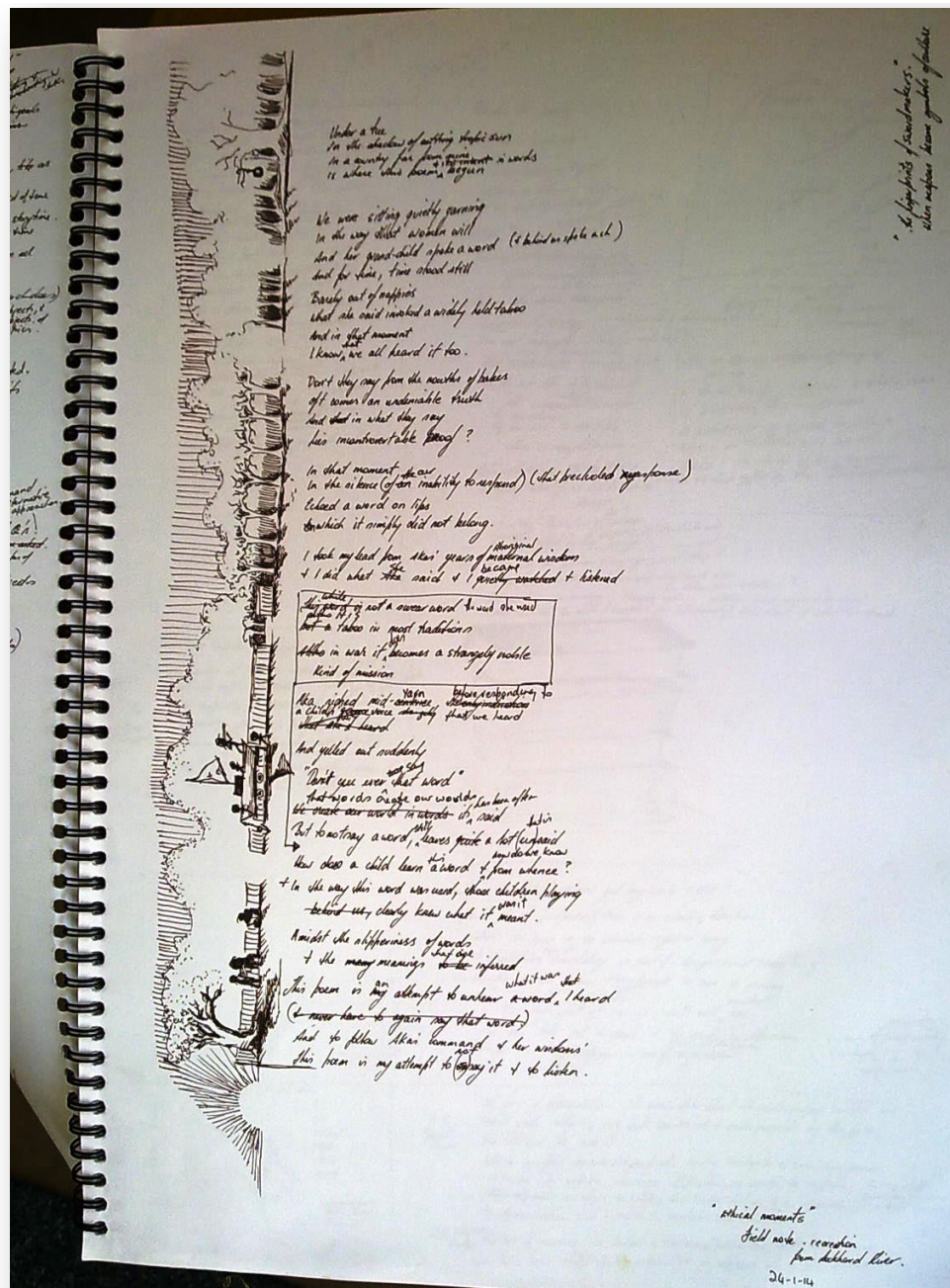
Prior to enrolling in a PhD program I used to be more of a quantitative researcher. Working in public health research my training revolved around epidemiology and statistical analysis. This training extended the predominantly quantitative research training I gained from completing an undergraduate psychology degree. While the methodology for this inquiry is not framed quantitatively, it was the numbers and statistics encountered whilst working in the fields of public and Indigenous health research that stimulated the search for a word (and a story ending) that became my PhD journey.

Just prior to enrolling in a PhD I was in the process of quantifying the content of a psychiatric database containing 20 years of clinical case notes from select Aboriginal communities in Far North Queensland. At that time I had also just finished transforming the clinical notes written in 68 Indigenous hospital patient charts into numbers for a chart audit we called the “Acuity project” (Haswell-Elkins, Saunders, Miller, et.al., 2007; Saunders, Haswell-Elkins and Brownlie, 2015, unpublished data). This project aimed to explore indicators of acuity or severity of illness amongst Indigenous admissions to an acute psychiatric unit with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or schizophreniform disorder. Whilst working on these projects, I spent many hours listening to mental health professionals speak of the Indigenous patients in their care. I would like to say this PhD journey began with the proposal I submitted with my ethical and PhD academic applications. I would also like to say my PhD journey unfolded as I originally proposed and planned. It did not. My PhD journey began as I sat under a tree outside the locked doors of a busy psychiatric unit, yarning with those who regularly moved in and out of those doors. It was during those conversations that I started asking different types of questions about my reasons for doing and valuing research and mental health care.

My research methodology began as a work of poetic inquiry however, three years later as I sat under a tree 800 km north of that psychiatric unit talking with an Aboriginal Grandmother, Artist, Auntie and Elder about her journeys through those clinic doors; about her journeys through those places that locate her life story. I did not ask for permission to use her story for my research project. I knew even as we spoke an academic text was no place to entrust her story into and I know what I learned from her about Aboriginal Recovery cannot be articulated fully or faithfully into written English words. But it was not her words that began this thesis as a work of poetic inquiry, it was the voice of her granddaughter. It was the words of a five year old child that led to an ethical moment (captured in the poem called ‘*Aka’s* poem’) that transformed my PhD into poetic inquiry. “*Aka*” is a Torres Strait Islander word meaning “Grandmother.” While “*Aka*” is not an Aboriginal word and it is being used out of context here, in the context which this poem evolved it is a term

frequently used by the children who live there. Here I am using it to refer to an Aboriginal Grandmother, Artist, Auntie, Elder and storyteller.

Figure 2: “Aka’s poem”| Alternative title: “*Dadirri*: an ethical moment”



Aka's poem

Under a tree
In the shadow of a setting tropic sun
In a country far from mine
Is where this poem in words begun
We were sitting quietly yarning
In the way that women will
And her grandchild spoke a word
And for a time, time stood still.
Barely out of nappies
What she said invoked a widely held taboo
And in that moment
I know that we had all heard it too.
Don't they say from the mouths of babes
Oft comes an undeniable truth
And in what they say
Lies incontrovertible proof?
In that moment
In the silence of an inability to respond
Echoed a word on lips
On which it simply did not belong
I took my lead from Aka's years of maternal
Aboriginal wisdom
And did what she said then and became quiet and
listened

Aka sighed mid-yarn
Before responding to what we'd heard
And yelled out suddenly
"Don't you ever say that word"
That we create our worlds in words
It has been often said
But to not say a word, still leaves a lot that is
said
While not a swear word
It is a taboo in most religious traditions
Although in war it does become a strangely
noble kind of mission
How does a child learn this word
And how do we know from whence?
And in the way this word was used
These children playing clearly knew what it was
it meant.
Amidst the slipperiness of words and the
meanings that are inferred
This poem is an attempt to unhear what it was
that I had heard
And to follow Aka's command and her wisdom
This poem is my attempt to not say it and to
listen.

(Vicki Saunders, 2014)

In this dissertation I have carefully left one word out of the text – in this way placing a non-word, an 'Ab-word', into the text. Using poetic inquiry (and Arts informed research practices (AIR) as a frame or lens) allows me to (re)present this word and to reframe it (and this story of research) from a whole other perspective. This was my intent in the beginning and it still is – to reframe or reposition an Aboriginal story ending known too well by focusing on alternate stories in mental health care and on the people who tell them. Adopting poetic inquiry allowed me to use the privileges of 'voice' afforded to researchers to create a space for the reader to read into ... and to respond to. Like a koan, or a question designed to be meditated upon, the research questions I pose in the end are posed for Aboriginal Recovery rather than about it. They are posed as questions designed to introduce a pause in an ongoing conversation. They are posed in conclusion, and as a conclusion, to ask of the reader a shift in perspective about who this research is

about³. These questions invite the reader to engage with another way of knowing and of reading and to read between the lines of the poem that links the research questions into a narrative and thesis, or suppositional (as opposed to propositional) statement⁴. The palimpsest placed in the centre of the work positions my response to the research questions posed in the thesis|poem that accompanies it. The palimpsest is placed as an invitation for the reader to provide a more tangible response. The questions I pose in the end, in conclusion, assume that the answer for this inquiry, that which I have searched and researched for, lies in the eye of the beholder not in the numbers that currently evidence Recovery outcomes and key performance indicators in Aboriginal mental health care.

Entitling | the non-bracketed story

“As I see it (along with Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty, etc., etc.) the meaning of our speakings is ‘in’ their speaking, not in the ‘content’ of what is said. And this is where we meet all the trouble of academic ways of working.” (Shotter, 2015, p 1).

The title|s of this dissertation are (re)presented and placed in brackets in multiple ways to draw the readers’ attention to the way written stories traditionally begin – with a naming tradition and a statement of authorship and/or ownership. In oral traditions, storytelling usually begins with the pause before the storyteller speaks. The title of this dissertation is represented this way to make the expectations of the reader more prominent in the transactions that writing this text initiates. In this text three titles have been used to disrupt more traditional approaches to beginning a story and to naming and establishing authorship. These three titles are bracketed and positioned on the cover page as an image. This image (re)presents how the beginning, middle and/or end sections of this story have been separated and (re)ordered. They also name the three main chapters that together form the substantive sections of the dissertation. These chapters are arranged in the order reflected in the outline and dissertation maps placed below. Each of the maps

³ In placing and reframing questions in this way the notion of parallax or “*the apparent change in location or perception of an object against a background due to a change in observer positionality*” is introduced and acknowledged in the design of the study.

⁴ Suppositional: a) something taken as being true or factual and used as a starting point for a course of action or reasoning. b) An idea that is the starting point for making a case or conducting an investigation. c) An opinion or judgment based on little or no evidence. As nouns the difference between proposition and supposition is that proposition is (uncountable) the act of offering (an idea) for consideration while supposition is something that is supposed; an assumption made to account for known facts, conjecture. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/supposition>, accessed 8 November, 2015)

illustrates a way of seeing or positioning the narratives placed in this dissertation and the order in which they appear.

Figure 3: Dissertation Map 2

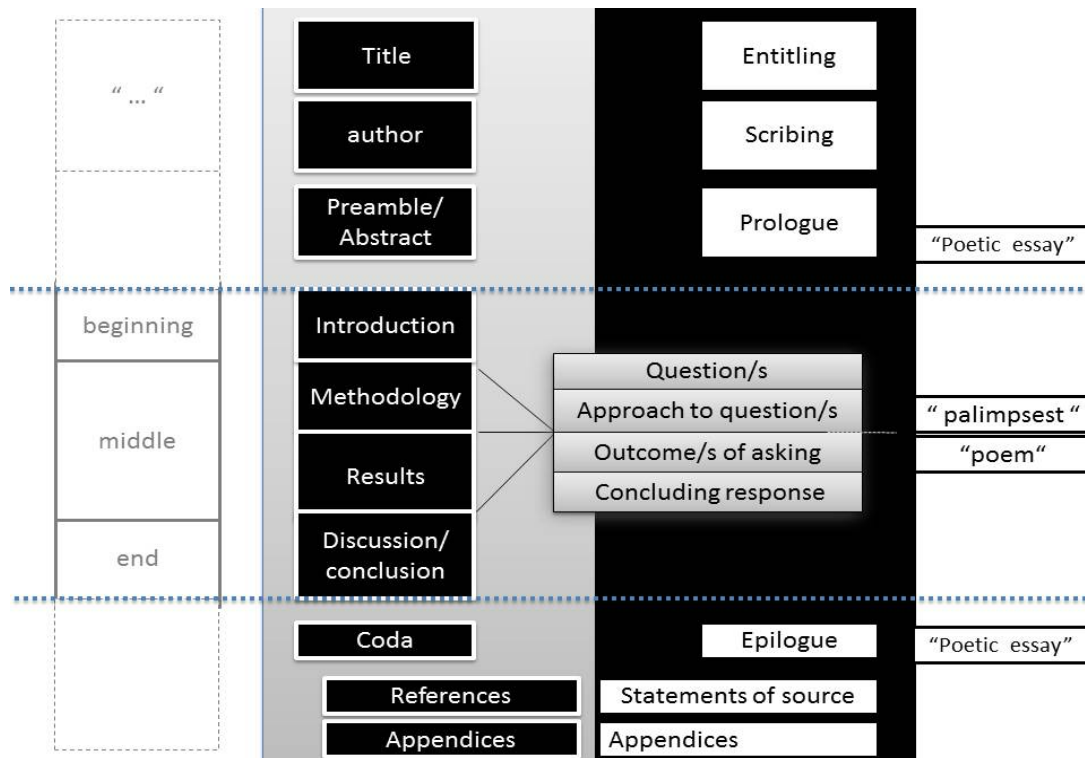
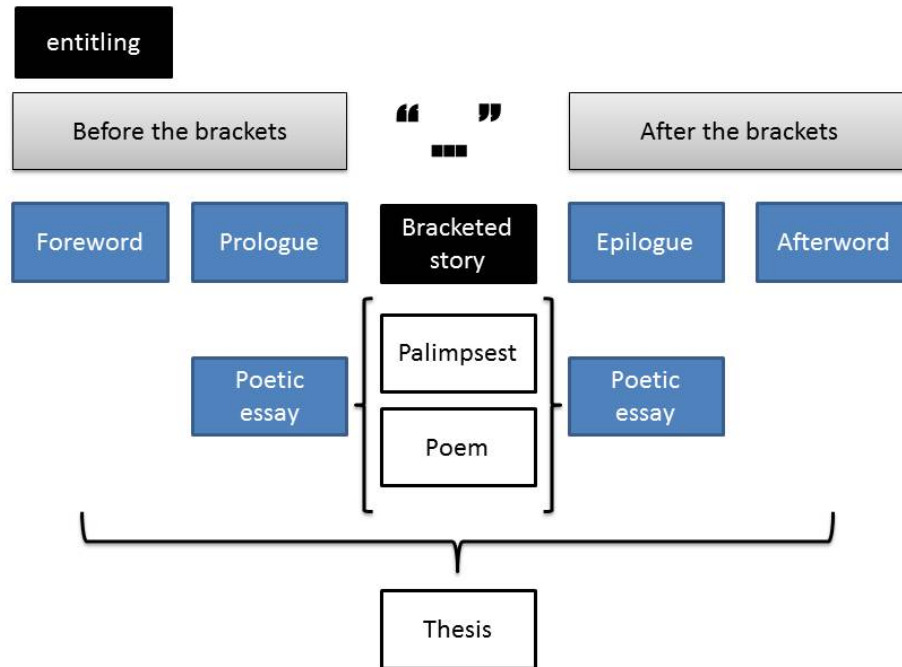


Table 1: Dissertation outline

Chapter number	Section	Chapter title
3	Beginning: Epilogue/Afterword:	<i>"Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery"</i>
1	Middle: Palimpsest/Poem	<i>"If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?"</i>
2	End: Foreword and Prologue	<i>"Using poetic inquiry for Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care"</i>

Figure 4: Dissertation Map 1



The title of the thesis as a whole is not presented on the cover page image. To name this dissertation, an alternate title is placed below as a suggested citation:

Saunders, V (2016) "...": Using a non-bracketed narrative to story Recovery in Aboriginal mental health care.. Unpublished thesis. Townsville, Australia: Nursing, Midwifery & Nutrition, College of Healthcare Sciences, Division of Tropical Health and Medicine, James Cook University.

Prefacing

“The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naïveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion.” (Friere, 2004, p. 4.)

Although this dissertation involves stories of Aboriginal people, it is framed around notions of meaning making, recovery, illusion and hope in places where mental health care is provided and/or received by Aboriginal peoples in Far North Queensland. It also involves the role of Aboriginal storytelling in the development of this inquiry. It is, though, as others have suggested, an inquiry fundamentally about ‘*capacity for optimism*’. If this is so, then the topic of this inquiry includes an illusory and context/time dependent element ... variable ... or capacity. To inquire about this as someone once told me *“tells me more about you than your question. It tells me more than any answer I could give you”*.

To tell you a little about myself, as a general outlook on life I usually consider myself to be more optimistic than not. This is a capacity that I attribute largely to the influence of my father and my family. It was my father who first taught me to draw and to learn how to look at the things in front of me as a consequence, or to put this a little more poetically to see *“the forest in the trees”*. It was my father who spent long hours talking about the names of the trees that we passed on long trips in his truck, the names of the trees that texture the landscapes and memories of my childhood and it is the symbol and metaphor⁵ of a tree that anchors this story and inquiry (see Figure 5).

As a *Gunggari* man who spent his childhood on an Aboriginal reserve with all the hardships that entailed, it is my father’s stories, family stories, usually told with laughter and love that taught me what hope means and the value of optimism. Optimism and hope are strange concepts to work with, particularly in public and Indigenous health research. It seems the main problem with this is that hope can be perceived as false, and optimism excessive. On occasion, I have been called a *“Pollyanna”* with dismissive overtones that suggest that I should feel insulted. On occasion, I have called myself *‘Pollyannaish’* to qualify a statement I have been

⁵ Drawing on the distinction made by Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Cash Ahenakew, and Dallas Hunt, metaphor is conceptualised here *“as the deliberate use of visual narratives to re-orient constellations of meaning from logos to mythos. As this definition is based on purpose, rather than form, there are no distinctions between metaphors, analogies and allegories.”* (2015, p. 23)

about to make. As a descriptor and noun, Pollyanna usually refers to someone who is ‘excessively optimistic’ and originates from an early 20th century children’s book created by Eleanor Hodgman Porter (1868–1920) about a girl who ‘finds the glad in every situation’ (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Pollyanna>. Accessed 2 November, 2012).

Not long after beginning the journey that led to this text, a conversation with an Aboriginal Grandmother, Artist, Auntie, Elder, Carer and experienced Social Emotional Wellbeing Practitioner (Storyteller 14), made me think more deeply about the story of Pollyanna. “*Every kid here needs to see that video*” she told me, referring to the 1960 version of the film “*Pollyanna*” starring Hayley Mills. She recommended I do likewise. I was conscious during that conversation that a young man, a relative of hers, had chosen to end his life only a few days before. As a result of that conversation, I started to look for “*the glad*” in the situation broadly referred to as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health care in Far North Queensland. Until I found other ways to do so, for a time I referred to the approach that I was taking semi-jokingly as “*Pollyanna research*”. The reasons I adopted this approach, to me and in the community where this conversation occurred, are not a joke; nor was I being excessively optimistic at that time as I searched for recovery oriented outcome indicators in the data sources that story Aboriginal mental health care.

I adopted this approach to counter the many stories of hopelessness I was immersed in at that time; stories that I was beginning to believe and absorb. To me this became what Paulo Friere (2004) has used the term “limit situation” to describe. A limit situation is an untenable situation that demands an ontological and sometimes radical response. If hope is an ontological need (Friere, 2004), then the experience of hopelessness demands an ontological response. It was the experience of being immersed/saturated in stories of hopelessness, and what Sousain Abadian (2006) has called culturally toxic stories⁶, that led to the question that re-shaped my research proposal and this dissertation:

“If you don’t have hope, what hope is there?”

When I first asked this question, I had just spent several weeks listening to the conversations of staff working in an Acute Mental Health Unit while conducting a chart audit of Indigenous psychiatric admissions. I had also been involved for twelve years in Public and Indigenous Health research, immersed in the literature that inscribes Aboriginal Health and social emotional wellbeing. At that time I considered myself relatively well versed in the literature and the story that describes the causal factors associated with Aboriginal health and mental health care outcomes at a population level and the social determinants that tend to link them. I

⁶ Dr. Sousan Abadian (2006) describes culturally toxic stories as ‘*toxic collective narratives*’ or stories that ‘poison’ efforts for cultural renewal or the cultural wellbeing of communities.

considered myself well versed in the Story that justifies the need for more research in the field of inquiry known as Indigenous mental health in Australia. By the time I developed the proposal for this inquiry, it seemed I had listened to this Story too many times.

“If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?” | “Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery” | “Using poetic inquiry for Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care” is a scholarly work compiled as a non-traditional dissertation that submits my thesis in multiple forms including through the poetic and through a not quite blank page or palimpsest. It engages with the potential that comes with authoring research stories and with having a researchers’ ‘voice’ to draw attention to the role of hope, illusion and capacity for optimism in the outcomes that inscribe Aboriginal mental health care.

This work is about stories, and it is a story in, and of, itself – a slightly autobiographical (and narratively incoherent) story about the search for a different story-ending amidst the texts that write Aboriginal mental health care into being. The collection of poems presented throughout this work were written while I listened for a particular story ending told of, and by, people living with experiences of mental illness and with ongoing mental health care. This is a story ending defined by a word (and social movement) that is now internationally known as Recovery in mental health care, research and advocacy contexts. At the time this inquiry began, this type of story ending and the word ‘Recovery’ were not widely spoken or written about in the contexts where I worked. Nor was it a type of ending written into the stories that are told about Aboriginal people living with a diagnosis of chronic or severe mental illness (Hunter, 2007; Hunter & Milroy, 2013).

This inquiry was, and is, thus focused on how the stories that surround Aboriginal peoples in mental health care contexts end, and how they are told and ‘heard’ in specific contexts; particularly in the public health literature that informs evidence based practice and policy in Indigenous mental health care. It is also about the difference between hearing and listening, and how that difference relates to what Aboriginal people had to say when I asked questions about stories of Aboriginal Recovery and mental health care.

The poems used illustrate a plotline—one that threads in multiple ways through the text to form the thesis (or suppositional statement) reflected in these poems. It is a statement about the endings of the ‘stories’ being told about Aboriginal people who need mental health care at different times in their lives. Listening, for the purposes of this text, does not involve the sensation of sound; rather it relates to the silent and silencing spaces that occur after a story has been told, and the spaces before and between the words that are spoken (and read).

The origin of this tale began with a research project and the experience of auditing the charts of 68 Indigenous admissions to an acute psychiatric unit and evolved into

an inquiry involving the use of poetry within an Arts informed research frame. Quite how that happened I'm not really sure, but for a long time my response to that experience involved a range of emotions that I now think of variously as burnout, or vicarious trauma, and felt as a sense of hopelessness; a sense that something urgent needed to be done and said. It also involved a strange kind of writer's block that left me unable (and perhaps unwilling) to write or read in the way I had learned.

I started looking for other ways to inquire and to write and this led to the creation of what Dr Maggie Kovach (2009) once described as an 'un-bracketed' or 'non bracketed story'. An unbracketed story is one that does not bracket or set aside the assumptions of the writer – it is storied in a way that makes visible those assumptions and the viewpoint of its author/s. Bracketing is a term widely used across the many traditions of phenomenological inquiry and is a method said to unite them all in their diverse applications or practices (Gearing, 2004). In this work the term 'bracketing' is used in both a literal and phenomenological sense. Originating from Husserl's adoption of the word, bracketing inscribes the phenomenological method. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) re-interpreted the process of bracketing to *"not refer to the turning away of the world and a concentration on detached consciousness but to a resolve to set aside theories, research propositions, ready-made interpretations, etc., in order to reveal engaged, lived experiences"*. (Ashworth, 1999, p. 708, cited in Gearing 2004 p. 1431).

Figure 5: Queensland Bottle Tree



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In this work bracketing is re-interpreted through my resolve to both hold *and* set aside my theories, my research propositions and my ready-made assumptions in order to write this text. This work was written to hold the tensions involved in ‘non-bracketing’ not so much as a phenomenological method of inquiry, but as a lens through which the aesthetic and ethical response as inquiry can be framed or expressed.

In the spirit of methodological bricolage or pluralism and drawing inspiration from the principles of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), as well as the work of Karen Martin (2008), I have constructed this text around a narrative device, known as an anchor point. Anchor points, for Professor Karen Martin (2008) and Professor Joanne Archibald (2008) are crucial to the (re)presentation of Indigenous research stories. *“The anchor point serves as a physical but equally conceptual and symbolic object for the research Stories to be shared. It must be culturally respectful and culturally safe and must therefore be intrinsically known and yet public, accepted and also respected to tell the research Stories”* (Martin, 2008 p. 107).

I use the anchoring symbol of a particular kind of tree, the Queensland Boab or *Bottle Tree (Brachyciton rupestris)* to (re)present and visualise the domains and dimensions of inquiry this text engages with. It is also a core symbol (or logo) for the place and country that for me locates my sense of where and who I am. I come from Bottle tree country, more specifically from Mitchell in South West Queensland, a space and place that is also referred to and acknowledged as *Gunggarri* country. In this space, more recently stories have emerged that the Bottle Tree may not be native to the area (Aunty Irene Ryder, pers.comm, 2013). Yet in the texts that were searched this tree is inscribed as native, indigenous to Queensland. The ambivalence or ambiguity embedded in its origin story means this tree may or may not be aboriginal or native to the place I call home; it also means it may or may not have a Gunggarri ‘naming’ word –with an ancestral, named reality, or existence of which I would need to be mindful. The ambivalence of its origins as a native of Queensland and to the place I call home speaks to the reasons for why it is used to anchor this story of inquiry. It also speaks to or (re)presents why I have chosen an ambivalent/ambiguous metaphor and methodological frame to construct this text.

“... philosophy either recognizes or invents the different categories of being in the world while metaphors feed on the violations of such categorical distinctions.” (Garver & Lee, 1994, cited in Elza 2006, p. 94).

Visually and metaphorically, the Bottle Tree (re)presents and symbolises the relationships I up/hold and embody across multiple social spaces, places over time. In one way it (re)presents *“where, who and how”* this inquiry is held in the multiple relationships that allow and enable shared understanding. In this sense, it is a map signposting the journey and processes of inquiry. The shape and form of the Bottle

Tree also maps the abstracted conceptual narratives and spaces that I create here in this text. As a symbol, the shape of the Bottle Tree is unique and somewhat strange. It is sometimes drawn stylistically as an upside down tree to represent an entity that has its origins and roots in the air and its many branches of manifestation in the earth. It (re)presents a methodological frame for inquiry that has its roots in Arts informed research practices (or AIR) and its outcomes located in context and place. As a symbol, the Bottle Tree challenges the perspective from which the tree is normally seen.

Writing about writing|how to read this story

“Aboriginal protocol usually links the right to tell a story with a declaration of involvement or connection to the story” (Anderson, 1997, p 4).

“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2003, p.2).

My purpose in writing this text in the way I have is not so much to tell a story about Aboriginal Recovery, but to create or open a space to listen for them. In this work I take the position that it is a basic human right to be able to tell your own story (Shotter, 1981).

“In a moral world, no one but person in question has the status, the authority, under normal conditions, to decide what his experience means to him’. (Shotter, 1981, p. 278).

My purpose in adopting this position is to engage You, the reader, in storytelling the ways in which these types of stories, Aboriginal stories, as well as this story ‘speak’ to you. Guided by an imperative oft mentioned in the literature surrounding Aboriginal mental health, illness and Recovery, ‘to listen’, I used the opportunities and privileges that come with research|ing and writing this dissertation, to listen for the voices and stories of those who receive and provide recovery oriented Aboriginal mental health care services in Far North Queensland.

Listening to some Aboriginal scholars, and from an Aboriginal epistemic stance (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 1999; Atkinson, 2002; West, Stewart, Foster & Usher, 2012) can be framed as *Dadirri*, a practice, philosophy, way of being and action with transformative and spiritual dimensions. In the way *Dadirri* is referred to, what seems to distinguish Aboriginal listening as a critical, active, creative, responsive and reflective research practice, is that it is a way of being and knowing deeply connected to an Aboriginal sense of place and belonging ... and time.

In the process of aligning and expressing an appropriate and responsive research stance and voice, this text engages with the readers' response to the form|s of research expression and voice adopted. It is designed to be read as writing-in-progress and as a transmission of ideas to promote further conversation about where stories of Aboriginal Recovery are located, particularly in mental health care. This story, as a result and on the whole, deliberately does not draw comfortably to a conclusion nor is it designed to be read from beginning, middle to end. This way of expressing and representing research in a postmodern paradigmatic space could be described as a multi-layered narrative, the performance of *métissage* or *bricolage* or just plain difficult to read. I describe the way I have structured this dissertation as chiasitic, non-traditional and poetic. To represent research and inquiry in this way requires from the reader a certain willingness to engage with the unfamiliar and with what I call an experience of narrative incoherence. It invites you, the reader to explore your expectations of this text and the stories you already know of Aboriginal Recovery, mental health care and research.

The various maps placed in this text (re)present visually the different elements and sections in this text. In aligning and expressing inquiry through the poetic, visual and chiasitic, and in positioning this work as a work of poetic inquiry, the order in which words and the narratives they unfold is a pivotal element of the text. In the unfolding of these narratives, content is also expressed through form.

I approach and write this text as a form of fictionalised true story. I do this deliberately, to be able to narrate the stories in this text that do not belong to me, and to address the issues raised by the various 'turns' that (qualitative) research practices have taken since the 1980s (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). I also do this deliberately to re-position or undermine any sense of authority that I may invoke as the author of the story that you are now reading. From this position, your role as the reader is to ask, '*What is the purpose and meaning of this story?*' rather than whether I am telling a true story here, or even whether I have the authority to do so.

As an author of a story about empirical inquiry I make no claims to truth, even though it is framed around the need for truth-telling in this context. Rather I claim the right and the responsibility to convey as truthfully as I can, or with '*truthiness*', the collective Aboriginal and Indigenous⁷ stories of mental health that I listen to (and for). It is these collective stories that have informed the development of this inquiry and the aspiration to open an ethical space for the production of knowledge involving Indigenous peoples in mental health care. Truthiness refers to things that a person claims to know intuitively or "from the gut" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts. It also refers to '*facts or concepts one only*

⁷ The terms 'Aboriginal', and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' are used in this thesis and refer to the first peoples of Australia, they refer to people who are not non-Indigenous to Australia. Where the term Indigenous is used it has been placed to be inclusive of other First Nations Peoples.

wishes or believes were true' (Meddaugh, 2010). Coined in 2006 by *New York Magazine* and used by social commentators in the media, it is a term used to encapsulate '*the epistemological uncertainty of modern political knowledge*' and has been posed ironically, as "*the summarizing concept of our age*" (Meddaugh, 2010). In claiming truthiness as a right and responsibility, I am flagging that the topic of my inquiry, [stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care], is one I wish and believe to be true and that the reasoning processes I have used necessarily include intuitive and imaginative elements.

I start from the premise that it is not possible to invoke an Aboriginal understanding of mental health care and Recovery simply because to do so implies there is one understanding, that I have the authority to represent Aboriginal knowledge and that I can assert this knowledge as an Aboriginal claim to truth. That I do not and I cannot; raises multiple issues (or questions) that contemporary forms of scholarship such as transformative and Indigenous research and critical studies, have emerged over time in response to; issues that tend to be reframed around 'representational crises'⁸ and moral and ethical values.

The issue of confronting 'truth claims' and the fiction of value free 'othering' in empirical inquiry is argued here as one of the defining characteristics and unifying features of qualitative transformative, Indigenous, and critical approaches to social inquiry. These are issues that involve ethical and credibility considerations in research practice. In this thesis, these issues are resolved by interrupting the authoritative, academic 'voice' of the author and by approaching all understandings and 'truths' as relative and relational (like Hume's notion of useful fictions), even the authors'.

"The poetic essay is ... an imaginative construction whose truth lies not in its facticity but in its evocative potentiality" (Pelias, 1999, p. xiv).

It is also done by taking a broad (and arguably simplistic) approach to the research topic—it approaches Aboriginal Recovery as simply one of two broad categories of endings to stories told in Aboriginal mental health care settings. I have used a variety of writing styles throughout the thesis to (re)present the tensions held between the scholarly, personal and creative dimensions of 'listening' with which I have engaged to undertake this inquiry. It is to assist the reader to maintain an attitude of relatedness to the broader meta-narrative (or storyline) and to undermine

⁸ "This phrase was coined by George Marcus and Michael Fischer to refer specifically to the uncertainty within the human sciences about adequate means of describing social reality. This crisis arises from the (noncontroversial) claim that no interpretive account can ever directly or completely capture lived experience. Broadly conceived, the crisis is part of a more general set of ideas across the human sciences that challenge long-standing beliefs about the role of encompassing, generalizing (theoretical, methodological, and political) frameworks that guide empirical research within a discipline" (Schwandt, 2014, p. 45).

any sense of authority in any one ‘voice’ that this text is conveyed in a number of different ways.

The dissertation opens with a foreword that is included as a reading guide. It is followed by a prologue that includes a poetic essay published in the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. These introductory sections are followed by a palimpsest, a poem, an epilogue, postscript and appendices. A section or statement explaining the writing process, the methodology and the practical and theoretical aspects of the research, appears as a postscript, not as an appendix, since it is a vital dissertation requirement. The explanatory text, entitled “A Statement of Methodology”, may be read prior to, or in conjunction with the main body of this text—the palimpsest and poem. The processes of crafting the thesis as a creative, non-traditional narrative, allows me to broaden my definition of inquiry and include storytelling devices such as storylines, metaphors and visual anchor points. These devices have been abstracted and constructed from observations and experiences to create a way of storying a ‘truth’ that is relevant within a certain place and time—even to use the reflexive “I” in this narrative implies a certain truthmaking claim.

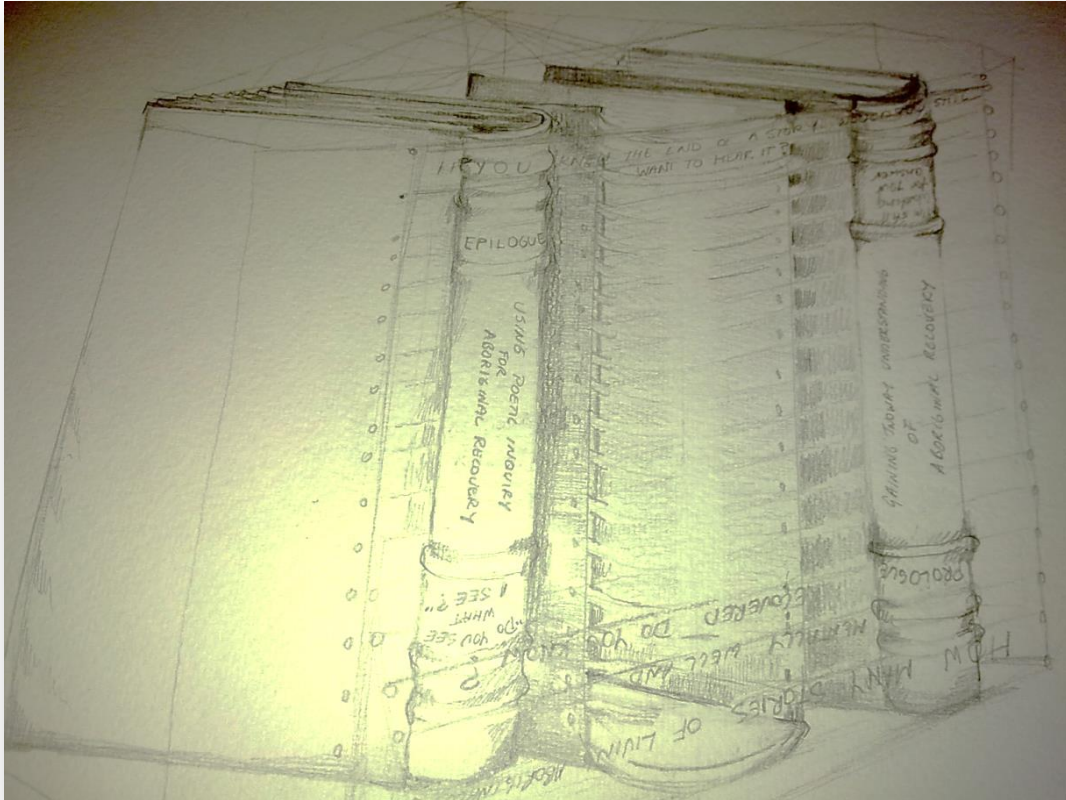
I approach the task of authoring as a potentially dangerous activity since this story is based on real events, experiences and people whose Stories are related to mine. Therefore as fictional writing, I am carefully bringing forward only those elements that Charon might describe as the “*narrative dividends*” of storytelling (Charon, 2006, p.177). Narrative dividends for Charon (2006) are the return on investment in storytelling, or the result of developing narrative skills in medicine, which,

“... helps improve cohesion of healthcare teams, minimize burn-out, increase empathy, encourage taking on the perspective of another person, feeling a growth in affiliation with their colleagues and others, listening attentively and less defensively, recognizing the unique dimensions of colleagues, using parts of the brain that had gone fallow, and recognizing that stories are total storms rather than the typical pattern of beginning, middle and end.” (Charon, 2006, p.177).

For Laurel Richardson (2000) writing itself is a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about myself and my topic. It is also “*a way of knowing--a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.*” (p.923)

To echo her words, “*in the spirit of affectionate irreverence toward qualitative research, I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of knowing--a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.*” (Richardson, 2000, p. 923).

Figure 6: “Entitling”



*If the image comes first, then the words,
how do the titles of stories emerge?*⁹

⁹Questions have been placed underneath select Figures in this dissertation to direct the reader towards the focus of each section. Together these questions reflect some of the decision making processes involved in structuring the narrative and text. The question placed below Figure 6 above is an indirect reference to something that has long been debated in research design: “*Which comes first data or theory?*” (Pathirage, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2008, p.1). It is the answer to this question that broadly delineates quantitative (or deductive) from qualitative (inductive) approaches to research. In the processes involved in creating this dissertation the image comes first (or rather came first) and it is this that guided my decision to write this text in the way that I have. Stating that the ‘*image comes first*’ also broadly refers to the premise that how “I see” or perceive is privileged or brought forward in the sequence of choices that created this inquiry and text. The first image you see in this text is the image on the title page. This image reflects (on) the three bracketed titles that inscribe and encapsulate what this inquiry is about. Which title comes first depends on which way the page is oriented, viewed or read.

Entitling

Bound by the threads of a suppositional poetic narrative,
Authored in ways to undermine the declarative
Wrapped in a page that behaves as part koan
Are placed three bracketed stories, books or tomes.
(Re)covered in the lines of a research poem

In broad brushstrokes each book tomes a tale
about Storying what Storying [Aboriginal Recovery] entails
On their own each book presents a pre-story prologue
together they speak like the pause in dialogue
voiced as if spoken in trialogue

Between each tome threads the presence and absence of words
winding through that which is read and that which is heard
in order to write into themes of narrative incoherence and silence
Cultural in/competence and Aboriginal, mental, non-compliance
When you know re-storying the 'other' can do and does existential violence.

What would you do, at the end of the day,
to talk the walk in what you write and say?

This work is not about what I am writing but how some words have not been said and why,
and to reason through why this particular topic makes some people angry or cry
or respond with a non-response or a sigh
to write this text I simply asked what needs to be said and why?

Why then is a topic well known & oft writ as recovery
Justified as illusion, anathema and a non-Ab-Original act of discovery¹⁰?

(Vicki Saunders, 2014)

¹⁰ The use of the word discovery here is a deliberate and indirect reference to the philosophical assumption that there is a division between acts of discovery and acts of justification in science (see Siegel 1980). This assumption has been debated in cross cultural studies where scientific discoveries have been used to justify the dehumanisation of people from other cultures. According to Charles Peirce science in practice is an ongoing act where “‘discovery’ and ‘justification’ are inseparable moments” (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p 170). The focus of this inquiry – is an inseparable moment, a moment in time when I discovered that the nature of what I was re-searching for justified and in some ways demanded, an alternate, ethical, moral and poetic response.

(Figure 2: “Entitling”): In various attempts to explain the different ways I have entitled this work, and how this research project evolved into poetic inquiry, I have often resorted to the phrase: *“the image came first, then the poem, then the words”*. The order in which this occurred is also echoed in the narrative structure of this dissertation. The image placed above (Figure 5) reflects (on) this statement of practice. The book in the centre of this image is shown as empty, like a folder from which the pages (and story) have been removed. It is this (not quite) empty centre that coheres or binds the different narratives (dis)placed in this inquiry. In the image are three separate books bound or connected by the lines of a poem written on a transparent covering. The transparent and poetic covering enfolds the three books into one shape or package (see also “Niya Noogalla Nulla”, p.43). This image was drawn to visualise and organise how each of the sections that form this dissertation come together and work as a whole. Combined, the three main sections of this dissertation present a story[ing] or narrative structure that may at first appear incoherent. Part of the reason for writing and restructuring the dissertation this way is to reflect (on) a theme that emerged consistently throughout my inquiries. This theme is captured in a quote from one of the central storytellers involved in the creation of this text:

“... there’s a problem with the story, the way they tell it” she tells me and has told me many times. “The way they tell their stories about us [Aboriginal people] and the way we live ... the way we then have to tell our stories about us ... no wonder you go Womba (crazy)” (Storyteller 2, Cairns, 2010)

The theme or central point this quote encapsulates involves a problem about the way Aboriginal stories are told. This theme also resonates in the literature that informs Aboriginal mental health care, for example in the substitution or preferencing of other words and phrases such as social emotional wellbeing to reframe concepts of mental health and illness (Garvey, 2008; Purdie, Dudgeon and Walker, 2010) and in the critical differences posited between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal storytelling practices (Lekoko, 2007, Mehl-Madrona, 2007, Klapproth 2004). It also recurs in critiques that suggest Aboriginality has been, and is still, too often inscribed, storied or evoked in pathologising ways (Sherwood, 2010).

In choosing to represent or inscribe Aboriginality (and research) in a different or non-traditional form, this dissertation is partly intended to engage with more traditional ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ expectations. This text has also been written to engage with what is approached (rhetorically) here as narrative incoherence (or rather the experience of narrative incoherence). As an experience, narrative incoherence (or the inability to narrate an experience coherently, or be able to draw meaning from narrated events) is (tentatively) positioned here as a unifying problematic around which mental health care revolves. The ability to make sense from an incoherent narrative is positioned in this inquiry and text as a core skill and practice, especially for mental health care practitioners. To engage with narrative incoherence in an abstract and conceptual way, I present this work in multiple and layered narratives and adopt the role here, not quite of storyteller, but temporarily of poet and of scribe.

Before I begin ...

This dissertation and text is accompanied by and accompanies:

- a. An audiovisual file
- b. A palimpsest or page from which a previous text has been erased or displaced.
- c. A suppositional statement (or thesis) rendered and submitted in poetic form
- d. Other research artefacts associated with the development of this text that include
 - a. collaborative peer reviewed publications
 - b. an anthology of reflective, research poems; and
 - c. visual diaries

What this means is that it has not been written as a stand-alone text, nor can it be read as one. Nor is it a linear or traditional type of story¹¹. Circular reasoning and intertextuality (in the post structural sense) are brought forward in this work. As a story this text sits within a web of other interrelated texts that both informed its creation and in turn were informed by its development. Some of these texts are listed in the appendices.

This dissertation includes two main sections: a prologue and epilogue separated by the bracketed text I submit as my thesis. Each element listed above with the exception of the palimpsest and poem has been placed outside the brackets that enclose my thesis or suppositional statement of research or inquiry. The palimpsest and poem (re)present my thesis in two different forms that sit in relation to each other. That which links or hinges each element as a whole, is presented in a poem entitled “if you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?” This poem presents my thesis rendered in poetic form and dis/placed from the body of the text that (re)presents inquiry. Displacing the words that represent my thesis uses the aesthetic to make visible the gaze, the lens and the view that forms its research focus.

¹¹ I describe the non-linear narrative form this dissertation takes as chiasmic to reflect the form of expression or reasoning it has been designed to reflect. Chiasmus is “*a rhetorical device in which two or more clauses are balanced against each other by the reversal of their structures in order to produce an artistic effect*” (Literary Devices, 2015 <http://literarydevices.net/chiasmus/> accessed 21 October, 2015)

Figure 7: "Do you see what I see?" | Alternative title: "through his uncle's eyes"



Do authors write to be read?

Or to work out what needs to be said?

Figure 7: The 'he' in the alternative title for this image was a young Aboriginal man who died in mental health care in North Queensland mid-way through my PhD candidature. He was in his 30s when he died. He did not recover from the mental health care he received. The gaze in this portrait belongs to that of his uncle. This image is used with his uncle's permission. During the time it took to publish this work, other young Aboriginal people have died in care in his community and family. This image tries to capture and reflect the questioning gaze of his uncle and a particular view of research, inquiry and mental health care that has been expressed by/through many Aboriginal voices. This image marks a moment in time when my relational positioning towards the practices of research and with the goals for this text as a work of research, shifted. In the process this shift in position rendered a more objective or traditional research lens or approach inadequate and inappropriate. It marked a moment when his uncle asked me as gently and as carefully as he could What do you imagine Aboriginal recovery looks like?". *Niya noogalla nulla*

The gaze, the lens and the view/ the thesis, the poem and the text

Before all else

Before all else,
Before even introducing myself
Before words begin to speak or to form,
I see you, the place where these words are born

Meaning *Niya Noogalla Nulla*

'I see you' means I see you to whom I am Other

I see You the page through which
this story would speak
and I see... U:¹²
The gaze holding,
the land unfolding
beneath
tentative writerly feet.

(Vicki Saunders, 2013)

¹² Translated from *Gunggari*, the language of my father's ancestors, *Niya Noogalla Nulla* means "I see you". These words are used to acknowledge your presence in this text. The different ways in which the terms "You", "you" and "U:" are placed in this dissertation represent respectively "You" who helped co-write this story; "you" the reader and (at this point imagined) audience and "U:" a rhetorical device used to signify 'the eye of the beholder' in the practice of Arts-informed research (Knowles & Cole, 2008) and poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2009) and to signify U: the reader in the transaction that writing initiates (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Shifting the lens

In this text, the limitations and readerly expectations of academic and poetic writing are acknowledged and foregrounded. Expectations of what defines a scholarly text vary according to the definition of research used and the type of inquiry the work is positioned within. In this work these limitations and expectations form part of the focus for inquiry and for writing this text in the way that I have. This text is about, and is carefully positioned at, the boundaries of accepted research and writing practices. That is it is a work that has been deliberately positioned as something that is not quite research and yet not quite not. I prefer to describe it as not quite research/not quite art. It is positioned as not quite research/not quite art in response to a number of questions and comments that inquiring about Aboriginal Recovery raised, for example:

“It [Aboriginal recovery] is an illusion”

“Is there such a thing?”

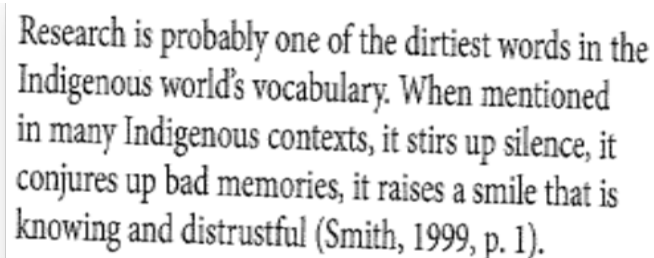
“It doesn’t exist ...”

“It’s anathaema ...”

“What good does it (research) do anyway? They don’t listen”

This text as an artefact or product of inquiry can be approached as a performance of reflective and poetic writing. It can also be approached as an illustration of a central theme that emerged from several years of focussing conversations around stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care: this central theme is presented in the text as ‘narrative incoherence’ or ‘silence’ or to put this another way this theme tends to present as a problem with how stories are told and/or heard in mental health care involving Aboriginal people. In this way this text is not about researching what can be discovered from Aboriginal stories of recovery. Rather it is about how shared understandings of these stories can be made visible as an outcome from care ... as well as the acts of discovery that tend to define what ‘research’ is and that ‘stirs up silence’.

Figure 8: Research is ... a dirty word



Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many Indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Image source: (Smith, 1999)

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Prologue| Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery

Publication 2: Saunders, V, Usher, K, Tsey, T & Bainbridge, R. (2016)

Declaration by candidate

The extent of candidate contribution to the following publication is as follows.

Chapter No.	Details of publication(s) on which chapter is based	Nature and extent of the intellectual input of each author, including the candidate
1	Saunders, V, Usher, K, Tsey, T & Bainbridge, R. (2016), If You Knew the End of a Story Would You Still Want to Hear it? Using poetry to listen for stories of Aboriginal recovery. Journal of poetry therapy Vol. 29 No.1 (March 2016)	Saunders developed the paper with assistance from the Usher, Tsey and Bainbridge. Saunders wrote the first outline for the paper which was revised with editorial input from Usher, Tsey and Bainbridge.

Thesis Title:	"...": Using a not quite blank page to story Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care: a non-bracketed story.		
Name of Candidate:	Vicki-Lea Saunders		
Chapter No.	Details of publication(s) on which chapter is based	Nature and extent of the intellectual input of each author, including the candidate	I confirm the candidate's contribution to this paper and consent to the inclusion of the paper in this thesis
1	Saunders, V, Usher, K, Tsey, T & Bainbridge, R. (2016), If You Knew the End of a Story Would You Still Want to Hear it? Using poetry to listen for stories of Aboriginal recovery. Journal of poetry therapy Vol. 29 No.1 (March 2016)	Saunders developed the paper with assistance from the Usher, Tsey and Bainbridge. Saunders wrote the first outline for the paper which was revised with editorial input from Usher, Tsey and Bainbridge.	Name: Vicki Saunders Signature:  Name: Kim Usher Signature:  Name: Komla Tsey Signature:  Name: Roxanne Bainbridge Signature: 

Original publication title: If You Knew the End of a Story Would You Still Want to Hear it?:Using research poems to listen to Aboriginal Stories.

(Published as Saunders V, Usher K, Tsey K and Bainbridge R (2016) If You Knew the End of a Story Would You Still Want to Hear it? Using research poems to listen to Aboriginal Stories. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. 29 (1) in press).

Abstracting

This [prologue] presents a poem created while conducting an inquiry into one of the endings of stories told of, and by, people living with mental illness; this story ending is grouped by a word (and social movement) widely known as Recovery in mental health care. Recovery, however, is not a word commonly used in the places where this Inquiry occurred. Nor is it a category of story ending often told about Australian Aboriginal people living with a diagnosis of chronic mental illness. This inquiry was, and is, thus focussed on how the current endings of stories that surround Australian Aboriginal peoples in mental health care are being/were told and ‘heard’. This [prologue] is an attempt to use poetry as a therapeutic and storytelling strategy to highlight the difference between hearing and listening, and how that difference relates to the word Recovery as a paradigm shift and story of social change.

Introducing

The poem being presented and this story illustrate a plotline—one that threads through multiple narrative layers to form a thesis (or suppositional statement). It is a proposition about the way the endings of the ‘stories’ currently being told of Aboriginal people interfere with the ability of health professionals and others ability to listen to their stories of Recovery in mental health care. Listening, for the purposes of this text, does not involve hearing or sounds—rather it relates to the silent and silencing spaces that occur after a story has been told and the space before and between words that are spoken (and read). These silences are positioned here as the place where theory transforms into practice—praxis. It is positioned as the place where individuals transform understanding into experience and action; where mental health care praxis occurs; and where it is practiced and researched.

Hearing and listening are common phrases in the texts that Aboriginal Australian scholars engage with, use and re-create. To hear but not listen is to be *Binan Goonj* (Eckerman, Dowd, Chong, Nixon, Gray & Johnson, 2010) or in North Queensland it relates to being *Binna Gurri* or deaf in English – more colloquially in Aboriginal Australian English in Queensland it also refers to being *Womba* or mad. These words, often used in Aboriginal communities, refer to a common observation that listening doesn’t often occur at the cross cultural interface of health (and mental health) care. Hearing and listening are also critical aspects of the interpersonal transactions and processes that are the relationships that create ‘mental health care’ – or what health professionals might refer to as the ‘therapeutic alliance’ (Safran & Muran, 2000).

While ‘listening’ to the words that might define Recovery for this inquiry, the word ‘Hope’ was the most frequent word to recur. It became a central motif/theme in the conversations and texts

I engaged with. However, hopelessness, disempowerment, and anomie were some of the words I read into and yarned about while exploring notions of Recovery with Aboriginal people who experience mental illness. This was also evidenced by the lack of change in the statistics that underpin evidence-based practice in the field; particularly Indigenous mental health statistics (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Hunter, 2007). An example of this phenomenon is evident in a recent yarn with an Australian Aboriginal woman with years of experience as a carer and Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) care provider. Her final statement to me was:

“... being Aboriginal is about being connected to land – we identify and are defined by this connection ... We are flatlining as a people. It’s time to deal with cultural cringe and the difficulties non Indigenous Australians have in dealing with us as a sovereign people.” (Storyteller 11, July 10, 2012)

It was not so much her words but the tone of her voice as she conveyed them that I listened to. I heard “*we are flatlining ... it is time ... to say what has to be said*”. To say what has to be said in the context of recovery-oriented Aboriginal mental health care means engaging with the challenges of communication between people, including myself, who sometimes do and don’t know how to “listen”.

Poetry and creative writing offered a way of listening and interpreting – and of engaging with what Maurice Merleau Ponty calls the “*chiasmus*”—a term he used to inscribe the inseparability of subject and world (Thomas, 2005). Here it relates to the gap between the words and stories I have heard and read; and those I am still listening for.

The poem

Poetry is one way that allows “*silent voices to be heard*” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 230). Poetry generated by researchers and through research practices is a method or a way that researchers can come to appreciate a deeper understanding of their own and others’ experiences (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009).

In this case the question being posed rhetorically in this poem is: *If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?* Through poetry and an imaginary dialogue, I draw on personal experience and conversations with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal consumers, carers and mental health professionals to pose, and attempt to answer, an unanswerable question. The aim of doing this was and still is to draw attention to the ways the endings of stories of Aboriginal Recovery are currently being told and heard; particularly, by You, the reader, and by others who contribute indirectly and directly to the way these stories end...

Niya Noogalla Nulla

If you knew the end of this story
Would you still want to hear it?
Could you still hear it?

Not quite once upon a time I know
But this is where it begins
With a question about the endings
Of stories that have been told
And how having heard them
Affects the ending yet to unfold

Your answer depends
And this story relates,
To the endings that you and I hear
and in the hearing help to create
To story what hope there is for those called
Aboriginal and mentally unwell
Begins at endings
Hard to hear, more so to tell

Its difficulty lies in tales of old
Hidden in stories unheard
between the spaces of those that are told

To story a tale of "Recovery's" Aboriginal meaning
Means fundamentally covering Another's
and an "Othered" state of being

In the straightjacket of English
This seems an impossible task
One more easily approached
Through the silences between stories and art

To inquire of health that is mental
When you know everything is related
Starts with our ancestors
the end that was our beginning,
And how country and 'Australia' was created

In the end this story is still my question
A bit Ab-Normal, Ab-Original and Ab-Western
Do you want to hear a tale heard before
again get uncovered?
Could you still hear an ending already known,
That waits to be discovered?

What endings have you heard of living Aboriginally and mentally well and recovered?

(Vicki Saunders 2010)

Reflections on the poem

Niya Naogalla Nulla is a phrase from the Aboriginal languages of my father's *Gunggari* Ancestors. In English, it generally translates as *I see you* (Nixon L, Pers.comm. 14 July, 2010). Part of an Aboriginal language once widely used in parts of South West Queensland Australia, *Niya Naogalla Nulla* is meant to be spoken, not written. Therefore, it translates imperfectly into written English, the language and the space in which **I** write and **You** read.

It is in this space that the following story begins.

The story

The use of story and “yarning” as a research method by Australian Aboriginal and other Indigenous peoples has gained momentum in health and the social sciences (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Archibald, 2008a & b). Focussed on relationship building and mutual respect, Yarning can be viewed as an informal interview where both the researcher and the participant share their viewpoint on a topic of interest (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). It usually incorporates a relaxed and creative or generative approach to storytelling.

In using the words *Niya Naogalla Nulla* to begin, I acknowledge my Ancestors and the Country that relates who I am. I also use these words to acknowledge **You**, and the place in which we meet, here in this text. As a writing strategy informed by the aspirations of poetic inquiry (Furman, 2006; Prendergast, 2009), Aboriginal storytelling (Lekoko, 2007; Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013) and storywork (Archibald, 2008a; Archibald, 2008b; Martin, 2008), *Niya Naogalla Nulla* is used in this text to mean I see **U**: the audience and community of practice for whom I write and **You** the invisible co-author/s of this story.

Beginning at the end....

Despite decades of research and inquiry, disparities in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people remain a priority for mental health care services in Australia. This disparity has been clearly articulated by the Australian Government in mental health care policies (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). The importance of this disparity is evidenced by, and currently underpins, the ‘Closing the Gap’ political and human rights campaign in Australia (Oxfam, 2007). This ‘Gap’ (and campaign) is broadly approached as shaping the way Aboriginal mental health care is currently practiced within health and human services and understood across multiple professional disciplines. This ‘Gap’, that is the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal outcomes in health care settings, therefore influences the form and presence of Aboriginal stories and discourses within mental health care.

More recently, in mental health care settings there has also been substantial growth in programs and policies framed around the notion of Recovery. While there are mixed views about these efforts (Ramon, Healy & Renouf, 2007), it seems clear that the paradigm shift in mental health care that the word Recovery represents, is changing the way mental illness and mental health care is being discussed and understood in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009)

“During the past two decades the concept of recovery has become a familiar part of the language of mental health policy, services and research literature”.
(Ramon, Healy & Renouf, 2007, p.108)

The words Aboriginal and Recovery however, do not often appear together in sentences in the peer reviewed mental health literature that is accepted as, and that underpins knowledge in, Australian mental health care settings. Within this literature, there appears to be limited evidence currently available to begin a conversation about “Aboriginal Recovery”, both as an outcome measure (Nagel & Trauer, 2010, p 141) and indicator of mental health care (although this is rapidly changing, see Nagel Hinton, & Griffin, 2012).

For the purposes of this [prologue], Aboriginal Recovery is approached as a concept, and an ending of stories of mental illness, that appears largely invisible and unseen in written (and statistically evident) forms. Therefore, this dialogue is an attempt to (re)present a story ending that, in many ways, cannot yet be seen. In this way, it can also be viewed as an imaginary exercise.

I have drawn largely from Arts based research practices (ABR) (Knowles & Cole, 2008) and the words of Merleau Ponty (1945/2005), to position how “I see” (*Niya Naagalla*) and what it is that this article and these words are attempting to show, express and (re)present:

“I can bracket my opinions or the beliefs I have acquired, but, whatever I think or decide, it is always against the background of what I have previously believed or done.” (Merleau Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 460).

It is against this background that these words have been created to bracket the authors’ opinions and beliefs through the practice of creative writing.

Bracketing the story

“...Abstracting”

I: If you knew the end of a story, would you still want to hear it?

U: I don’t know, it depends I suppose

I: On what?

U: Well on what the story’s about and whether I liked it.

I: Assuming you don’t like the end of the story, would you still want to hear it?

U: Well probably not. But what’s your point?

I: That is the point. Of asking the question anyway – if you don’t like the way the story ends you probably won’t want to hear it again ... Anyway, it’s a rhetorical question so it has no point, or rather it has no answer. It’s posed simply to relate two separate things about stories of ‘Aboriginal Recovery’ and mental health:

The story endings You already know and whether You would want to hear them again. That’s what this yarn is about anyway.

“...Introducing”

U: I’m not getting it, what do you mean by Aboriginal Recovery?

I: Well first it helps to be aware that the words [Aboriginal] and [Recovery] get used a lot, in many different ways and contexts. Therefore, these words mean many different things depending on where you are and who you are with. I don’t really want to define these words here. There are, it has been said, “major scholarly industries” devoted to those undertakings (Waldram, 2004; Ramon et al., 2007; Barker 2003). I’m simply approaching both these words as ones that are increasingly being used by mental health practitioners, policy makers, authors and researchers. In the mental health research texts that I read, the words Aboriginal and Recovery don’t often appear together in the same text. Over time I have become interested in why that is. While the word Recovery more generally refers to re-gaining a state of wellness after an illness, I’m referring to the way people recover or regain a state of wellness/wellbeing with ongoing experiences of mental illness;

...and more specifically, I’m asking about stories of how Aboriginal Australians do that.

U: Then why are You asking if I want to hear a story about that, and assuming that I don’t?

I: Well I suppose that relates to what the word Aboriginal means to You. In asking questions about Aboriginal Recovery, I noticed the absence of the word Recovery in people’s stories, and the presence of other words, like black deaths, injustice, trauma, violence, human rights, abuse.... Since I mainly heard stories I’d rather not have to hear or read, I’m conscious You may not want to either. Besides it seems some of these stories may be culturally toxic.¹³

U: Because these stories are mostly about Aboriginal deaths? Is that what you mean?

I: Not really, although quite a bit of the literature is focussed on Aboriginal deaths, both in Australia and Internationally. It’s not about not wanting to hear these stories – it is imperative they are heard. It’s just that I’m more interested in stories about Aboriginal people who get called or labelled mentally ill and who ‘live life well’.

U: I don’t think you’re going to find many of those kinds of stories....

I: Why do you think I won’t? Find any Aboriginal people who have recovered that is.

U: I don’t know, I guess you just don’t get to hear those stories very often.

I: So you could say Aboriginal Recovery stories are largely silent stories?

U: I guess so

¹³ While there is not space to go into it in here, many of the stories I have heard asking about Aboriginal recovery relate to what Dr. Sousan Abadian (2006) described as ‘*toxic collective narratives*’ i.e. stories that ‘poison’ efforts for cultural renewal or the cultural wellbeing of communities.

- I: And like you said they're hard to find – in fact they could be said to be absent or largely invisible?
- U: I suppose so
- I: So what I'm looking for are stories that are silent, invisible and most notable for their absence?
- U: It seems so
- I: But you agree that stories of Aboriginal Recovery do exist?
- U: Well they have to don't they? After all, some of them must get better. That's what mental health care is for isn't it?
- I: I think that's a whole other conversation. What I am getting at here though, is that we can assume Aboriginal Recovery stories exist but that they are in general largely silent or absent stories because they aren't often told and heard. And also because other more urgent stories, mostly about basic human rights, need to be heard in Aboriginal mental health care. But I have also noticed that there seems to be a hearing problem when it comes to stories of Recovery in relation to Aboriginal mental health.
- U: A hearing problem?
- I: Well in Aboriginal mental health, where mental health care is provided to Aboriginal people, most of the stories that get heard (at least in published stories) are about deaths, injustice, human right issues or professional and cultural incompetence and these take precedence. The problem is that these stories get in the way of being able to tell (and hear) stories about Aboriginal Recovery. Because most definitions of the word Recovery in mental health care settings include the word hope, can you see why it's challenging to talk about Aboriginal Recovery?
- U: Sort of, so how do you hear these silent stories of Aboriginal Recovery?
- I: Well you first have to listen to how they are told and this relates to what Eckermann et al. (1992, 2010) used the words *Binan Gooanj* to describe. *Binan Gooanj* are Bidjara language words from south-western Queensland that translate roughly as "they hear but they don't listen". These were the words used to entitle a cross cultural mental health training resource used widely across Queensland. It says something that this phrase is used to encapsulate the essence of an Indigenous mental health training resource.
- Used as a noun and category of people, *Binan Gooanj* refers to something that could be argued is an overarching issue or theme in Aboriginal mental health care – the capacity for non-Aboriginal mental health care providers to be able to listen to (and respect) what the Aboriginal consumers of their services are saying.
- U: But aren't you going a bit over the top there? Surely this hearing problem, this *Binan Gooanj*, and the absence of Aboriginal stories of Recovery from mental illness isn't just about white people not being able to hear them?

- I: I did not say white people actually. But for now I'll agree with you – it's not just about White people not listening – there is a lot more to it than that.
- U: I still don't get it though—if I already know the end of the story that you're about to tell then I probably won't want to hear it? Because I already know it? and this is a research story?
- I: More or less. Why I'm telling it this way though is to increase the probability of You being able to hear it.
- U: Ok I'm listening now—This story that you reckon I already know and don't want to hear? Do I get to hear it?
- I: I'm not sure. I would tell you, but of course here I'm writing it, so while it's written the way I would tell it, writing a story down always changes it in ways I can't predict. Besides it's the You who doesn't want to listen, that is the You that I write to – so in effect it is You who determines what this story is about.
- U: But You don't know me.
- I: But in writing this story, You are always present, shaping always what needs to be said. My question is what have You heard?
- U: Sorry?
- I: (Interesting choice of word¹⁴) What I mean is that to be able to hear this story, it helps to understand what you have already heard. It also helps to understand that this is part of what you see when you hear the words 'Aboriginal' and 'Recovery' together in this story.
- U: Now I'm lost—in order to hear it I first have to be able to see? What am I supposed to be seeing? If you're talking about what I know of Aboriginal Recovery from mental illness that would be similar to what I know of pink flying elephants.
- I: Which is how much most of us know really. Good analogy by the way – since only those who can actually see pink elephants know much about them; the rest of us have to guess. What I want to show you, like pink elephants (flying or otherwise), has a similar (subjective) relationship to reality, knowledge and perception.
- U: What?
- I: Let me put it this way – what I want to show is only what I see of stories about Aboriginal mental illness and Recovery – that is what I know. Like pink elephants, what I see isn't only what I see, it's reality depends on whether others can see it too. How do you know if what I see is real? Does it matter if the story of Aboriginal Recovery that I'm telling you is real?
- U: I don't know, probably

¹⁴ Referring to the Australian Prime Minister's Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples in 2008 (see <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>)

I: The point I'm making is you know when something is real, however you do that, mostly because other people can see it too. What I'm showing is what I see and what I have seen (as I have listened to a lot of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal stories). This is all I can ever do anyway – irrespective of whether I call it research or not. And what I see is *Binan Goonj*.

U: I get that it's about what you see but what do you see? What's this story about?

I: Didn't I just tell you?

U: Well....

I: Look, basically it's about Aboriginal Recovery Stories – or rather how they are told and heard. And while what I see is a difficult thing to translate into written words (and English) it's actually quite simple—it just needs to be told in the right language to convey the story properly. Unfortunately, Academic English isn't the right language, and as Merleau Ponty and phenomenologists know, seeing can be a tricky business because it's not about what's in front of your eyes. I have chosen to use poetry and select Aboriginal words (used out of context) to capture the key themes and subplots of this story. These words help loosen “*the straightjacket of written English*”; the written text that ultimately constrains, and immobilises, the meaning able to be conveyed.

For now let's just say that what I saw when I listened were largely “Womba Stories” – with a capital W to indicate this is a Noun, a naming word and a type or category of story. A Womba¹⁵ Story is a kind of story that isn't ‘normal’, isn't ‘quite right’ and seems to be all about people not listening properly or being disconnected from ‘normal’ (or Aboriginal) reality. What I started looking for were the ways Aboriginal mental health¹⁶, not illness, were being talked and written about. What I saw was a lot of rhetoric; and the absence of certain words—like Recovery.

U: So this is all about words then?

I: Sort of, although it's more about how certain words and stories are listened to in Aboriginal mental health contexts. Through poetry and yarning I'm using words for persuasive effect – therefore it could be seen as more of a rhetorical than empirical practice. Of course, I'm not meaning this is just an exercise in using words, I'm simply trying to make more visible the rhetorical or persuasive aspects of research, and this research in particular. In acknowledging that, I'm making it the moral of my inquiry and this story.

U: What's the moral of your story?

I: Well I kind of just told you. Anyway it's really the reader or listener's role to work that out. By the way what do you think it is?

¹⁵ “Womba” is an Aboriginal word that is used to roughly translate the English words mad, crazy, silly in the head, possibly insane –not ‘normal’. In general usage across Aboriginal communities in Queensland “Womba” is a broad concept – it includes a wide range of symptoms or behaviours. It can be used to refer to silly behaviour and seriously disturbed and pathological behaviour. In this context it also relates to not being able to ‘hear’ or ‘see’ reality properly.

¹⁶ Social and Emotion Wellbeing are the term preferred by Aboriginal and Indigenous Australians (Garvey, 2008).

- U: That I'm deaf?
- I: Not really... Tell me what if your answer was no to my original question: If you knew the end of a story, would you still want to hear it? What if you didn't want to hear a particular story ending again? What if you wanted to change the ending, what would you do?
- U: I don't know. Tell it differently?
- I: What if the story ending you wanted to change was the true (or real) ending? If you changed it wouldn't it be falsifying the whole story?
- U: I don't know – couldn't you change how you look at it?
- I: I guess this is why I'm writing this way – to try to disrupt how the words Aboriginal and Recovery are seen or conceived. It is to introduce a pause in the way these words are used in select Aboriginal mental health contexts that I'm doing what could be called the task of bricoleur (Kincheloe, 2005). In qualitative research traditions, a bricoleur does the job of a handyman. Just like a handyman my task is to make something useful – to use whatever (research) tools I have in this situation, to make something out of the stories I listen to and am inquiring for. And rhetorical questioning is one of the tools I'm using here.
- U: So you are a handyman asking rhetorical questions? And you're calling that research?
- I: Not really. Pushing (or at least walking) the boundaries of what is considered real research is more what I'd call it; which is not actually unusual in research practices; especially for Indigenous and Aboriginal scholars. But rhetorical is a word not often used to describe research findings and the words of researchers are not often meant rhetorically. I'm doing this to highlight the rhetorical (or persuasive) nature of academic writings and the power these writings have over which stories are told and heard.
- "It's all just words"* is a phrase I have often heard from Aboriginal people after meetings between researchers and Government representatives. In the way I'm looking at this though – it's never just words. Words have power, particularly written words and the words of research. Isn't it said that the pen is mightier than the sword? Foucault also talks about the power of words in the way they are used in and through discourses, especially in relation to mental illness (Foucault, 1988).
- U: I was wondering when you were going to get to the point. So far I'm not really sure what the point of this story is, what you're calling this discourse or dialogue? Or is it a yarn? Seems more like a monologue to me?
- I: Well in a way it is. I am, after all, using U: to be able to tell it.
- U: But why Me?
- I: Well U: are a relatively, culturally safe, literary device—a strategy used to promote greater awareness of Aboriginal Recovery stories; deliberately (and respectfully) used to draw attention to your role in the creation of stories of Aboriginal Recovery.

U: My Role?

I: Well your role is “The Listener”. In the telling of stories there has to be someone who listens. The problem for people telling stories about Aboriginal mental health is that there often aren’t people who want “to listen” or who do not know how to. Not to mention that ‘The Listener’ is often someone who can involuntarily treat you or lock you up. Particularly when it comes to Aboriginal people diagnosed with mental illness.

“...Concluding”

U: But I am still not seeing what your story is about?

I: My story is kind of about U: the imaginary and absent co-author of this article. In asking rhetorically about a particular ending to stories of mental illness (that is Aboriginal Recovery), I am deliberately asking U: to think about what you may already know, before I begin. So are you going to tell me your story now?

U: But aren’t you the one telling this story?

I: I’m still waiting for your answer.... “

Closing the brackets ...”

On ‘readerly and writerly texts’:

“...in order to think [these] unthinkable thoughts and glimpse [these] unimaginable images, it is necessary to think and imagine differently. Analysis must constantly oscillate to and fro in an endless series of detours and displacements.” (Taylor, 1987, p. 174)

To tell a non-bracketed story, at least as this practice is re-interpreted here, is to make visible that which is unperceived. In posing a rhetorical question and using multiple voices deliberately as writing strategies, this story draws no conclusions nor does it conclude (at least not in the usual way with a recommendation for more research).

It was created simply to find a way to begin a story or Yarn (to open a dialogue) about Aboriginal Recovery and explore how endings of Aboriginal stories of Recovery are currently heard. But first these voices and stories must be heard.

Therein, lies the focus of this story (and it’s main challenge): Of writing in the silent (and sometimes silencing) spaces of unheard, untold stories; Of creating messy texts that try to reconcile and honour multiple voices; and of (re)presenting the ways in which Aboriginal voices and stories are heard.

As a Yarn, the preferred term for stories by Aboriginal Australian people, stories of Aboriginal Recovery are viewed as largely absent or invisible (at least within select peer reviewed literature and discursive contexts). Therefore, the aim of the Yarn is simply to make these stories visible, not to tell them.

Conclusion

As an approach to writing and inquiry, this article begins in a certain space: at the cross-cultural interfaces (Nakata, 2002) that conceptually locate Aboriginal and Indigenous stories, and where stories of Aboriginal Recovery are shared and understood. In the context of the recovery paradigm shift that is currently occurring in mental health care discourse, policy and practice in Australia (Ramon, Healy, & Renouf, 2007) and Internationally, this [prologue] and poem focuses on the ways Aboriginal stories of Recovery are currently being heard and listened to. Generated poetry has been used to provide deeper insight into the phenomenon in question.

Through an imaginative conversation drawing on yarns, personal experience and select literature, this poem and dialogue brackets (as both a literary and phenomenological practice) some of the opinions and beliefs encountered while inquiring into Aboriginal Recovery. It also brackets some of the tensions generated in the creation of research texts, about what the word Recovery (and its primary descriptor Hope) means for Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples living with mental illness.

The hope in doing so is to hear the end of a particular story, so that this one can begin.

On seeing and saying...

I cannot say what I cannot 'see'
This is a 'truth' that I somehow
Know, do and be

What I 'see' there are so many ways to say
And in the Storying there are many rules to obey

English is slippery in cross-cultural translation spaces
There are spaces within spaces at the so-called interfaces

Where Ab- and Non- discourses divide and words are found absent
And where words are contested for what they really (re)present

While discourses clearly divide, they do and have actually intersected
Novel views emerge there in patterns unexpected

'I see' patterns in spaces of shared understandings, recorded and timed
Meanings (re)covered from the abstract in living storylines
A thin red line threading, feeling, knowing, being entwined

Of Storying a journey with no visible end or point
A mimetic spiral where the end of the story is it's starting point.

(Vicki Saunders, 2010)

Acknowledging

I acknowledge **You** who have generously, and patiently, assisted me to develop and write this article in this way. Since writing never occurs in isolation from the people with whom (and for whom) it is written, it is to show respect for those places, relationships and spaces that the phrase '*Niya Noogalla Nulla*' was used to begin.

I particularly acknowledge the scholars within the Building Indigenous Research Capacity (BIRC) program at James Cook University, and affiliated community members for sharing their time, their stories, and their support (and for listening).

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“...” | If you knew the end of a story ...

If you knew the end of this story
Would you still want to hear it?
Could you still hear it?

Not quite once upon a time I know
But this is where it begins
With a question about the endings
Of stories that have been told
And how having heard them
Affects the ending yet to unfold

Your answer depends
And this story relates,
To the endings that you and I hear
and in the hearing help to create

To story what hope there is for those called
Aboriginal and mentally unwell
Begins at endings
Hard to hear, more so to tell

Its difficulty lies in tales of old
Hidden in stories unheard
between the spaces of those that are told

To story a tale of "Recovery's" Aboriginal meaning
Means fundamentally covering Another's
and an "Othered" state of being

In the straightjacket of English
This seems an impossible task
One more easily approached
Through the silences between stories and art

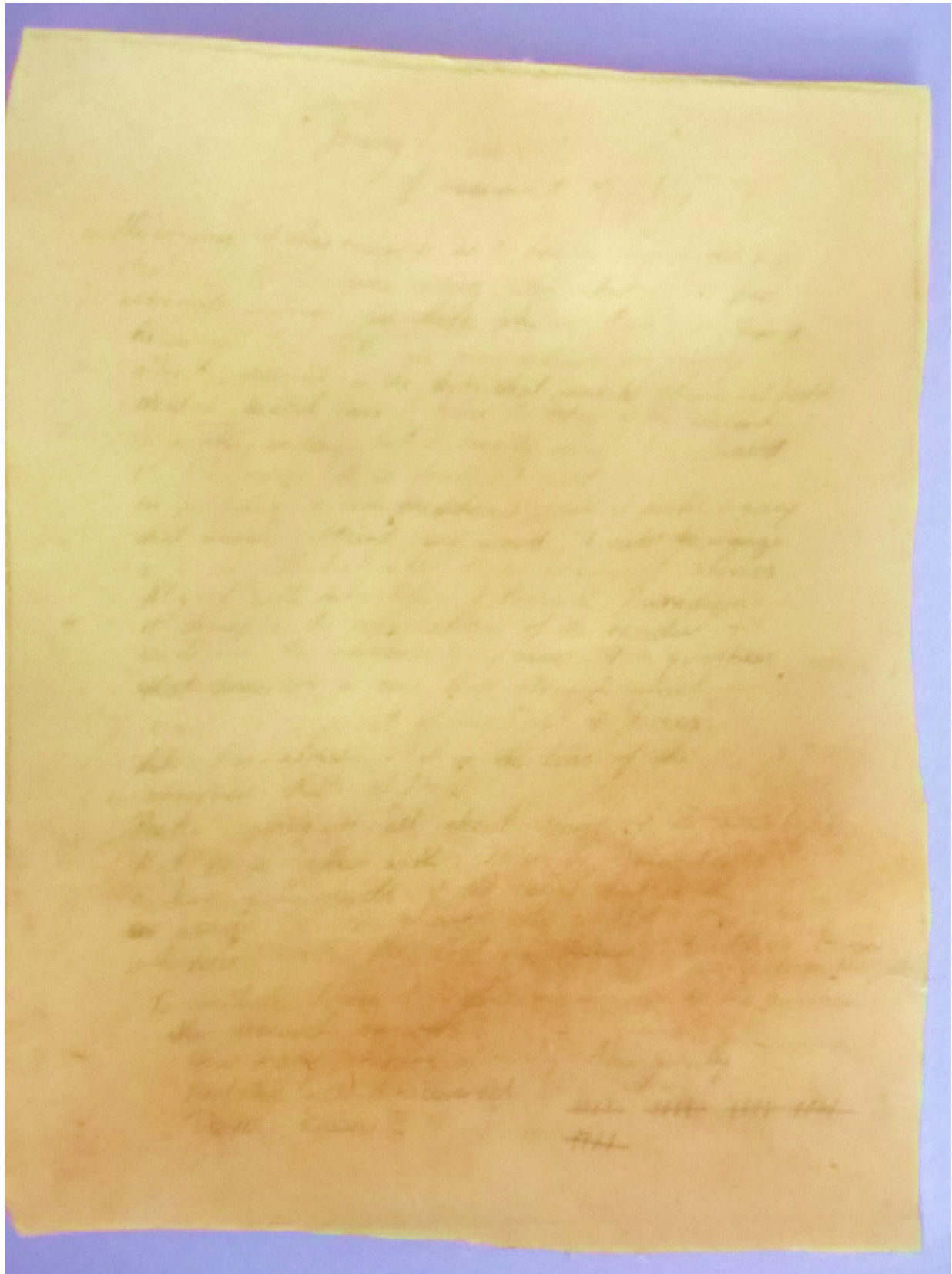
To inquire of health that is mental
When you know everything is related
Starts with our ancestors
the end that was our beginning,
And how country and 'Australia' was created

In the end this story is still my question
A bit Ab-Normal, Ab-Original and Ab-Western
Do you want to hear a tale heard before
again get uncovered?
Could you still hear an ending already known,
That waits to be discovered?
What endings have you heard of living Aboriginally and mentally well and recovered?

(Vicki Saunders 2010)

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Palimpsest



Palimpsest: an animal skin parchment from which a prior text has been erased to make space for another.

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Epilogue| Using poetic inquiry for Aboriginal Recovery

Publication 1: Saunders, V, Sherwood, J, & Usher, K. (2015)

Declaration by candidate

The extent of candidate contribution to the following publication is as follows.

Chapter No.	Details of publication(s) on which chapter is based	Nature and extent of the intellectual input of each author, including the candidate
3	Saunders, V, Sherwood, J, & Usher, K. (2015) If You Knew the End of the Story, Would you Still Want to Hear It?: The Importance of Narrative Time for Mental Health Care. Volume 20, Issue 10	Saunders developed the paper with assistance from Sherwood and Usher. Saunders wrote the first outline for the paper which was revised with editorial input from Sherwood and Usher.

Thesis Title:	"...": Using a not quite blank page to story Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care: a non-bracketed story.		
Name of Candidate:	Vicki-Lea Saunders		
Chapter No.	Details of publication(s) on which chapter is based	Nature and extent of the intellectual input of each author, including the candidate	I confirm the candidate's contribution to this paper and consent to the inclusion of the paper in this thesis
3	Saunders, V, Sherwood, J, & Usher, K. (2015) If You Knew the End of the Story, Would you Still Want to Hear It?: The Importance of Narrative Time for Mental Health Care. Volume 20, Issue 10	Saunders developed the paper with assistance from Sherwood and Usher. Saunders wrote the first outline for the paper which was revised with editorial input from Sherwood and Usher.	Name: Vicki Saunders Signature:  Name: Juanita Sherwood Signature:  Name: Kim Usher Signature: 

Original publication title: If you knew the end of the story, would you still want to hear it?: Using poetic inquiry to (re)present Aboriginal Recovery.

(Published as Saunders V, Sherwood, J, and Usher, K (2015) If You Knew the End of the Story, Would you Still Want to Hear It?: The Importance of Narrative Time for Mental Health Care. Qualitative Report. 20(10). Article 4.)

Abstracting:

The origins of (this text), lie in the experience of having heard too many stories with the same outcome or ending in the field of inquiry and practice described as ‘Aboriginal Mental Health’. The aim of the inquiry that foregrounds this [epilogue] was primarily to hear (or be able to hear), and to privilege, other outcomes and story endings that are not often heard in the discourses of Aboriginal mental health in North Queensland, Australia. Poetic inquiry was used as an approach to qualitative research—it aligns well with Arts informed activism. In the inquiry that foregrounds this [epilogue], the use of poetry evolved from a reflective writing tool, to a method of data collection, data construction, analysis and interpretation; and it is also posited as both a methodology and an ethical way of (re)presenting research results in this context. One of the poems produced whilst asking questions about Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care is explored in this [epilogue]. An Arts informed approach to social inquiry and writing is used as a way of opening a conversation and amplifying the Aboriginal voices informing the development of this work.

Introducing

The origins of this text lie in the experience of having heard too many stories with the same outcome or ending in the field of inquiry and practice called “Aboriginal Mental Health”. The purpose of conducting the inquiry (re)presented in this [epilogue] was primarily to hear (or be able to hear), and to privilege, other outcomes and story endings that are rarely heard in the discourses of Aboriginal mental health. Starting with these assertions is deliberate, because it is Storying (as a methodological approach), and specifically how story endings are heard, that forms the focus or centre around which this [dissertation] revolves. What this means is that the word ‘Story’ is used here to refer to both the research objective and its subject. As such, Story is approached as the research aim (ie. it aims to create a Story) and Story is also its’ topic (that is, the focus of the research are stories of Aboriginal¹⁷ experiences with mental illness, mental health care and Recovery). Storytelling and writing are approached as methods for research

¹⁷ ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ are terms that are used to refer to the First Peoples of Australia. In this paper the term Aboriginal is preferred as the inquiry specifically focused on Aboriginal Recovery. The central storytellers within the inquiry and two of the authors for this paper identify as Aboriginal Australians. The word Indigenous is used where there is a need to refer to, be more inclusive of, and respect the unique status of Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and other First peoples from around the world.

and an outcome of inquiry; and poetry is used in, and as, a storytelling, methodological and writing strategy.

An overview of poetic inquiry is provided, and supported by a poem, an illustration of this approach for the research topic – ‘stories of Aboriginal Mental Health Recovery’ is included. It also includes a description of the way poetic methods were employed for data construction, and to suspend preconceptions of Aboriginality, mental illness and Recovery, in a way that makes visible the unique and multiple viewpoints of the Indigenous people who inspired this inquiry.

Poetic inquiry

The use of poetry in, and as, qualitative inquiry has steadily increased in recent years (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009). Although an emergent research practice, domain of inquiry and methodological perspective, the use of poetry in qualitative inquiry is not new (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). Used as an analytical, reflective and interpretive approach, as well as a representational strategy in qualitative inquiry, the value of research poems lie in their capacity to engage the reader, and to express and/or evoke novel ways of seeing, knowing and Storying experience and narrative knowledge through writing. That is, poems are valued within qualitative inquiry for their potential to represent, or write into visibility, novel ways of seeing. They also make more visible the subjective, experiential and affective elements of research (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; van Manen, 1997; Furman, 2006; Richardson, 2000; Glesne, 1997) as well as the way those elements are conveyed (and not) in and through writing. Poetic writing in inquiry is more than “*another way of telling ... it is another way of interpreting and therefore of knowing*” (Brady, 2004, p.633; see also Shidmehr, 2014).

As a research practice, poems are also valued for their capacity to engage the reader (and writer) in those spaces generally positioned at the ‘*edges of knowing*’ (Stewart, 2012), the liminal, or the ‘*borderlands*’ (Gitlin, 2008) or ‘*edgelands*’ (Rapport, Wainwright, & Elwyn, 2005) of research even though these edges are now considered relatively inhabited and porous in qualitative inquiry.

In a way, the increasing use of research poetry makes visible the incognizable or unknowable, as well as the sub-textual and structural aspects of the stories that underpin and are research. That is, research poems are valued not just for their ability to engage with, and to express the feelings and experiences involved in research and the construction of data and knowledge, but their ability to ‘say the unsayable’—the ‘things’ that are not, have not, or cannot be said. Since the unknowable is always present, somewhat like the null hypothesis in quantitative inquiry, poetry is therefore valued for “*not shying away from either ambiguity or indeterminacy*” (Rath, 2012).

To use poetry as an approach, a methodology and an outcome of research though often means engaging with (and in) a relationship with a reader, audience or a discursive field that in general does not value poetry nor its potential or role in research. Although many have outlined a role for poetry across a variety of social science traditions, including “*psychology, sociology, anthropology, nursing, social work, geography, women’s/feminist studies, and education*” (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009, p.xxi), and as a therapeutic intervention (for example, Elliot, 2012; Jeffs & Pepper, 2005; Archibald, Dewar, Reid, & Stevens, 2012),

not everyone understands, values or even likes poetry. Like the poetry of rap music, not everyone will appreciate this genre of writing, research representation and storytelling.

This story: Aboriginal Recovery

The ‘Story’ and the endings of story being referred to here, is encapsulated by a word that currently underpins mental health reform both in Australia and Internationally. It is a word that is increasingly being used in mental health care, research and policy contexts and also by consumers of the services that mental health practitioners provide. While there are many definitions for Recovery, here we are using it more generally to refer to the journeys that (Aboriginal) people take through, and with, experiences of mental illness and mental health care, and the ways life is lived well with these experiences.

Described as an “*idea, a movement, a philosophy, a set of values, a paradigm, policy and a doctrine for change*” (Turner, 2002 cited in Bonney & Stickley, 2008, p. 140), Recovery at its core is conceived around ideas of hope and meaning (Roberts & Boardman, 2013). As a language and paradigm shift, Recovery is usually positioned as a response to the pathologising and pessimistic lens of mental health professionals (Walker, 2006). Most definitions of Recovery encountered in the literature, present or (re)present the word hope in some way. In the places where Aboriginal individuals and communities manage experiences of mental illness and mental health care, hope is sometimes a difficult word to use.

Since mental illness is understood by Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples in different ways to that of non-Indigenous peoples, it follows there is need to learn more about the meaning of Recovery in this context (Nagel, Hinton & Griffin, 2012, p.221). In some ways though, the topic of this inquiry could be said to be invisible, to not really exist. For instance, in the beginning I was often asked if the topic I had chosen—“Aboriginal Australian mental health Recovery” and the stories I was re/searching for, were illusions¹⁸. I was asked a number of times by mental health practitioners if I thought I would find any Aboriginal Australian people who fit the ‘Recovery’ criteria¹⁹. I was told by a psychiatrist with more than two decades experience in Indigenous settings that Recovery, in the context of patients from remote Aboriginal communities who had been diagnosed with serious mental illness, demanded a much broader understanding than would be the case in metropolitan Australia or the wider non-Indigenous population. In those remote settings the developmental and social context of such disorders, he explained, is such that patients are much more likely to follow a relapsing/remitting course that challenges the concept of incremental Recovery and consequently rather than ‘closing’ cases his practice was to continue proactive monitoring.

¹⁸ Illusion here is defined ‘as a perception that represents what is perceived in a way different from the way it is in reality. An illusion is a false mental image or conception which may be a misinterpretation of a real appearance or may be something imagined. It may be pleasing, harmless, or even useful’ (Stein, 1982, p. 662 cited in Taylor & Brown, 1988, p. 194).

¹⁹ In the literature surrounding Recovery there are frequent references to the difference between clinical and personal definitions of recovery. For example, Clinical Recovery is “*recovery from symptoms and difficulties in response to effective care and treatment as described in most evidence-based guidelines*” and personal recovery is “*recovery of a valued pattern of life and living, with or without ongoing symptoms and difficulties, linked to an active personal commitment to working on recovery*”. (Roberts & Boardman, 2013, p.402).

I was also told by an experienced Aboriginal mental health practitioner, consumer and carer, in a tone that belied any chance of rebuttal, ‘*there’s no such thing*’. In the context of that conversation and reinforced in a range of other conversations, I could see how the non-existence, non-potential of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care could constitute a truth for her and for others as a generalisation, although it is one that is hard to sustain. That Aboriginal people do meet clinical and personal criteria of Recovery is not questioned here—it’s whether they can, that is the underlying question.

In exploring and responding to various iterations of this statement with others, that is whether Aboriginal Recovery and hope is an illusion, poetry was chosen as both research practice and result, because this way of inquiring (and Storying inquiry) seemed the best methodological, aesthetic and ethical fit for the types of questions and responses that emerged while exploring the research topic. The choice to use poetic inquiry also reflects my belief that the ephemeral, illusory, subjective and affective nature of my research topic and its association with ‘*capacity for optimism*’ (Prof Ernest Hunter, 2010, pers.comm) requires a similar form of writing.

The originating or originary²⁰ questions for the inquiry were framed around placing or locating the word Recovery in Aboriginal mental health care. These questions were:

- Where are discussions and stories of Recovery in Aboriginal mental health care in North Queensland, Australia?
- What is the place of Recovery in Indigenous mental health care literature?
- How is mental health Recovery understood and narrated in this context?
- How are Aboriginal understandings of Recovery relevant for recovery-oriented mental health care practice, research and reform?

The evolution of these questions into a different way of questioning or a more rhetorical and poetic form of questioning, is (re)presented here as my response to the questions that the research questions generated, and that I have been unable to resolve (nor do I expect to resolve them here). As a result, this inquiry combines creative writing strategies as (or within) a framework for poetic questioning to address, and more authentically express, the experiences and challenges of engaging with a research topic that was not often storied or narrated in the broader mental health care story when I began. This also presents the rationale for adopting a poetic stance – to amplify Aboriginal ‘voice’.

It is presented this way as my response, a methodological, aesthetic and ethical response, as a researcher and as a *Gunggari* woman, to what has been said and not said in the texts and discussions that coalesce/d around Aboriginal mental illness. Poetic inquiry was therefore used as a way to interpret and capture my experiences and learnings whilst engaging with the data and discourses of Aboriginal Recovery co-constructed through the processes of inquiring; namely through yarning²¹, reading and writing in iterative cycles ... and to include my feelings

²⁰ Originary meaning “constituting, causing existence; production; or primitive, primary, and original” (www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Originary, retrieved 24 October, 2014). Use of this word is an indirect reference to the word Poiesis – “which derives its meaning from an Ancient Greek word ποιέω to make; the medical definition of poiesis is formation or production” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/-poiesis>, Retrieved 24 October, 2014).

²¹ Yarning is an informal interview technique where both the researcher and the participant share their viewpoint on a topic of interest (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). It usually incorporates a relaxed and informal approach. It is also “an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander technique for information sharing and relationship building.”

about those constructions. As I listened, and re-learned how to listen to the Aboriginal stories that I saw, read and heard, the research questions as they were originally conceived and tested changed and as a result alternative methodologies were explored.

Over time the use of poetry in inquiry evolved from a reflective writing tool, to a tool that also assisted with data collection, data construction, analysis and interpretation. Poetic inquiry also offered a way to synthesise and represent the main findings in a more concise and authentic way. The use of poetry loosens the meanings bound within certain words, and plays with “*the straightjacket of English words*”, and rhetoric in poetic form to express other dimensions in the evolving spaces and moments of inquiry – dimensions that are not traditionally storied or made visible in the shifting paradigms of research where the craft of writing for.... is learned and re-learned. In using poetry, the analysis moved beyond thematic understanding into expressive interpretation through text, where the focus is not so much on semantic meaning (or what the text says) but rather on mantic meaning (or how the text speaks (van Manen, 1997, p.346). In other words, in moving through thematic meaning-making to meaningful expression, writerly/readerly questions shift from “*What does/should this text speak about?*” to “*How does/should it speak?*”

Writing poetry as method

For Laurel Richardson (1990), “*Writing strategies are not just literary or scientific choices: they are moral decisions*” (p.38). As a moral decision, writing poetically involves deep reflection not just about the subject and findings of research, but also the feelings and ethical considerations that engaging with this topic generated. Poetry is used here as a summary of multi-layered learnings brought together in poetic form. Since poetry “*seeks to reveal and communicate truths via intuitive contemplation and creative expression*” (Elliot, 2012, p. 1) it “*emphasizes subjectivity rather than objectivity*” (p. 2), and is, therefore an “*extra-rational process*” (p. 2) that continually prompts the reader into recognising that the text has been constructed. It is because all texts are constructed; that poetry therefore, “*helps problematize reliability, validity, and ‘truth’*” (Richardson, 1994, p.522). Poetic inquiry and the Arts informed research practices (AIR) and activism that poetic representation is aligned within, are a way of “*making the familiar strange*” and of suspending preconceived assumptions (Mannay, 2010). In this context the need to problematise ideas of truth, reliability and validity, relates to the complexities of producing knowledge in cross-cultural contexts, especially in contexts where “*Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific ones are ... so disparate as to be ‘incommensurable’ or ‘irreconcilable’*” (Verran, 2005 cited in M. Nakata, 2007, p.8).

While a poem may ‘prove’ nothing, the use of poetry in research can allow questions about social phenomena to be posed more concretely (van Manen, 1997) and here it offered another way of approaching the research topic and the questions it creates.

Applying research poetry

To review, the original or originary²² questions for this inquiry involved understanding how Aboriginal people ground or narrate their experiences of mental illness/mental health care such that meaning and Recovery is made possible. To introduce this question in a different way, I use the following poem. This poem is informed by a number of statements or assertions made by Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples over the course of inquiry, about how the words ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Recovery’ are more generally viewed, and more particularly, how these words are storied. Writing these statements in poetry allows me to express what many told me to say (and do) without repeating or revealing what it was that was actually said. It also allows me to express how their words ‘spoke’ more than what was said.

This poem is one of a series of poems that listening to Aboriginal stories of Recovery created—as field notes, interpretations and reflective syntheses. Like Kathleen Galvin and Les Todres, who called their approach to poetic inquiry “*embodied interpretation*”, I wanted my words “... *to provide an understanding that is both of ‘head’ and ‘heart’, and as such, carry forward both the logical dimensions as well as the textural dimensions of experience*” (2009, p.309). My interest in poetic inquiry centres on searching for words, and ways to use words, that more (faith)fully, capture the phenomenon and topic of this research in all its complexity and texture. As a way of demonstrating or expressing the interpretive nature of poetic inquiry, the following section unpacks the poem and provides an explanation of the discussions and conclusion it contains and yet does not quite say.

The poem is called “*Do you see what i see?*”

Do you see what i see?

Somehow i don't think that you do
For that to happen you'd have to 'Be' me
And i You

Beyond care
Clinically storied in logic
Are the aims of rhetoric,
Taled dialogic, synchronic
- not always diachronic

Beyond the limitations of the printed eye is the ear
When you can't see
You know, You perceive primarily
By what you feel and hear.

(Vicki Saunders, 2012)

²² Originary meaning “constituting, causing existence; production; or primitive, primary, and original” (www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Originary, retrieved 24 October, 2014). Use of this word is an indirect reference to the word Poiesis – “which derives its meaning from an Ancient Greek word ποιέω to make; the medical definition of poiesis is formation or production” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/-poiesis>, Retrieved 24 October, 2014).

The poem that is used to introduce (and contain) this section expresses something that could be reduced to a simple proposition but it does not do so in a straight forward way because it is asking the reader to engage in the work of understanding or comprehension²³. It also represents a poetic response to the phenomena that brings together the ideas and principles that created the research questions and that are posed here for ‘Aboriginal Recovery’.

The poem addresses a proposition oft cited in the literature surrounding Indigenous social emotional wellbeing – a proposition that involves storytelling and listening to the voices of Aboriginal people in mental health care. It is a proposition inspired by the practitioners of narrative medicine and therapy (for example, Charon, 2006 & White & Epston, 1990) and by researchers who have taken the ‘narrative turn’ in qualitative research practices (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003), and by the paradigm shift called recovery-oriented mental health practice and research.

It is simply a statement:

... that there is therapeutic and non-therapeutic potential or power in stories; in the sharing and telling of them, and in reading and listening to the way that they ‘speak’.

As Charon (2006) the author of *Narrative Medicine* asserts there are narrative dividends for clinical practice to be found from investing in storytelling and narrative skills. However, as one of the storytellers who guided the development of this project suggests, there is value in banking some stories. At first I took this to refer to the value of the stories we shared ... later I understood it to mean there are some stories that need to be locked away safely or banked. Later still i learned it meant that some stories function as values, like money—their value realisable only in the way they are used in, and through, the transactions and relationships that create mental health care.

In effect the poem is asking the reader to reflect on what they see and to listen to what is not quite being said in the poem—to listen not to the words written on this page, but to the words and Story that you hear/d as you read them.

Storytelling generally begins this way ... with a pause, the silence before a story unfolds. It is this silence that the poem is trying to draw attention to as it introduces the problematic that centres the inquiry “ways of listening” and by extension “ways of Seeing and Storying” where listening is viewed as an active, non-silent process that connects experience through perception to knowing. Listening is also approached here as a way of seeing—that is, the way worldviews, or embodied understandings are socially constructed and through these constructions, felt and understood. In this [dissertation], worldviews and embodied understandings are how the reader and author make distinctions between self and others, between truth and fiction, between knowledge, wisdom and evidence; between the words that i

²³ There are concerns around using the word ‘understanding’ here, in that it infers that you have experienced the same experience and that you understand the feelings, issues, etc. that it may have aroused. Comprehending or appreciating the experience is perhaps a better adverb to use in that it recognises you cannot know exactly how another feels or experiences an event. Rather you may have an appreciation of how an issue is experienced and feels but you cannot have an understanding of that as you do not share the same body or emotions.

write and what it is you hear; and between the words that can be seen and those that they convey and do not quite say.

The beginning of the poem – the problematic

Do you see what i see?
Somehow i don't think that you do
For that to happen you'd have to 'be' me
And I you

The poem begins with a rhetorical statement about a seemingly irresolvable issue –you can't see through my eyes nor can I see through yours. This statement came from synthesising a number of the conversations that orient and position the stance and intent of the inquiry. This issue (and fact) suggests an inescapable gap within and between experience and perception that limit what it is possible to observe... and to know ...or to say or language and share.

The poem thus begins to relate how sense in this text is made of the world both within and between self and other ... and of the “othering” that occurs in healthcare and research (for example, Johnson, Bottorff, Browne, Grewal, Hilton, & Clarke, 2004; Browne & Fiske, 2001; Brown & Varcoe 2006; Canales, 2000). It is about the stories that I have listened to and now attempt to re-tell ... and which in turn enable an author, this author, to be created, told, and written... and in being inscribed metaphorically ‘heard’. From this perspective, it is the space that locates where the topic of the inquiry begins to be storied and in written form, transformed

... from what i see ... into something for You to see .. and read.

Incidentally, it is in this space where, according to Henrietta Williams Pichon (2013) problems encountered by students without clearly defined research problems or the insight to realise how the researcher's experiences and self, influence data collection and a complete cycle of research, occur. In this space is where student researchers tend to unravel and become stuck. It is also where this inquiry and its use of poetic inquiry began; or more correctly, arose as a response and a way to address these problems. In some contexts and in select discursive fields, these problems or challenges for students, are also related through the phases or stages of decolonisation (for example, Smith, 1999; Rigney, 1999; Young & Nadeau 2005; Laenui, 2000; Muller, 2010; Sherwood, 2010).

It is in this space where poetic inquiry began to develop into a framework or strategy for inquiry, as both a site of resistance and an attempt at resolution through the creative use of words. The creative use of words in this text has been approached with therapeutic, persuasive, and methodologic intent. Monica Prendergast (2009) outlined 29 ways that poetry is/has been used in research practice. Number nine offers one of the reasons why poetry has been used in this inquiry.

(IX) “Poetic inquiry is a response to the crisis of representation experienced in postmodern critical perspectives on traditional approaches to ethnography and other social science paradigms” (p. xxxvi)

You cannot see what i see, nor can I see what you do as you read (or listen) to the meanings these words represent. As an aspiration and rationale, empathic participation or wanting to share and story what we and/or others 'see' (experience, know, or want to show) is a defining quality of being human and a fundamental feature of storytelling, research and poetic inquiry.

The middle of the poem –the aim

Beyond care
Clinically storied in logic
Are the aims of rhetoric,
Taled dialogic, synchronic
- not always diachronic

The second stanza is deliberately ambiguous using carefully placed words (logic, rhetoric, dialogic, diachronic and synchronic) to draw attention to, as well as locate the different ways in which stories are formulated (both clinically and beyond), and the purposes for which they are. In clinical care, where what is 'seen' is '*clinically storied in logic*', stories are formulated in proscribed ways (for example, case histories) for a very clear purpose; to assist with the provision of care. The words allude to the persuasive use of words or rhetoric, where rhetoric is viewed as the 'art of discourse' and a pervasive, ever present element of research and mental health care. The words allude to why and who it is that is being persuaded, and for what purpose. More indirectly these words refer to how time is an important feature in, and for, storytelling (and mental health care) and that across cultures, different storytelling traditions approach and use time in different ways. Time, and the way events/experiences are conveyed over time through stories, varies according to context and cultural traditions, whether they are written or spoken, and who they are written and spoken for and to. In storytelling and narrative traditions, diachrony is the condition of time passing; of being within sequence; it contains frequency and repetition – diachronic is a term used in several fields of research for something happening over time. Synchrony according to Charon (2006) is the "*ephemeral state of having arrived. It is simultaneous and does not have habit or antecedent*" (p.43), that is, there is no before in synchrony, just now, a sense of being in the moment. Another way to approach these words as Charon (2006) does, is to see diachrony as the longitudinal ordering of events and discourse in story, synchronically is where the time sequence is removed, it is an all at oneness, like a cross-sectional slice of a story.

These words are intended to make visible, through their unspoken and perhaps unfamiliar meanings, how Story is more than that which is contained in words and the ways they are used. It focuses on the way events and experiences are related and ordered in narrative time ... and into an ongoing (meta)Story that informs, and is, Aboriginal mental health care practice, research, and training.

What the poem introduces here is an idea that beyond the chronology of linear time there are other kinds of time such as narrative, fictional, introspective, psychological and story time (Charon, 2006, p.43). For Aboriginal Australians, certain qualities of time are translated sometimes in the English word "Dreaming". For Professor Helen Milroy, Australia's first Aboriginal psychiatrist, different notions of time are recognised as an important consideration and imposition in cross-cultural clinical practice, stating that:

“It is not only about cross-cultural understandings [of time], but about experience – about ‘being in history’. Colonisation, frontier violence, protection, assimilation, integration, self-determination... these are not just abstract terms suggesting some kind of ‘progress’ – they relate to lived experiences with tangible and personal consequences, including a widely held sense among Aboriginal people that little has really changed” (Hunter and Milroy, 2013, p. 308).

For Professor Milroy,

“[f]rom the inside looking out, the impression is of a systemic psychosis with little hope of recovery” (Hunter & Milroy, 2013, p.308).

The poem introduces and alludes to the idea that beyond the different ways time is approached or experienced (and written about) across different cultures and within stories themselves, it is a pivotal component of mental health care. Here it is used to infer something about how ‘what’ is heard– relates more to what remains over time, what is remembered and how guided by what we hear we are persuaded and change. It also relates to what and how you hear. This stanza in the poem simply presents an observation about what ‘I heard’ as I listened to others and read the literature reviewed for the inquiry; as I encountered words that have been persuasive, inspirational, and sometimes offensive. Below I use an example from the literature reviewed to relate this observation with something that is commonly referred to in Aboriginal mental health care in North Queensland as ‘*Murri time*’, Aboriginal time, or where I’m from *Goorie* or *Murldi* time. To tell a *Murri* story occurs in *Murri* time.

In the table below the words of the poem are placed alongside those written by Janca and Bullen (2003) to form an awkward relationship between the two texts and to make more visible the meaning contained in the words of the poem. The poem had already been written when this article was encountered. This poem was written to express what it was that those whose stories of Aboriginal Recovery (and mental health care) inspired this inquiry, could not quite ‘see’.

Table 2: Relating Texts – the Aboriginal concept of time

Poem text	Peer reviewed text
Do you see what I see?	Janca A and Bullen C (2003) The Aboriginal concept of time and its mental health implications. <i>Australasian Psychiatry</i> , Vol 11 (Supplement), Indigenous Populations.
Beyond care Clinically storied in logic	<i>“The purpose of a standard and routine psychiatric interview is to obtain the most accurate possible account of the patient’s mental illness, and the events in the patient’s life that are relevant to it, within a reasonably short time.”</i>
Are the aims of rhetoric,	<i>“Coda: People have different perceptions of time and life, which does not mean that they cannot or should not make an effort to find a common ground and develop mutual understanding. In psychiatry and related disciplines, it is up to mental health practitioners with a commitment to better quality mental health care to decide how to deal with these differences, and to acknowledge that there is more than one pathway to mental health.”</i>
Taled dialogic, synchronic - not always diachronic	<i>“The Aboriginal concept of time differs from the Judeo-Christian perception of time in that Aboriginal people do not perceive time as an exclusively ‘linear’ category (ie. past–present–future) and often place events in a ‘circular’ pattern of time according to which an individual is in the centre of ‘time-circles’ and events are placed in time according to their relative importance for the individual and his or her respective community (ie. the more important events are perceived as being ‘closer in time’). Such an important difference in perception of time contributes to the limited applicability of standard assessment procedures in psychiatry and creates numerous difficulties in providing culturally appropriate mental health services to Aboriginal people in Australia.”</i>

The main point of this particular article was to highlight that time is approached in different ways across cultures and that this has considerable implications for those who provide and receive mental health care. The moral and clinical point the authors make relates to the responsibility for clinicians to acknowledge and commit themselves to dealing with these types of differences in their practice and professional development.

The end of the poem –the conclusion/re-solution

Beyond the limitations of the printed eye is the ear
When you can't see
You know, You perceive primarily
By what you feel and hear.

The poem ends by referring to a certain level of blindness that is to be accepted and expected. Leaving aside how time or the research topic is approached, or seen or posed in words for primarily academic audiences, and ignoring the paradox of defining words (that is, the more precise the definition the more words are needed to provide that precision) and the multifaceted layered qualities that word meanings convey ... beyond all these limitations, if you can't see what you are looking for with your eyes then you tend to have to rely on the other senses.

... and the complex transitions between sensing and knowing, between 'hearing' and 'listening' ... and between 'listening' and 'seeing'.

The printed eye alludes to how the image/text can also 'read the reader', and guide what is heard from, and read into texts. Texts that emerge from a context and from stories that in this context, are usually told orally and 'heard' aurally by people...

In the statistics and texts that were searched (through the grey literature and more formally through Scopus and Medline), the word Recovery was not often used in the literature that in/forms Aboriginal mental health care nor does it appear visible or manifest as yet as a service orientation – although in the time it has taken to write these words, this is rapidly changing and has changed.

Concluding

In the time it has taken to write these words much has happened in the lives of the people who have inspired this [dissertation] and the inquiry that foregrounds it and many lives have been lost in communities in which i and they live/d; much more than should be expected. In this context, against this background, words (and placing yet more words in 'the major scholarly industry' (Waldram, 2004) that stories 'Aboriginal mental health') seems somewhat inadequate, irrelevant and at times immoral. However, words (and the stories that some words create) can, have and do, effect social change; and stories and storytelling are often viewed as containing a quality or power that can *be* transformative, therapeutic and/or healing. This is a fundamental premise for those who align their work with the philosophies and principles that distinguish narrative therapy and narrative medicine in health care.

Drawing on the premise that writing and writing poetry can be therapeutic (Mazza & Hayton, 2013), this [epilogue] has considered the ways in which words can be written to 'amplify voice' and to listen for stories of Aboriginal Recovery. For those whose stories have inspired this [dissertation], there is an oft mentioned and critical difference between listening and hearing. This difference is encapsulated in the title of a seminal training resource used widely in Aboriginal and Indigenous mental health care across Queensland and Australia – *Binan Goonj*

Epilogue

(Eckermann, Dowd, Chong, Nixon, Gray, & Johnson, 1992). *Binan Goonj*, an Aboriginal phrase from southern Queensland²⁴, translates as ‘they hear but don’t listen’ (Eckerman, *et al.*, 1992) or ‘they’re not deaf but they’re not listening’ (Eckermann, pers. Comm., 2014). Since using poetry “invites us to listen” (Leggo, 2008, p.166), and to listen deeply to how texts (and words) speak, poetry is approached here as one way of engaging with the critical difference between hearing and listening in Aboriginal mental health care. In this way, as Foster (2012) suggests, poetry can be used as a form of arts activism that can “‘give voice’ to marginalised groups” (p.752) and “provide a starting point for a different way of thinking ... challenge conventional wisdoms ...and identify oppression in a way that text [books] cannot” (Foster, 2012, p.753).

This [dissertation] in using poetry as a writing strategy draws attention to words and the challenges they pose at the cultural interface of Aboriginal mental health care, and it is a word that coheres the social movement and paradigm shift currently underpinning mental health care reform in Australia and Internationally. This word is Recovery. While use of this word has been challenged (for example, Davidson, *et. al.*, 2006), it is through the processes of sharing and listening to personal stories of Recovery in mental health care contexts, and through “*the increasingly coherent voices of individuals who have experienced mental illness and used mental health services*” (Slade, Amering & Oades, 2008) that change and the paradigm shift that is recovery-oriented care has occurred.

This ‘power’, that is the power embedded in Story and storytelling, however can also manifest in ‘culturally toxic’ ways (Abadian, 2006) and in the ways that some stories interfere with communal efforts for healing and cultural renewal. Since the topic of this [dissertation], and the words, ‘Aboriginal Recovery’ and ‘Hope’, were not often ‘seen’, nor storied, in the communities we have worked and lived in, nor in the literature that was searched to position this inquiry (at least in the beginning), the main challenges this raised related to being able to find the right words as well as the right ways to use words for that being sought, (re)searched and (re)presented. In written text, these challenges multiply. Using words in poetic form allowed these challenges to be made visible and addressed.

While this inquiry started out as very different kind of project. A number of failed attempts to ‘research’ it, led to alternate approaches to the words, story ending and phenomena that is Aboriginal Recovery. Through yarning and reading a diverse range of inter-disciplinary texts, the lead author’s writings and reflections developed into images and poems. In the process of undertaking the research and using writing as a methodology, we learned that Story means different things in different places. We also learned there are many ways to approach and (re)present Story, and indeed many ways to present, interpret and write the findings of research. Here we use a poem to (re)present a word, story of social change and a story ending that we frequently find ourselves listening to ... and for.

The purpose in (re)presenting it as, and through, poetic inquiry, and in using writing as a methodology, is to write ‘for’ [Aboriginal Recovery] rather than ‘about it’. It was also done to bring forward an idea, an illusion, a word and a phenomenon, in a way that asks the reader (and the writer) to see things differently and to ask ourselves and you ... do we see what you see?

²⁴ Binan Goonj is a phrase from the Bidjara Language group in southern central Queensland, Australia.
Epilogue

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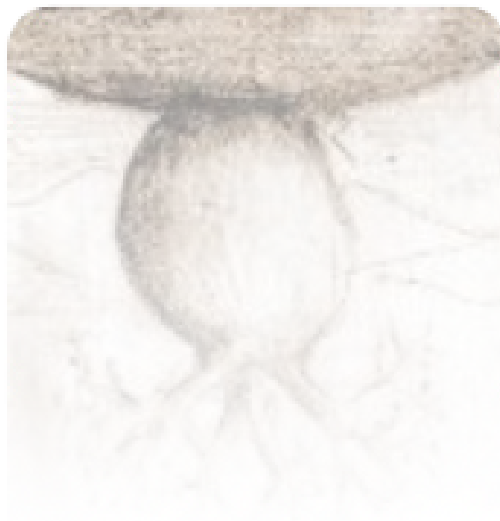
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Figure 9: Metaphors of methodology



Opening statement|“Methodologically speaking”

There are many ways to ask a question
And many questions to ask
The trick to getting answers
Is knowing which one you want at the start

But questions have a habit
An irritating trend
An inevitable growing spiral
With no beginning and no end

The What of questions asked
Comes from the questions Why
And to have the question answered
depends on Who it is asked by.

How answers are found
Is all about Where and When
And from the answers you already know
Is where 'new knowledge' is located
in the end.

But knowing and knowledge are funny things
In the world of Indigenous science
Especially in the field of research about
those
named Aboriginal or Indigenous mental
health clients
In the “mental health” arena –
to be Indigenous is mainly deemed a curse
In the discourses of 'health',
it seems nothing is counted nor countered
worse.

Indigenous questions are all about Who
And How our stories are related
And answering unasked questions
About how knowledge is used and who's
'truths' are created?

At the cultural interface of mental health
care
Where 'knowledge' and 'truth' are impossibly
blurred
Only questions bound in the 'logic of care',
Cognitocentrism and pathology tend to
emerge.

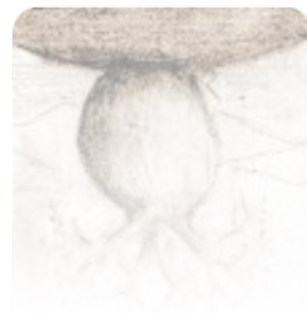
At heart the Indigenous quest is critical
Its challenge – a way of seeing

how knowing relates to doing
and what this means for Storying
a human, researched being.

Being human
is to story that which we deem 'real'
about the truths that we know
and can't separate from those which we feel.
Where whose reality? Is the central question
In The Field defining the 'real' that gets heard
To ask Indigenous questions
makes an attempt to find “a 'real' answer”
faintly absurd

To be able to ask
My first questions come from the heart
Do I have the courage?
How will these words be used?
And how do you express in words of science
Questions better asked of spirit and through
art?

(Vicki Saunders, 2010)



Statement of intent| the poem and the story

“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2003, p.2).

At the time I became a PhD candidate I identified, storied or located myself as more of a quantitative and Aboriginal researcher.²⁵ Having worked in public health research for over 12 years, I placed a much higher value then on the training I had undertaken in statistical analysis. This training built on the predominantly quantitative research training that completing an undergraduate psychology degree in Australia requires. While I have not framed the methodology for this inquiry quantitatively, the numbers and statistics so frequently encountered in the literature and stories that inform public and Aboriginal health research are what created the underpinning rationale for writing this research project in the way I have, that is by using a poetic form of inquiry.

While the formal aspects of my candidature began with the research proposal I submitted, this inquiry began long before that as I sat under a tree outside a busy psychiatric unit yarning with staff and other people who like myself could move freely in and out of that unit and were similarly interested in the statistics that describe the Indigenous peoples admitted into it. As a result of those conversations, I began asking different types of questions about my reasons for doing research in Aboriginal mental health care and what it was that created value in these contexts.

Three years after enrolling in the PhD journey, as I sat under another tree 800 km north of that psychiatric unit, my dissertation transformed into an expression of poetic inquiry. This happened as i talked to an Aboriginal artist, grandmother, wounded healer and elder about her journeys through that psychiatric unit to the places that mark and locate her life story. I have not asked her permission to include her story in this dissertation because an academic text, a written text, is not the right kind of place into which to entrust her life story. i also know now that what I learned during our conversations cannot be fully or faithfully articulated into written English words.

This text as an artefact of poetic inquiry is positioned as a methodological and ethical response – it is a response in part to the words a five year old child (captured in the poem called Aka’s poem) and to the questions that those involved in this inquiry raised about the value of research in Aboriginal mental health care. As a response, my dissertation poses two questions for the reader, the audience, to answer. A not quite blank page (or palimpsest) is placed centrally with/in the ‘bracketed text’, to capture your response and to also echo what it was I heard when I asked those it involves *‘What does Aboriginal Recovery or recovery oriented Aboriginal mental health care look like to you?’* It also echoes (or resonates with) the responses I heard when I asked others *“What is it that needs to be said?”*

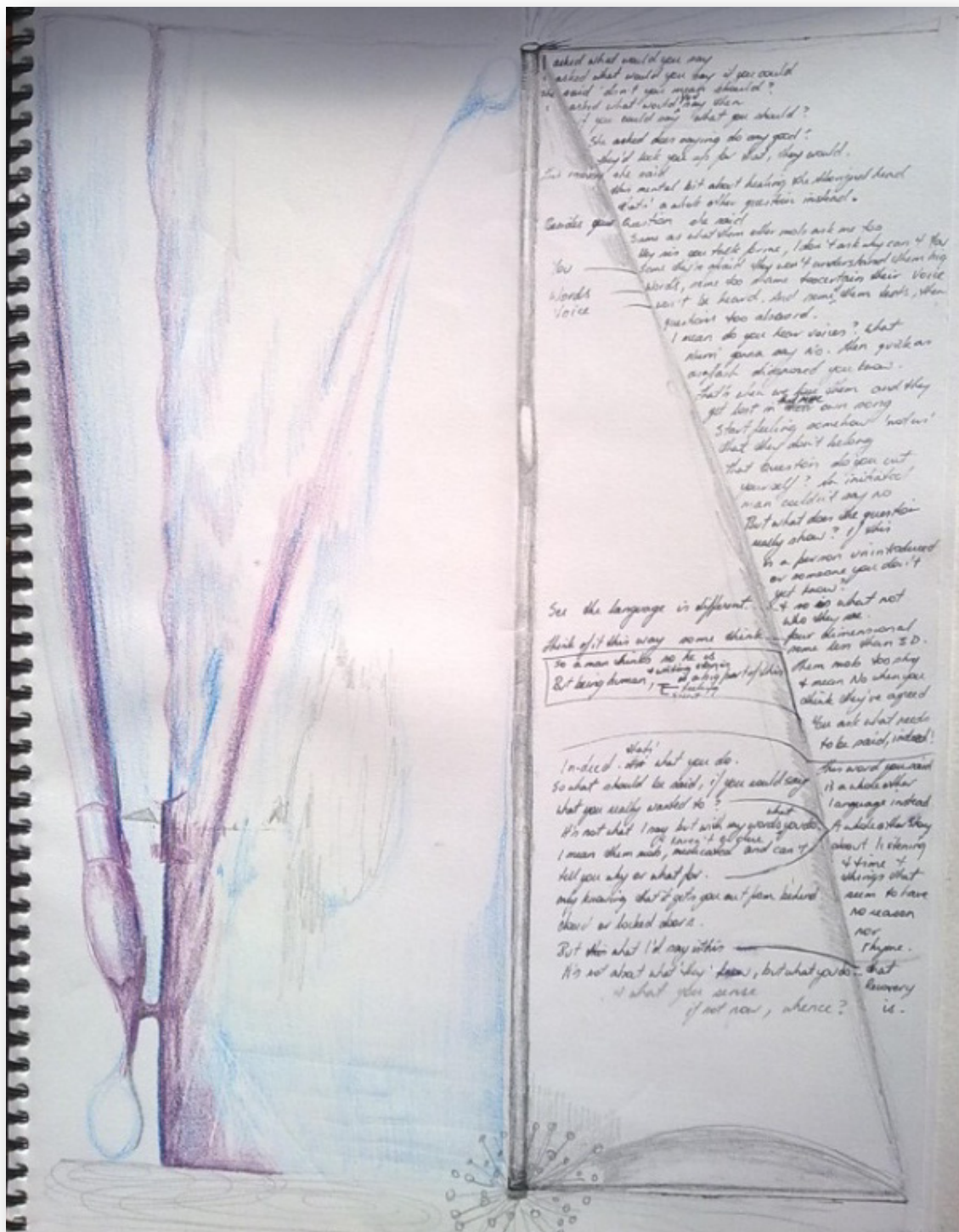
²⁵ The following paragraphs reiterate several of the paragraphs placed in the foreword of the dissertation. This is a deliberate writing strategy used to bring to the fore, to echo, to reinforce and to mirror key points within a chiasmic narrative structure.

For the purpose of writing this dissertation I have deliberately left one word out of the text—in this way placing a non-word, an ‘Ab-word’ into the text. This word is present in most of the research literature surrounding Aboriginal mental health that I have explored. Using poetic inquiry (and Arts informed research [AIR] practices as a frame or lens) allows me to (re)present this word and to reframe it (and this research story) from a whole other perspective. Although not framed as poetic inquiry in the beginning this was always the intent—to reframe an Aboriginal story ending I know too well by shifting my focus towards stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care and on the people who tell them.

Adopting poetic inquiry allows me to use the privileges of ‘voice’ afforded to researchers to create a space for the reader to read into and to respond to; and to amplify the Aboriginal voice/s this text speaks to and with. Like a koan, or question or paradox designed to be meditated upon, the research questions I pose, in the end, are posed for Aboriginal Recovery rather than about it. They are posed as a conclusion to ask of the reader a shift in perspective about who this research is about. They invite the reader to engage with another way of knowing and of reading and to read between the lines of the poem that links my research questions into a narrative and thesis, or suppositional statement. The palimpsest placed in the centre of the work re-positions my response to the research questions posed in the thesis|poem that accompanies it. The placement of a palimpsest offers an invitation for the reader to provide a more tangible response. The questions I pose in the end, assume the answer to my inquiry, that which I have searched and researched for, lies in the eye of the beholder, the ‘gaze’, not in the numbers and statistics that currently evidence Recovery outcomes in Aboriginal mental health care.

During the time taken to develop this text, I repeatedly asked those whose stories it involves “*what needs to be said ... or voiced in my dissertation?*” The content of their collective response is embedded in the multiple forms this thesis and my research|ed response and statement take. Organised into written form, my words echo rather than transcribe what it was that was said. (Re)presented through the use of non-words and located in what Edward Tufte (1997) has called the “Flatlands” of the printed text, the intent behind this dissertation is to amplify what it was those involved ‘voiced’ | said. Its accuracy lies in what my words evoke for you as you read. The following poem was constructed from several transcribed conversations with one of the central storytellers and validated by iteratively asking ‘*Is this (still) what you wanted to say?*’

Figure 10: "Talk for me Sis"



'talk for me sis'

One time I asked

"What would you say
What word
if not 'Recovery' would you choose?"
"In maintenance", was the first word she used.
Followed closely by others
as she asked who is it though that really recovers?
Before that we'd talked of domestics and violence
Aboriginal stories and the 'great Australian silence'.
We'd talk of identities inscribed as victims or
survivors of transgenerational trauma
Of being in ways that are spiritually,
collectively considered Ab-Originally Ab-normal.

I asked "What would you say if you could?"
She said "Don't you mean ... should?"
So I asked "What should you say then, if you could?"
She said "Does saying do you any good?
if you did they'd lock you up, they would

This Recovery thing" she said
"This mental bit in the Aboriginality well head
it's not mental, it's more how you socially
emotionally feel
and this includes your feelings too sis, so lets get
real"
She said "This question you asked, that you say you
wanna story
you and I both know that's a whole 'nother kind of
story.
Still you ask me, same as that other mob do too
'Talk for me sis', they say. I ask 'em sometimes why
can't you?"

"See some mob afraid they won't understand them
big words
And some too shame, too sure their voices, their
words won't get heard
And some of them questions them tests they get
asked, just too absurd
I mean do you hear voices? What murri gonna say
no?
Then quick as a flash diagnosed. You know?
That's when we lose em, lost in that mental health
care song

Then they start seeing somehow 'not us', that they
don't belong
That question do you cut yourself?
The initiated couldn't truthfully say no
But what does that questioner really want to show
If it's asked of a person uninitiated that you don't
yet know?

Them mob, them ones too shy, they mean no when
you think they've agreed
You ask what needs to be said?
Indeed!

See the language is different and so it's about how
not who or what it is you see
Think of it this way, some think four dimensionally,
some less than 3D
'As a man thinks so he is'
But being human isn't about thinking, is it?
Feeling is a big part of knowing and knowledge isn't
it?"

So I said "What would you say, if you could say what
you wanted to?"
She said "It's not what I'd say but how what I say
speaks here to you
In ways I really haven't got a clue
In what you do with my words and in words as you
will
or in writing them down dissecting them, laid bare,
still
this is about them mob perhaps held within your
care
perhaps they are still there
medicated and can't tell you why or what for
Those that think meds only get you out from behind
locked or closed doors
What I'd have to say," she said. "if I felt I should is
this
It's in what you do with their story where Aboriginal
Recovery really is
It's about how other people story us and do not
makes sense"

So I asked "if not now, then, whence?"

(Vicki Saunders, 2013)

Speaking methodologically| the text

This statement of methodology is set within an overarching research paradigm as the whole of my research plan, wherein this section provides an account of its structure, design and process²⁶. It is placed postscript to show and to relate how the practices and methods of inquiry were and are being performed here in writing. As a statement of methodology, it is placed postscript outside the brackets of the “text”, to reflect and echo these practices and methods; and to present an alternate and additional conclusion (or coda).

Expressed in poetic, visual and prose forms, this statement can be read like a footnote placed to expand, comment and reflect on select points raised within or between the brackets of the text.

“There are two dangers inherent in the conventional texts of scientific method: that they may lead us to believe the world is rather simpler than it is, and that they may reinscribe enduring forms of historical oppression. . . . One way to confront the dangerous illusions (and their underlying ideologies) that texts may foster is through the creation of new texts that break boundaries; that move from the center to the margins to comment upon and decenter the center; [and] that forego closed, bounded worlds for those more open-ended and less conveniently encompassed” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.184).

The subject and focus of my thesis, suppositional statement, and inquiry, is approached as a word, a story, a vision, a philosophy, a paradigm shift, an outcome and a principle currently orienting mental health care reform. It is also approached as something uniquely and multiply experienced and storied by Aboriginal people in mental health care. As a concept Recovery refers to a social phenomenon and movement in mental health care service delivery and reform that *“challenges the traditionally pessimistic outlook of mental health professionals, which is influenced by a historical belief in the chronic nature of some mental health problems. It also proposes that episodes of illness, while clearly distressing, can in fact be developmental and educative experiences.”* (Amering & Schmolke, 2009, p.17).

As a social movement in mental health care Recovery reflects a movement away from *“a pessimistic view of the value of treatment of mental illness”* (Adeponle, Whitley & Kirmayer, 2012, p.125). *“This pessimistic view significantly contributes to less favorable treatment outcomes and a lower quality of life”* (Jakovljević, 2013, p.312). The Recovery model of care brings to the fore, capacity for optimism amongst practitioners as an important variable and contributing factor in the outcomes that currently demonstrate

²⁶ Placing this section here is influenced by the structure of “Finding Tadodà:hò” an autoethnographic thesis that explores Aboriginal stories of healing and trauma (Thomas, 2013).

mental health care. *“While recognising that persistent illness and impairment can be the experience of a proportion of people, the recovery model seeks to counter the uniformly pessimistic view of prognosis for those with severe mental illness”* (NMHC, 2005, p.8).

To counter the ‘*uniformly pessimistic view*’ of Aboriginal prognosis encountered in select contexts of mental health care this work is an attempt to re-story or reframe the researchers view using poetic inquiry. While the approach used has aspirations to be qualitative, expressive and narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry is preferenced as a claim, named as such to contain and position the text (as a product of inquiry) at the edges of narrative, Arts informed and Indigenous traditions of research. It is awkwardly positioned at the ‘*borderlands*’ of inquiry (Saunders, West & Usher, 2010) to not quite represent these traditions but to make them more visible. It is also positioned this way to engage with a research space where form and content of expression are critical and entwined elements; that is, it not just about what I am saying but how I am saying it. In this space mode of expression, or the performative/performed aspects of expression (the aural, visual, evocative and creative dimensions of storytelling), are more central in the research approach and objectives.

Formulating research questioning

“Methodology comes from the questions asked not vice versa” (Owen and Rogers, 1999, p.88).

“... Aboriginal mental health is embedded in a larger set of questions relating to culture and cultural differences, historical events, social and cultural change and coping.” (Reser, 1991, p.216)

“Methodologically, [speaking] most research [questions] concerning Aboriginal issues overwhelmingly emanates from a deficit model of research which identifies the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and imposes a White cultural framework of meaning and interpretation to the findings. As a result, this type of research not only views the issue in problematic terms, but also fails to adequately capture the perspective of the Aboriginal research population.” (Bainbridge, 2009, p.vi)

‘*Methodologically speaking*’, the approach used to inquire emerged in response to the challenges of research problem formulation or being able to formulate appropriate research questions for the topic this inquiry addresses. The poem that begins this section called ‘*Methodologically speaking*’ outlines my deliberations and ends with a question that in effect this dissertation answers: “How do you express in words of science questions better asked of spirit and through art?” This dissertation, in effect, has been designed to speak, respond or answer the (types of) questions raised by the Aboriginal storytellers involved when I asked “*What needs to be said about Aboriginal Recovery in*

this context". Since choice of research methodology comes from the question/s asked, the decision to adopt poetic inquiry responds to the questions that were raised. These questions involved the ethics and value of writing Aboriginal stories, of transforming them into another form, into a non-Aboriginal (and blended) space and cultural interface (see Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2012).

As a response to the many questions raised by the subject and focus of this inquiry, my dissertation engages with the challenges of research problem formulation in this particular context, through the use of poetic inquiry. The questions that focus this inquiry are derived from quotes by people I am careful not to name or call research participants because this identity can have negative connotations in this context (Bainbridge, Tsey et al., 2015; Evans, Miller, Hutchinson, & Dingwall, 2014). Instead, the people who contributed to the development of this text are referred to as storytellers. They are named this way because this work involves the unique stories that three Aboriginal women and 21 other people hold, own and represent for Aboriginal Recovery. This inquiry emerged from listening to the stories they told and the questions they asked me. This text also poses, reflects (on) and responds to, a number of questions and statements that were gathered involving the ways in which Aboriginal people are storied, especially in mental health care and in research. These questions and statements have been re-ordered and reframed below. Reframed from direct quotes, they are taken out of context to echo how these questions speak to the origins of this text and the rationale for adopting poetic inquiry as a methodological response:

- ... *Isn't it all just words?*
- ... *They (the researchers) took (my words) out of context.*
- ... *Its different for us. It [mental illness and mental health care] is just different.*
- ... *The story is wrong.*
- ... *They don't listen ... they can't see.*
- ... *What hope is there?*
- ... *Do you think you will find any [people who are Aboriginal, mentally ill and recovered]?*
- ... *It [Aboriginal Recovery] doesn't exist. It can't*
- ... *What can you say? What's the point of saying anything when nothing changes?*
- ... *If you said it, they'd lock you up they would.*

Taken together and separately, these questions and statements (and many others like them over time) suggested that research about this particular topic [stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care] needed to be done differently. This perception was reinforced by the frequent use of a particular quote (often attributed to Albert Einstein) by four of the Aboriginal storytellers involved; that *"the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again, and expecting a different response"*. Used by each storyteller to refer to their perceptions of Aboriginal mental health care and research, this

definition also speaks to the challenges associated with defining mental illness, health and care across differing cultural practices and knowledges and the languages that frame them (Adeponle, Whitley, & Kirmayer, 2012).

The questions and statements I cite and place above also suggest while there is a need “*to adequately capture the perspective of the Aboriginal research population*” (Bainbridge, 2009, p. vi), there are some challenges in capturing these perspectives (and perceptions) in writing. For a start the research topic, Recovery and recovery oriented mental health care reform, in itself involves a shift in perspectives, attitudes, role and perceptions towards those who receive and provide mental health care. It is this shift, usually referred to as a paradigm shift, or a shift in beliefs and assumptions, that tends to define the word Recovery as it is used in contemporary mental health care and research (Slade, Amering & Oades, 2008). For those who require mental health care, Recovery generally refers to people’s journeys to wellness from experiences of abnormal perceptions, feelings, perspectives, trauma and/or narrative incoherence. For those who provide care, Recovery is used to refer to a shift in perspective, attitude and perception of the values and responsibilities that the role of mental health care practitioner assumes (Amering, 2010).

“Although framed in the universalist language of human rights, recovery is rooted in specific Euro-American concepts of self and personhood. The US consumer-oriented recovery approach builds on Anglo-American individualism and on an egocentric concept of the person as a self-sufficient, self-determining, independent entity. However, in other cultures, sociocentric, ecocentric, or cosmocentric conceptions of personhood may have greater salience. These differing cultural concepts of the person may influence trajectories of illness, modes of adaptation, treatment preferences, responses to interventions, and definitions of positive outcome. In particular, cultural notions of the person influence the importance that is given to connections to family, community, and spirituality as key dimensions of recovery for diverse cultural groups.” (Adeponle, Whitley, & Kirmayer, 2012, p.127.)

The challenges associated with capturing perspective relate to how Aboriginal people have traditionally been researched and viewed in the past by researchers (Bainbridge, 2009; Sherwood, 2010); particularly in mental health care and research (Waldram, 2004, Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). It involves exploring how Aboriginal people in turn view and research traditions of mental health care and the unique and critical gaze they bring to the broad endeavours that form research practice (Smith, 2005). Underlying the challenges of invoking the words Aboriginal or Indigenous within (an arguably) postcolonial research spaces are the decolonizing research imperatives to:

- address epistemic divergence, privileging and dissonance (Rigney, 2001); and incommensurability (Nakata, 2002);
- effect transformation or change in the research practices that reshape, re-story and are now part of Aboriginal life (Archibald, 2008; Smith, 2005; Martin, 2006);
- grow and maintain relationships of trust with those involved in research and for whom research is conducted (NHMRC, 2003); and
- build and sustain relationships with the research topic over time and within Aboriginal context/s and communities.

Figure 11: Researching questions and questioning research

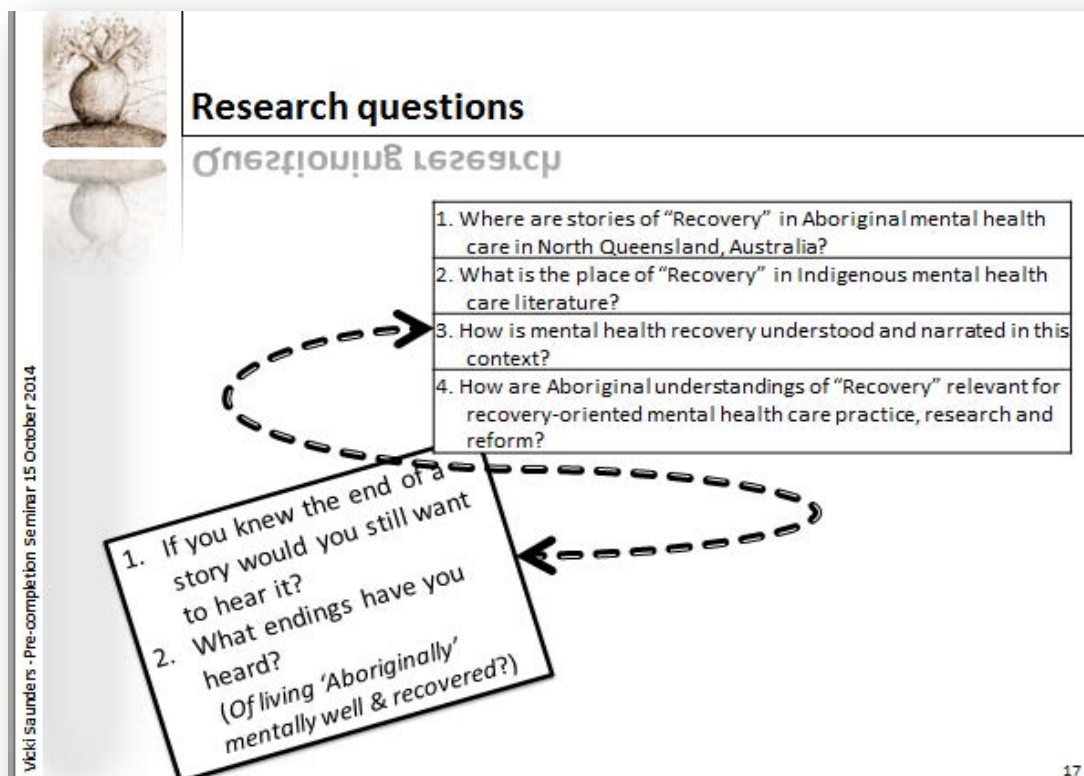


Image source: PhD precompletion seminar, JCU, 2014

The protocols advanced in the documents that guide ethical research conduct with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia (such as the *"Values and Ethics: Guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research"* (NHMRC, 2003) and the *Guidelines for ethical research in Indigenous studies*, (AIATSIS, 2012) are more demanding of researchers. They are more demanding in that they seek to move from *"compliance with ethical standards to the development of research relationships that involve trust"* (NHMRC, 2003, p.4). In maintaining a focus on the relationships and ethical and relational criteria that allow and create Indigenous, expressive, minor and socially responsive inquiry, the original planned approach evolved into a more expressive research response informed by poetic and Arts informed research practices (AIR).

Researching questions and questioning research: the poem

The research questions that I posed at the beginning of this inquiry are not the same questions I pose now. Yet they still seek the same answer, simply in a different way, using a different approach. The questions that I ask now are also posed at a different point in the research journey, not as a way to begin inquiry but by way of concluding it.

In the beginning I asked:

1. Where are stories of Recovery in Aboriginal mental health care in North Queensland?
2. What is the place of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health literature?
3. How is mental health Recovery understood and narrated in this context?
4. How are Aboriginal understandings of Recovery relevant for recovery-oriented mental health care practice, research and reform?

To bring this work to a conclusion, these questions (see Figure 11) were transformed into a different (poetic) form of questioning and their place in the design of the study transformed from originary²⁷ hypotheses into a research response and outcome. Over time, these questions began to act like a koan, or a question that is posed to disrupt reasoning and to engage with alternate ways of knowing, that allow space for paradox, ambiguity and indeterminacy. In the end the questions I pose through this inquiry are:

1. If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it? and
2. What endings have you heard of living Aboriginally, mentally well and recovered?

These questions assume that the ending of these types of stories, and this story, are already known.

Mapping inquiry

“Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have different effects” (Pascal, 1932, p.8).

This section, as postscript, is placed to guide the reader through the different forms of expression, my choice of research voice and the writing strategies adopted, embedded and

²⁷ Originary meaning “constituting, causing existence; production; or primitive, primary, and original” (www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Originary, retrieved 24 October, 2014). Use of this word is an indirect reference to the word Poiesis – “which derives its meaning from an Ancient Greek word ποιέω to make; the medical definition of poiesis is formation or production” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/-poiesis>, Retrieved 24 October, 2014).

used. It is placed here as a postscript to explain, reflect and provide further details about the dissertation and the approach I used to explore the research focus/topic and research questioning. It is designed to be read like a map that can be used or read into the story at any point. Like a map, this postscript has been placed to orient the text and its story and to provide an alternate, additional conclusion to locate how this text and its story has been constructed (see Figure 18).

The map I followed/created for my thesis is designed to reflect a ‘chiasmus’ or X shaped form and structure (see Figure 14:, p. 78). Chiasmus, is a word from Greek meaning ‘cross-wise’, a “*rhetorical term to describe a narrative construction involving the repetition of words or elements in reverse order (ab : ba); also known as antimetabole.*” (Wales, 1989). In this text key narrative events, words, phrases and sometime quotes, are placed and reordered in repetitive and disrupted ways. They are organised in the form of a chiastic narrative structure to bring forward ‘the bracketed text’ signified by a palimpsest and poem that lie at the centre of my dissertation.

This statement of methodology has been placed postscript to show as well as tell how ‘I see’, ‘be’, and ‘know’ in this context; and in the end describes how I made the bracketed text (signified by a palimpsest and a poem) that submits my dissertation and thesis. Since writing is approached as methodology, this dissertation and printed text is one of the products or outcomes of the methods used. The Aboriginal story|ies it (re)presents in printed form are conveyed in multiple ways as my attempt to escape the constraints of two dimensionalised and academic storytelling. It is multiply presented to make visible (or to show more than tell) other ways of knowing, being and doing inquiry (Martin, 2006). It has also been made this way to invite or advocate for space to value different ways of ‘seeing and saying’ research as well as for different results or outcomes from research to be made more evident; particularly when it involves Aboriginal people living with ongoing experiences of mental illness and mental health care.

Figure 12: What is poetic inquiry like?

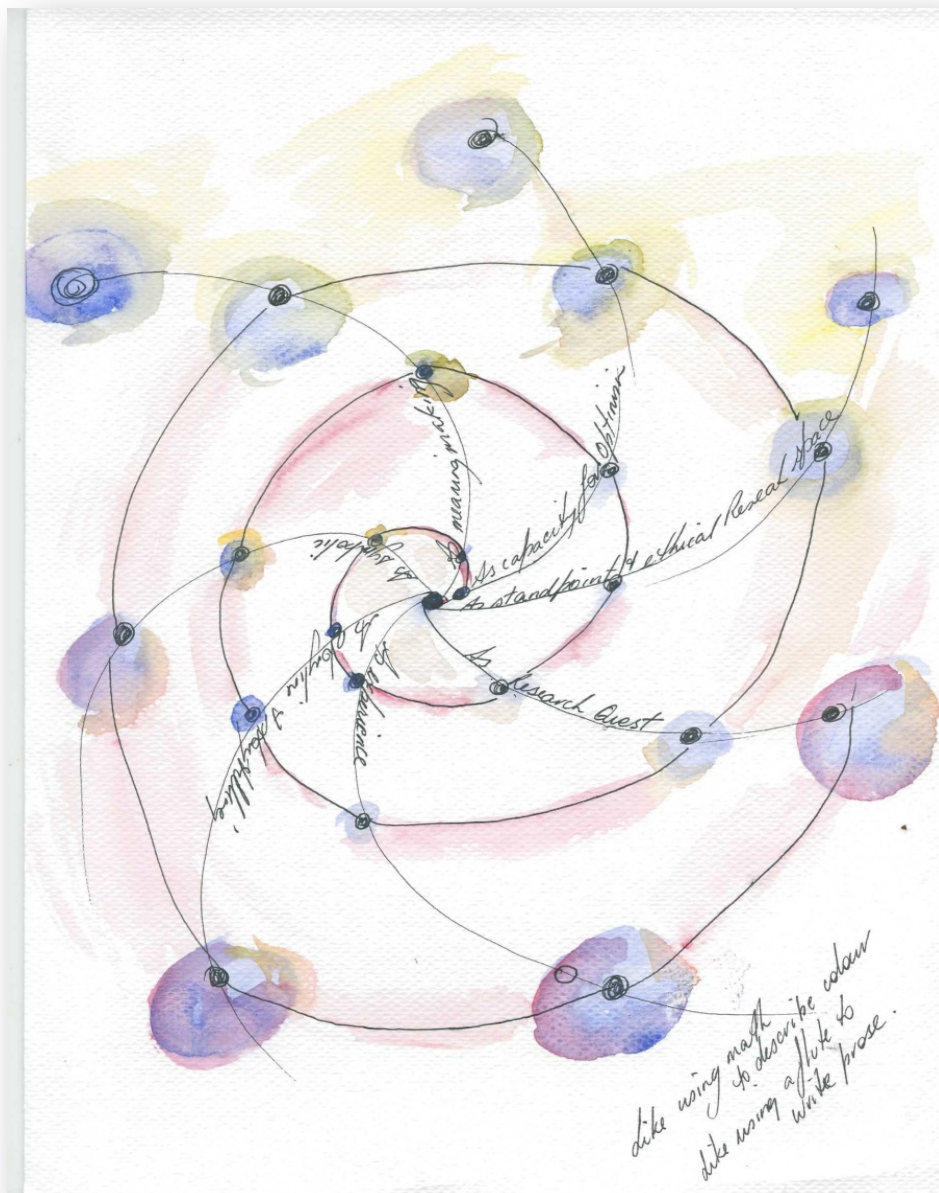


Figure 14: The chiasmic structure of this research narrative

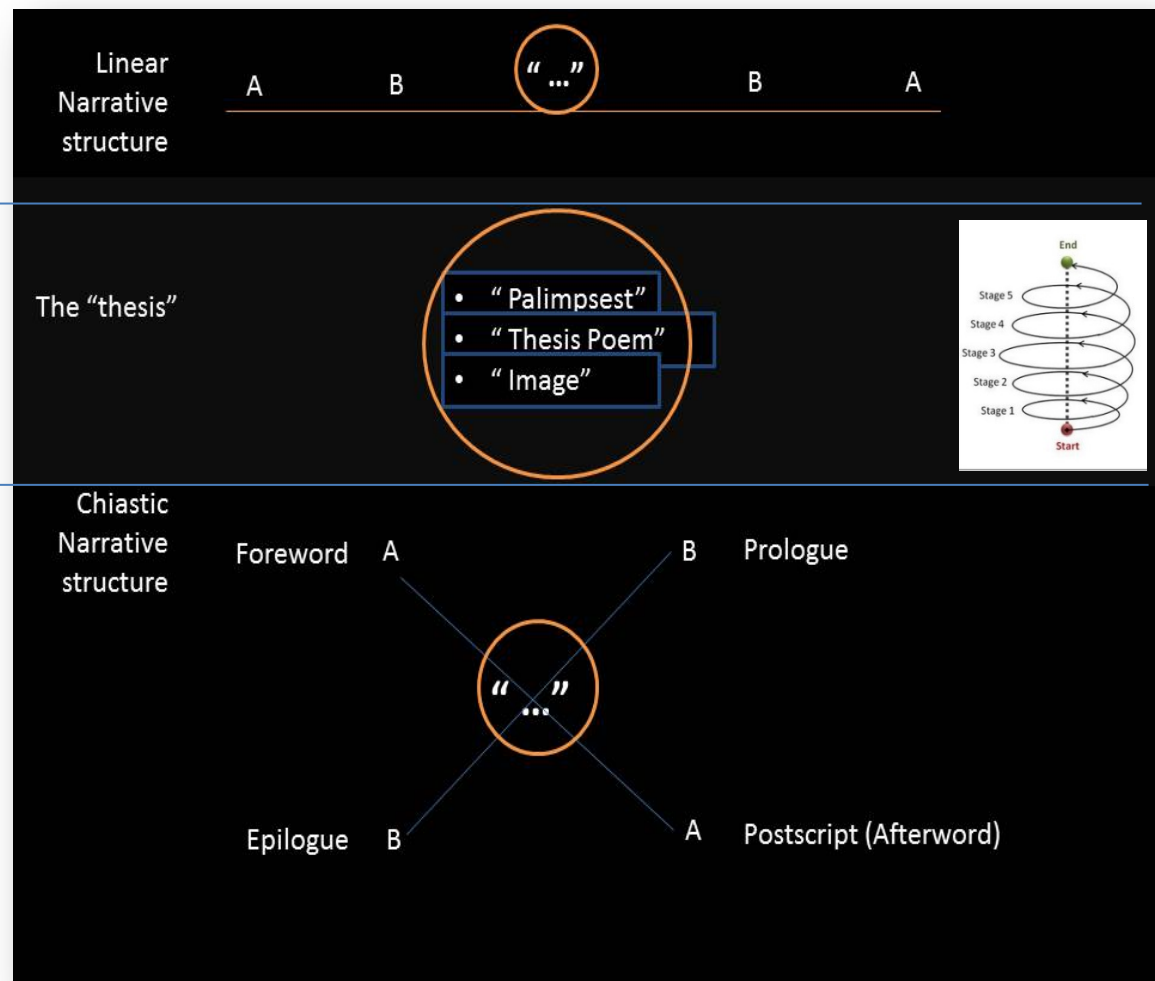
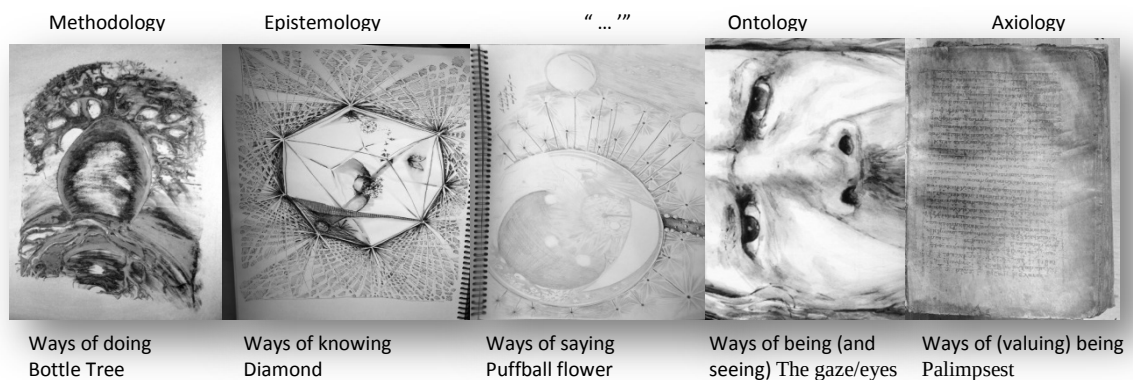


Figure 13: Metaphors and methodological elements



Anchoring points| organising metaphors

“... philosophy either recognizes or invents the different categories of being in the world while metaphors feed on the violations of such categorical distinctions.” (Garver & Lee, 1994, cited in D. Elza 2006, p.94).

“Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen.” (Leonardo Da Vinci: Paragone or the first part of the book of painting, cited in A. Hecht 1995, p.5)

The methods used to create this structure are contained and conveyed using an anchor point or organising and extended metaphor (Archibald, 2008; Martin, 2006). Metaphors have particular value for Aboriginal representations or expressions of research (Archibald, 2008) not just because they have *“the capacity to provide untranslatable information and yield alternate insights about reality”* (Ricoeur, 1978, p.143), but because they can reveal things that (English) words alone cannot. In this work, five metaphors are placed as visual guides or maps. These metaphors-as-maps show, rather than tell, how the multi-vocal/layered texts forming the substance of the dissertation come together as a whole. They are also used to position or locate the traditional elements that create research methodologies, and to represent separately the inseparable or interrelated elements that methodologies contain: namely epistemology, axiology, ontology and methods (see Figure 14, p. 78). The key metaphors used to (re)present different aspects of this text as a form of inquiry are the Queensland Bottle Tree (methodology), the diamond (epistemology), an eye (ontology), a palimpsest (axiology) and the puffball flower (writing strategies/methods/stance). Each metaphor emerged as a way to hold my research stance as I engaged with what I later learned to call epistemic flexibility (Bainbridge, 2009) and what Mignolo (2009) argues as ‘epistemic disobedience’ or the need to ‘delink’ from the Western epistemological assumption that there is a “detached and neutral point of observation” through which to interpret and know the world (Mignolo, 2009, p.160, cited in M. Nakata, et al., 2012, p.124). As I entered the tricky grounds that Indigenous and decolonising research methodologies occupy (Smith, 2005) I used these metaphors to orient and hold my relationship with

- different ways of thinking about thinking,
- the non-binary dimensions of Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity,
- the Indigenous and decolonising imperative to transform *“‘Indigenous’ relations to ‘the Western’ academy”* (Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt, 2012, p. 124),
- The use of writing as a methodology and moral decision (Richardson, 1990).

The use of multiple metaphors (see Figure 13) also brings forward subtle differences between the practices of Arts informed research (AIR) and Arts based research (ABR) practice. These differences relate to the way research expressions or artefacts of research can be informed by those traditions/paradigms that write about Art (with a capital A) as research (or a way of knowing) and yet are not quite positioned as Art. For some, positioning creative products as research, or as a source of knowledge/knowing, devalues or undermines its value as Art (Graham, 2005).

Rationale for the text

“The way I see it there’s a problem with the story, the way they tell it; the way they tell their stories about us and the way we live ... the way we then have to tell our stories about us ... no wonder you go womba (crazy)” (Storyteller 2, Cairns, October 2010).

In this text, I bring forward the role of scribe and poet to reinterpret the role and paradigm shift that the principles of recovery oriented care (Amering & Schmolke, 2009) and Indigenous research (NHMRC, 2003) demand of researchers. This shift involves engaging with the lens through which the object and subject of research is viewed – it involves engaging with the eye of the beholder. This shift involves thinking about thinking and the beliefs that frame and underpin what can be known and assumed. I also do this to undermine or disrupt the authorial ‘voice’ and the researchers gaze that writing research comes with. Foregrounding my role as scribe and poet is a paradoxical attempt to move my ‘voice’ into the background by deliberately making its constructed presence, and my role as rhetor in this text, more visible. Like the role of echo in the myth of Narcissus, the purpose of my words, and this work, are to echo or to resonate with other peoples’ words. I place and use other peoples’ words in multiple forms throughout this text as an attempt to express, reflect and to give back what I was told (and what I feel) needed to be said by three Aboriginal mothers, aunties, artists, who also identify themselves on occasion as Aboriginal mental health care consumers, practitioners and carers. In this way this text cannot be approached as an impartial or objective rendering of research and considerations of whether the construction of this text is eisogetic versus exegetic come to the fore and remain visible.

In the beginning, the purpose for conducting this inquiry was to increase the number of stories of Aboriginal Recovery that could be read, and that I knew. However, along the way I found I could not quite locate, write or see these stories said through a traditional research|ed written view. At the risk of mixing too many metaphors and myths, like the fate of Narcissus as he listened to Echo’s voice, as I listened for the voices of those who story [Aboriginal Recovery], I fell down the rabbit hole (or rather I fell into “...a tangled web of theory, method, data, rife with conceptual problems, shaky assumptions, and inappropriate generalisations” (Waldram, 2004, p.3). In this place, there are few guides to indicate direction and there appears to be no solid ground from which to write definitively from (or to define). This experience resulted in the development of a strange kind of writer’s block—one where I wrote copious amounts, forests of texts; whilst

simultaneously being unable (and perhaps unwilling) to write and to read in the way that I used to, or was expected to. In losing a more traditional writing voice, I read widely into the challenges and ethics of writing across cultures (see for example, Janke, 2009; Cattell & Carroll, 2013; Fox, 1994; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Johnstone & Strong, 2008) and adapted Echo's voice, the poetic voice, to find (or write) my way back. That is, I used more intuitive and poetic listening practices to locate and create a way to give voice to what I view as a narratively incoherent experience. It could be said that narrative incoherence is that which unites the broad range of definitions used to encapsulate the meaning of mental illness—that is being unable to narrate experiences or perceptions in a way that makes shared or coherent sense to others.

While this is wholly an original work, these words were written by me and I claim authorship of this text; the stories that underpin and substantiate it do not belong to me—they belong to the Aboriginal storytellers who informed its creation²⁸. As such, it expresses what they said as we storied our understandings of Aboriginal Recovery and leaves absent their personal stories. Within the limitations of the printed text I am trying to evoke and express, using a carefully constructed research voice, their collective story and response'. I am trying as faithfully as I can to express what was said using the silence of select absent/ed words, and the silences-in-words that poetry makes more visible.

“Poetry, I think, is an interruption of silence. The poem largely makes sense because it has this space around it. It is inhabiting a part of this space, but leaving space around it. so a poem is an interruption of silence, an occupation of silence, whereas public language is a continuation of noise”. (Collins, 2004, cited in Faulkner, 2009, p.80).

Ars poetica| poems about poetry

Ars poetica: *“to pin experience to meaning through words [...] at least temporarily”* (Lockford, 2012, p.236).

“To write about poetry is to believe that there are answers to some of the questions poets ask of their art, or at least that there are reasons for writing it,” (Weigers, 2003, cited in S. Faulkner, 2009, p.78).

²⁸ *“Indigenous knowledge systems are orally based and developed over time through intergenerational refinement. They are constantly evolving and subject to complex kinship relationships about who may hold and disclose knowledge. Writing up Indigenous research such as a thesis or dissertation involves the transfer of Indigenous knowledge to a material form. For that skill, labour and effort the individual undertaking the research writing task is recognised under copyright laws as the author of the paper they produce. Copyright owners have the exclusive rights to control who can use, reproduce and adapt the written work, and the author holds the moral rights of attribution and integrity.”* (Janke, 2009, p.5).

To create or evoke a/the poetic is what Ron Pelias (2011 cited in L. Lockford, 2012) has called “*resonant articulation*,” or a way of writing that resonates or echoes with experience and meaning. While words can never allow a full grasp of what an experience or event means, a/the poetic allows the processes of meaning making to be revealed as experienced. It also reveals the poet as being “*in love with words ... lulled by the belief that words can make change in the world*” (Lockford, 2012, p.236).

Since every reader brings to the text “*different personalities, different syntactical and semantic habits, different values and knowledge, different cultures*”²⁹, it is assumed in this text that every reader will “*fashion different syntheses*” each time (Rosenblatt, 1978, p 38). Since every reading “*is an event in time and place, involving a particular reader and a particular text*”, the history and sequencing of these event/s makes possible an alternate re-interpretation. In seeking to establish the similarities, the repetitions, the variations and differences in the stories I have ‘read into’ across different settings and over time, re-ordering the narrative structure and events in this text seemed to present a strangely logical, illogical solution to the tensions that writing stories of Aboriginal mental illness, mental health care and Recovery, entailed.

“The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp.30-31).

What drew me to poetic inquiry were a series of experiences that in hindsight can be viewed as transformative. At the time they were experienced as deep and painful unlearnings—or the shifting of deeply held beliefs and assumptions. Writing transformed into a form of therapy for the narrative incoherence (or writers block) that these experiences within research engendered. For the purposes of this dissertation these experiences are related and organised into poetic research moments; moments when my gaze or my relationship to the lens through which the research subject, object and approach was viewed, shifted. Since words are inadequate to capture these unlearnings, a selection of images and poems are used to synthesise and echo or reflect key moments. These moments mark points in time when the subjective elements of research became more prominent, more relevant and the objectives for researching shifted. As a result the

²⁹ For the purposes of this statement, culture is approached as “*shared, patterned, and historically reproduced symbolic practices that both facilitate and constrain meaningful human existence*” (Gone & Kirmayer, 2010). Approaching culture this way places emphasis on practices, “*with specific reference to routinized actions (whether by thought, deed, or word) that people undertake in their lives*”. (Gone, 2011, p.235) and like water is for a fish are not always visible.

approach taken towards the central elements of research – data construction, analysis and writing also shifted. In searching for alternate approaches or methodologies capable of encompassing the unlearnings, or shifts in perspective these moments created, I encountered the use of poetic inquiry. At that time, unaware such approaches to inquiry existed, i did not intend to use the poems and images already created whilst trying to make sense of the Aboriginal responses and non-responses being gathered, transcribed, listened to.

Writing poetry and using creative writing strategies emerged as a reflexive research practice and as alternate/complementary method for producing research (Richardson, 2000) and to help make sense of the non-sense that asking research questions revealed. It helped to make sense of that which is sensed more intuitively, in the processes that constructing research data as text entailed. Transforming yarns and oral stories into texts and thematically fragmenting them only reinforced that which was sensed and felt intuitively, viscerally, completely: that there is/was something wrong/not quite right about the way stories in Aboriginal mental health and research are re-constructed, evidenced and re-told; that there is/was something wrong/not quite right with my approach to these stories and to words (and to the privileges of writing or what Barthes once called “*the ownership of the means of enunciation*”, cited in M. Lyall, 2014, p.142).

“No textual staging is ever innocent (including this one). Styles of writing are neither fixed nor neutral but reflect the historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms.” (Richardson 2000, p. 925)

Ars poetica | What good is a poem

*What good is a poem
To those dying, unstoried, still
What good is a poem
To those whose lives get storied ill?
What good is a poem
To those who research the value of pills?
What good is a poem
For those forever searching and in seeking always will?*

*A poem does nothing except say things that cannot be said
A poem does nothing that does not first occur in the listeners head*

*A poem just says stop for a while and listen to these words
And seek your own questions for the poetic answer you have heard*

(Vicki Saunders, 2014)

Structure: Approach to the narrative

“The word narrative calls to mind a particular genre with formal characteristics. A story is an example of a narrative—a kind of narrative. A story is always a narrative, but narrative structure is not limited to story” (Kramp, 2004, p.106).

The way words are ordered into a narrative structure is important for the reading transaction, particularly so for a poetic narrative. While the aims for writing prose can be viewed as the correct ordering of words, the aspirations of poetic writing are to achieve a ‘perfect’ ordering, whilst holding perfection to be unachievable. Like the Japanese Haiku poet Issu suggests *“The world of dew is the world of dew| and yet, and yet ...”* (Stryk & Fujiwara, 1991). Somehow, sometimes understanding that something cannot be done still does not prevent the attempt to try.

The aspirations behind the structure of this particular narrative (and dissertation) is not so much to achieve perfection, since to do so would in itself be a form of destruction (and hubris), but to get as close as possible to the sounds that formed in response to the research questions I asked others—“What is it that needs to be said to better understand Aboriginal Recovery?” To get as close as possible to their response, the creation of this narrative is approached through a chiasmus or X-shaped structure. The chiasmus structure is used to indirectly reference as well the way Maurice Merleau Ponty (1964) uses the term ‘chiasm’ or crossing-over to combine subjective experience and objective existence. It is the:

“place in the flesh of the world where the visible flesh also sees, where the tangible flesh also touches . . . this is the place where there are people, where observation includes perception and sensation This only happens at the location in this fleshly element where there is a person. The sculpture does not feel or see itself or the other objects in the room around it. . . . Thus, perception and sensation are a kind of doubling of the flesh of the world upon itself. One could think of it as the wave when it breaks and curls over. It is the place in the wave where the water touches itself” (Young & Davis, 2001, p.114).

The chiasmus is also used to reference the dynamic, intertwining and disruptive gaze that brings forward an awareness that those under observation or ‘surveillance’ (the researched), also observe back (see for example, Razack, 2008; Kudchedkar, 1994).

The look and the form: on being a human researched being

“The world does not exist outside of its expressions” (Deleuze, 1993, cited in Jagodzina, 2010, p.116).

“At what point do we begin to story ourselves in the ways we are storied?” (Clark, 2014, p.103).

Would you read this text differently if you knew it was a story written about you or for you? Would you read this story differently if the same story, your story, were expressed in a different form? Since consumer, carer or user-led evaluation or research³⁰ is a key outcome and principle orienting mental health care reform (Commonwealth of Australia 2002; Council of Australian Governments, 2012), these questions have particular relevance or salience for those who currently read and write into the discourses that locate mental health care, research and reform. For example, part six, section 45(s), of the *Mental health statement of rights and responsibilities* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), asserts that *“people who provide services throughout the social, justice, health and mental health systems have the responsibility to ensure the involvement of mental health consumers and their carers and support persons in the planning, management and evaluation of social support, health and mental health services”* (p.22). The involvement of consumers and carers in the processes of mental health care planning, management and evaluation is generally posited as a critical element of, and both a right and a responsibility within, current research and reform agendas. Consumer involvement in research however, raises a number of methodological considerations and also highlights the need to identify and develop research skills amongst consumer groups. In Australia, training courses have been developed for consumers who want to be involved in health research and advocacy to help build the necessary skills (Goodare & Lockwood, 1999). In this work I have explored how consumers and carers involve themselves in, or read and write themselves into, the discursive fields that frame mental health research—more specifically, I have asked questions about how Aboriginal consumers, carers and professionals do that.

A recent phenomenological study by Rachel Sambrano and Leonie Cox (2013) explored the experiences of three Aboriginal consumers within psychiatric care. While the article that describes this study focussed on Aboriginal experiences of seclusion in psychiatric care, one of the aims of the article was to provide a platform to amplify the voice of

³⁰ The Australian National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) prefers to use the term ‘people with a lived experience’ to describe people experiencing mental health difficulties, their families and support people, to ensure that their language is clear, both to people who recognise the term ‘consumer’ and those who do not identify with an established mental health consumer movement. In this work the words ‘consumer’, ‘carer’ and ‘provider’ are privileged to better reflect the different roles that people play in the relationships that form mental health care.

Aboriginal consumers and how care is perceived, assessed (and storied) from their perspective. A key strategy in the Australian National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) Report Card (2013) also echoes this aim in a slightly different way:

“our strategy of putting the voices of people with lived experience to the front and centre of what we do is the most important aspect of our national leadership and reporting role” (p.15).

That which links the two documents cited, is reinterpreted and (re)presented here as ‘voice’ or the imperative to ‘give a platform for voice’ to those with lived experiences of mental illness and those who care for them. In this work voice is a critical element and problematic. What was ‘voiced’ by those involved in the development of this text has been reframed into the following two assertions. These assertions both relate to the citation and statement of fact that precedes them:

“People with severe mental illness die between 10 and 32 years earlier than the general population, a life expectancy second only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (Australian Mental Health Commission, 2013, p.8).

1. Aboriginal perceptions of racism (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008) in care and expectations of an untimely death or a poor outcome from or within care, do not necessarily reflect delusional states.
1. In current sociocultural practices of research (and mental health and evidence based care) there is value to be gained from listening to Aboriginal voices (NHMRC, 2003).

These two assertions can be read as statements drawn from and validated by those involved in the creation of this text. In this text I take these assertions as given, or as foundational assumptions from or against which this text has been constructed. In writing this work I am conscious that its readership may include those whose stories are being, have been, transformed, re-storied, and (re)presented through this work. To resolve some of the ethical and aesthetic tensions that doing this entails (consider Ings (2013) for a more detailed description of these tensions) writing has been approached as a method of research and the reader as an imagined and central character and agent in the unfolding story. Therefore, writing this story brings forward the role of imagination and more particularly, how I imagine the reader, you, in the transaction that writing initiates. Doing so brings forward the writer’s role as both research participant and scribe in the research process.

In a situated and partial effort to resolve the tensions generated by asking and sharing research stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care, this work responds by using the poetic, or resonant articulation. It does so to be able to pose new questions and to introduce a pause in the ongoing conversations or storytelling that write and yarn them into (being) evidence.

How to read

By inviting the reader to perform an aesthetic reading³¹ of this work as opposed to an efferent³² reading, that is, to read poetry as research and to read into a palimpsest and a poem a research answer and statement or expression of socially responsive and focussed inquiry, places the readers' response in a more prominent position in the transaction that writing this text initiates. The way the reader is more centrally and actively positioned in the creation of this text, is informed by the principles of Arts informed research (AIR) practices and the reader-response theory originally put forth by Louise Rosenblatt (1978). For Louise Rosenblatt, each reading event falls somewhere on a continuum depending upon the adoption of the reader of a "*predominantly aesthetic*" stance or a "*predominantly efferent*" stance. Stance reflects the reader's purpose in (or for) reading. The aesthetic stance orients the reader's attention to "*what is being lived through during the reading event*", whereas the efferent stance orients attention towards what is to be "retained after the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p.5). According to Louise Rosenblatt this difference in stance is associated with the elements of self (public or private) being attended to within the reading transaction.

Arts informed research (AIR) as a broad set of practices, and art in general, is oriented towards '*the eye of the beholder*' and it is the eye of the beholder, the audience, that in essence defines who, what, where, why, when, and how Art is or comes to be. Reader-response theory also recognises the audience, the reader, as an active agent in the construction of written texts. It is the reader "*who imparts 'real existence' to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation*" (Rosenblatt, 1978). From this perspective literature is viewed as a performance in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance. Drawing on Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as Exploration* (1978), this work argues that while it is important to avoid imposing any "*preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any (or this) work... it does not assume any interpretation is acceptable. This stance suggests that in settings where participants share a cultural background, common criteria will develop to validate and establish acceptable interpretation because these criteria are underpinned by already agreed upon assumptions*" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.151).

To address these already agreed upon assumptions and the imposition of my own preconceived notions and assumptions, I disrupted my own expectations of what writing this story would entail. This was done by holding an attitude of not knowing, and of

³¹ Efferent reading or reading to "*take away*" particular bits of information. The reader is focused on obtaining a piece of information and not interested in the aesthetic elements of language or the style of writing used. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) states, "*the reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue after the reading — the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out.*" (p.23) or to frame this another way, efferent reading is what the reader believes should be retained after the reading; the aesthetic reading, on the other hand, is what the reader experiences while reading.

³² Aesthetic reading is reading to explore the work and oneself. Here, the focus is on engaging in the experience of reading, itself. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) states, "*In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.*" [p. 25]

curiosity about how it would end; a practice somewhat similar to the methods of epoche and reduction that define transcendental phenomenology (championed by the philosopher Edmund Husserl). This approach began with a poem that throughout acted like a koan or a question designed to disrupt thought; to disrupt reasoning. This of course, meant that inquiring and Storying inquiry took on distinctly circular and alternate forms as I searched and (re)searched for alternate endings. In doing this, the role of the reader became an element or resource for unfolding the end of this story. It is the reader, both imagined and real, who creates a/the poetic or the pivot or hinge against which writing this text emerged. In this way the reader could also be referred to as the *ars poetica* or *poetic purpose* of this work.

This thesis involves the gaze or the lens through which I view inquiry as well as the lens through which the Aboriginal storytellers involved view research and my role and because of this multiple representations are used to align with and reflect these interpersonal dimensions and responsibilities. I have constructed this thesis using various writing strategies to resonate with the personal, creative, and scholarly questions engaging in inquiry raises/raised. A combination of prose, poetry and images are used to explain and express the concepts that locate the processes of the study and the study design. These multiple representations are (re)presented as an interweaving of voice/s (which somewhat ironically resonates with a popular reading of mental illness defined by the hearing of voices not heard by others); Using poetry, images and text to amplify rather than give voice to the collective responses I gathered from the three Aboriginal mothers and 21 other people involved in my inquiries, I am attempting to show, more so than tell, what it was I listened for.

To clarify the interweaving of these multiple writing strategies, I have used

- different font styles for poetry, quotes, and Aboriginal words.
- footnotes to echo and bring forward the notion of bracketing and the strategies or form in which story is presented in the text.
- text boxes to contain explanations of and commentary on select words, images, terminology and context.
- Times New Roman 12 pt. normal font for the remaining text, and
- italics and the disrupted placement of words in the white spaces of the printed page for emphasis where necessary.

The following map and image (Figure 16: Methodology and “data’ maps) (re)present a strategy used in the construction of the research data, processes and products underpinning this text. It does so in a way that synthesises the relationships between data/process/product and frames them through an organising metaphor – a Queensland Bottle Tree, boab or *Ruppestria brachytrich*. The shape of the particular tree in this image, sometimes referred to as an upside down tree, has a strange and unique kind of shape (see Figure 16: Methodology and “data’ maps, page 90). Yet this shape is so familiar in the

landscapes of the country that anchors my ancestral and *Gunggari* identity that it has become used across the region as a logo, ever present on the signposts that mark the roads across the region. However, in *Gunggari* country, questions have also been raised over whether the Queensland Bottle Tree is, in fact, Indigenous to the country (Aunty Irene Ryder, pers. comm. 2012).

Some of the intangible qualities represented by the Bottle Tree as an organising metaphor also resonate with the intangible qualities that poetic inquiry embeds/embody. For example, as an upside down tree with its roots in the air, the form taken by this inquiry has its roots in the practices that form Arts informed research (or AIR). In addition, the ambivalence of its status as a native of Queensland resonates with the position I adopt as an author|scribe, as not quite Aboriginal and not quite not, and as not quite research|not quite art, in order to address (and avoid) the complexities that come with defining Aboriginality and Aboriginal identity (and research) across the different contexts and knowledge systems that frame Aboriginal mental health care.

Figure 15: The reader, the text and the poem

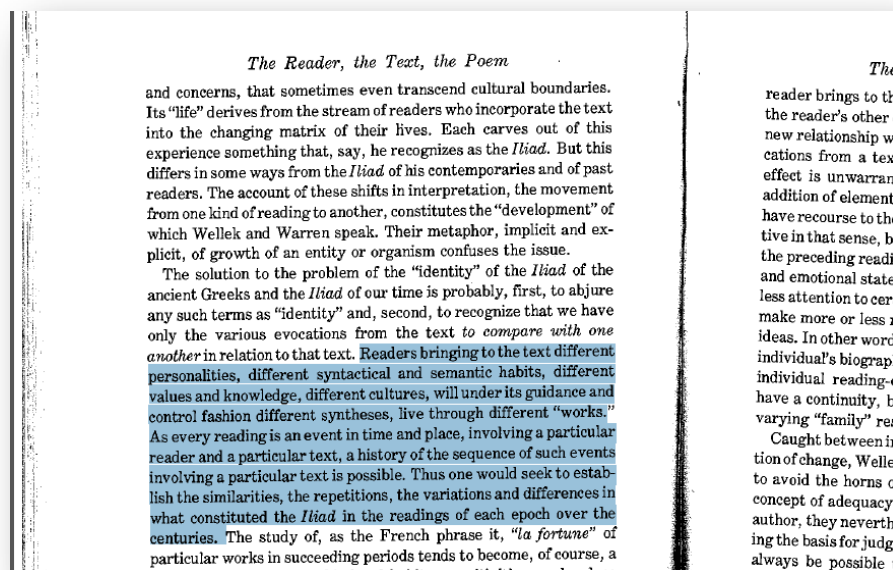
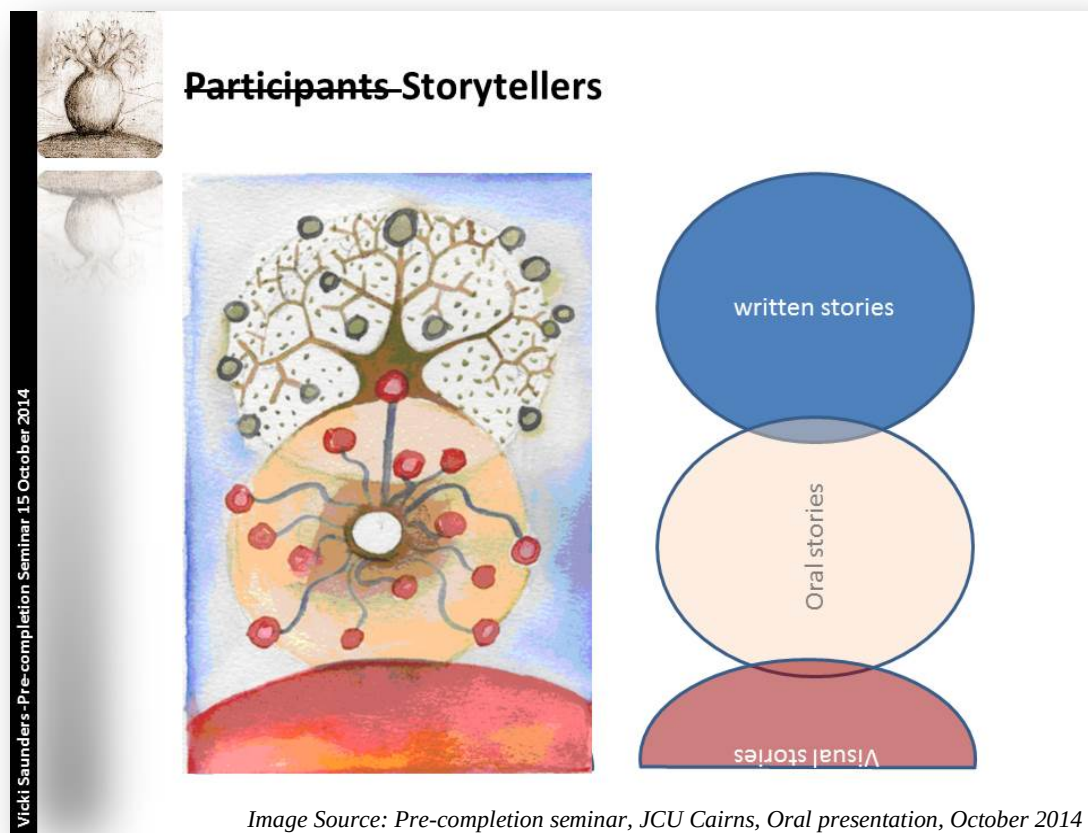


image source: Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 38

What I am temporarily trying to assume is the impossible/paradoxical/non binary position of not preferencing an either/or Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal identifier in the naming traditions used to inscribe my role (and identity) in this context. To do this I use the metaphor of an empty centre to model and visualise how I frame Aboriginal identity construction/negotiation. Drawing on the work of Joe Gone, Associate Professor of Psychology (Clinical Area) and American Culture (Native American Studies) at the University of Michigan, the empty centre model addresses the need for a more dynamic, relational and context dependant or flexible model of Aboriginal identity formulation in research communities and in communities of mental health care (Gone, 2006).

Figure 16: Methodology and “data” maps



This ‘not-quite positioning’ (and the impossibility of holding the tensions it poses) represents my response to being positioned and in positioning myself within these broad communities and discourses. It is my response to ‘being the gaze’ within the (surveillance of the) gaze that researchers represent. However, to say I am taking a not quite Aboriginal stance towards the subject and objectives of research is not quite true – it is a useful fiction, a construction, that depends upon the context, and on where and when it can be assumed. By deliberately positioning this text as not quite research/not quite art; not quite Aboriginal/not quite non Aboriginal it attempts to make more visible the tensions and central premise assumed –that we are (and I am) multiple identities living in a multiply constructed, polyvocal, social world. In this context, in the texts that academia

constructs, multiple names, or multiple “I am” statements, may not be traditionally expected.

There are well recognised ethical and conceptual challenges involved in invoking the words “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” in academic spaces and contexts, and in research practice (Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2012). These challenges have been articulated in national ethical guidelines (NHMRC 2002; NHMRC 2003; NHMRC 2006, Australian Council for the Arts, 2007) and research protocols (Martin, 2006), and in the emergent methodologies that frame decolonising research (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith 2008). As a result, the principles of respect, reciprocity, relatedness, and regenerative responsiveness/responsibilities are often foregrounded as criteria and guiding protocols that need to be demonstrated or evidenced in research involving Indigenous peoples.

To show respect for the original and living stories that underpin the project of inquiry, I have chosen to leave them absent in this dissertation, paradoxically as a way to amplify their presence. I have chosen to presence them in a way that echoes their relative absence in the discourses I engage with in mental health care and research. These living stories are central to this text, yet as stories they are not placed in the text – like the artwork or product that an exegesis refers to, these stories are positioned as the creative product the text of the thesis accompanies. Through their deliberate absencing (in text), the presence and existence of these stories are (being) acknowledged through the use of non-words to evoke the ‘utterance’ and ‘voice’ in which these stories ‘spoke’. It also simultaneously conveys my aesthetic and research|ed response to the moral questions that listening to and for their stories raised.

In addition, to show respect for the reader, I allow space in the text for You to write into, in this way acknowledging your presence and the ethical tensions that present themselves in the transaction that writing research involving Aboriginal people initiates.

To address and respond to some of the ethical tensions that creating ‘good data’ in this context generated, that is, in a cross cultural context, poeisis was preferenced as a mode of disclosure, a way of knowing, and a practice. It was also preferenced to demonstrate the principle of generativity, Aboriginal survival and cultural renewal in writing this text. Poeisis is distinguished from noeisis—as a mode of thinking that is closer in form to techne or to know how than to know what. In this way the content of inquiry is embedded and expressed in how the poetic takes (or creates) form.

Figure 17: Research processes and products

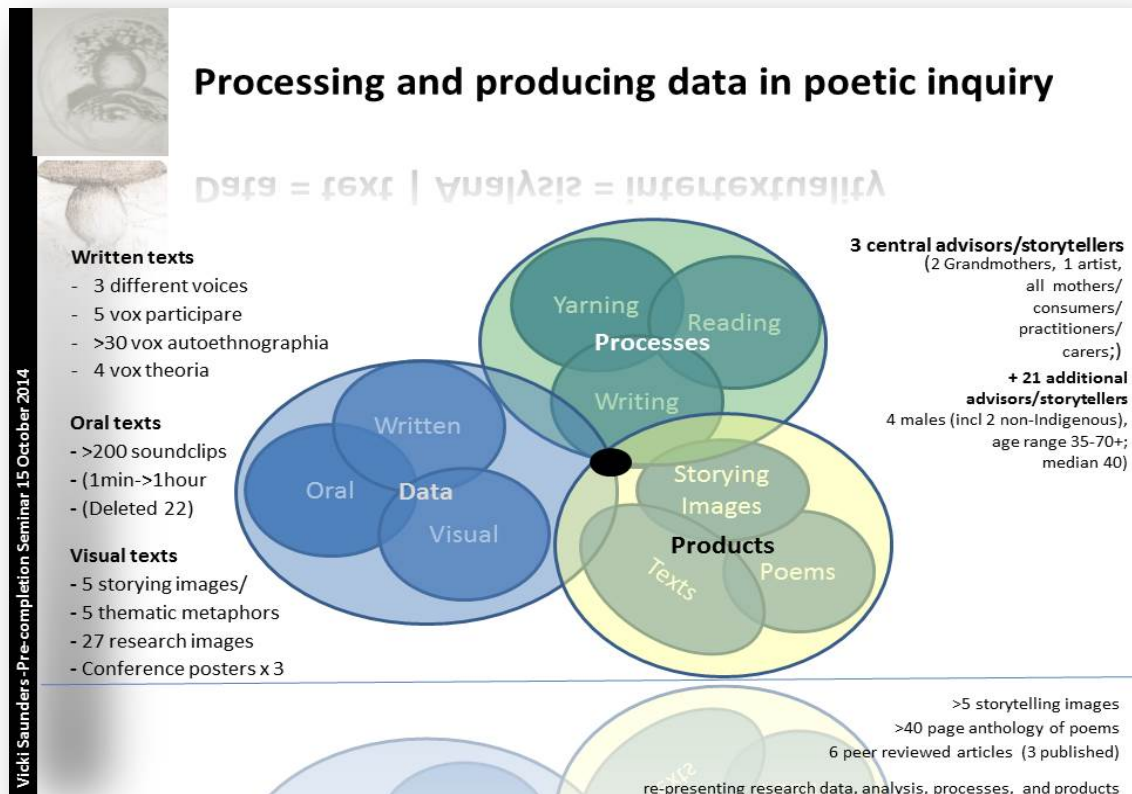


Image Source: Pre-completion seminar, JCU Cairns, Oral presentation, October 2014

“Ethical and Epistemological Tensions: For some researchers, ethics is straightforward, an acknowledgement of informed consent procedures spelled out in federal regulations that guide research involving humans. Such a stance positions the researcher as powerful expert and closes off the opportunity and challenge of considering ethical and epistemological implications in tandem. For the qualitative researcher, however, no aspect of the research process and product may be more important to problematize and unlearn than ethics. Whether an experienced anthropologist or a beginning researcher, reflexivity enables the researcher to explore ethical entanglements before, during, and after the research. Reflexivity may also enable the researcher and the researched to resolve in a practical, working sense, other ethical issues. **Ethics cannot be separated from epistemology and, to this end, reflexivity on ethics has everything to do with good data.**” (emphasis added, Kleinsasser, 2000, p. 157)

To create ‘good data’, or data that is relevant to the assumptions and values embedded in the questions being posed, a palimpsest or a page from which another story has been erased, has been placed to create space for your response and your story and to position the readers’ response as data in this story.

“When we seek to make sense of such problematical topics as human nature, culture, society, and history, we never say precisely what we wish to say or mean precisely what we say. Our discourse always tends to slip away from our data towards the structures of consciousness with which we are trying to grasp them; or, what amounts to the same thing, the data always resist the coherency of the image which we are trying to fashion of them” (White, 1978, p.1).

To demonstrate reciprocity—I give back through the aesthetic that coheres and is embedded in the multiple narratives placed in this dissertation. The aesthetic conveys the spirit in which the stories I listened to were shared, and as such, acknowledges and honours the spiritual dimensions ever present in Aboriginal storytelling and understandings of mental illness and health. The aesthetic is that which creates a response in another|the other—an element or dimension of inquiry that is somewhat difficult to inscribe and define, at least from my perspective. The aesthetic is that which makes the eye of the beholder a critical element of and in the text.

To demonstrate relatedness – much of the text is dialogic– in dialogue with the reader, You, ‘I’ and the “other” I imagine as I write. I also demonstrate relatedness in the way Aboriginal stories of Recovery are presented through their absence. Informed by the

principles that orient transformative (Mertens, 2008) and expressive research (Shidmehr, 2009), this inquiry was designed to express a research|ed response and the response of those being research|ed. In this way, being responsive in and to the context of inquiry is a central goal. To uphold my responsibilities to those who shared their stories for this inquiry and to the content of the stories themselves, I use a basic human right to be able to tell your own story (Shotter, 1981) as a rationale for presencing these stories in the way that I have.

To demonstrate the regenerative aspirations for this text – I bring forward the role of the reader in the transactions and relationships that writing this text initiates. Metaphorically and symbolically, space has been left in this story for the reader to write into and re-story. In the places where I use the Bottle Tree as a metaphor, a writing device and an image or model for the research methodology, I separate it from the stance I adopt towards writing research and this dissertation. The tree with its roots growing in the air (or Arts informed research [AIR]) is a metaphor used to (re)present the narrative and discursive spaces this work explores and the types of Aboriginal stories it (re)frames. To delineate the adopted writing standpoint from the approach or methodology used to sustain it, the metaphor of a puffball flower is used. Similar to the Bottle Tree, the puffball flower is a strange and familiar type of flower. For a start, it is not actually a flower – the plant from which it emerges, the dandelion, is considered to be a weed in some places and yet is also a source of food and medicine in others. The puffball flower is a seed pod with petals designed to float on the breeze; and with one gust of wind, one breath, the shape of the puffball disappears. Its form, like all flowers, is inherently ephemeral. Texts over time can be read very differently.

To locate the less ephemeral aspects that knowledge production and the research process demands, my approach towards knowledge or the way I know what I know is represented by another metaphor and image. The diamond is used to represent perception and my epistemic stance. It represents how I perceive what I know and am attempting to story. It draws on and echoes the use of a diamond metaphor by Maurice Merleau Ponty to reflect on the nature of perception and consciousness. Drawing on the words of French poet Valerie, Maurice Merleau Ponty claims that “*Perception is the flaw in the diamond that is consciousness*” (Merleau Ponty, 1962, p. 241).

Each metaphor used separately and together in places throughout this text, relates the different elements of inquiry and methodology. Dis/placed, each metaphor is located by the final metaphor used—the not quite empty page or ‘palimpsest’ that forms a centre or hinge for the bracketed ‘text’. The palimpsest is deliberately placed between the brackets that separate the prologue from postscript to represent a particular and situated research/ed voice or stance. As a metaphor, this page represents an image and expression of the (not quite absent|ed) words expressed by those involved in this inquiry. It represents my way of un-bracketing the words they spoke as I listened. Using a palimpsest allows their words to be dis|placed as a deliberate writing strategy and brings forward a|the poetic that gives coherence to my dissertation. The palimpsest (re)presents

what each storyteller expressed when I asked: “*What is it that needs to be said (in this context)?*”

To show how this interpretation was iteratively and collaboratively co-created, an image of a Bottle Tree is used as a way to organise the data sampling, and the analytic and expressive elements of the research methodology. It also echoes the ‘chiasmatic’ structure used to create the dissertation. To resolve the tensions involved in narrating other/Aboriginal peoples’ life stories I present them in an absented or through an alternative form of presencing; and I use the prologue and epilogue sections of this text (two published poetic essays) to explain and position the reasons why I have done so.

Calling it (a) methodology

“Why not call it autoethnography?” Storyteller 3 asked. After all, autoethnography is *“research, writing and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection...and claims the conventions of literary writing.”* (Ellis, 2004, p.xix).

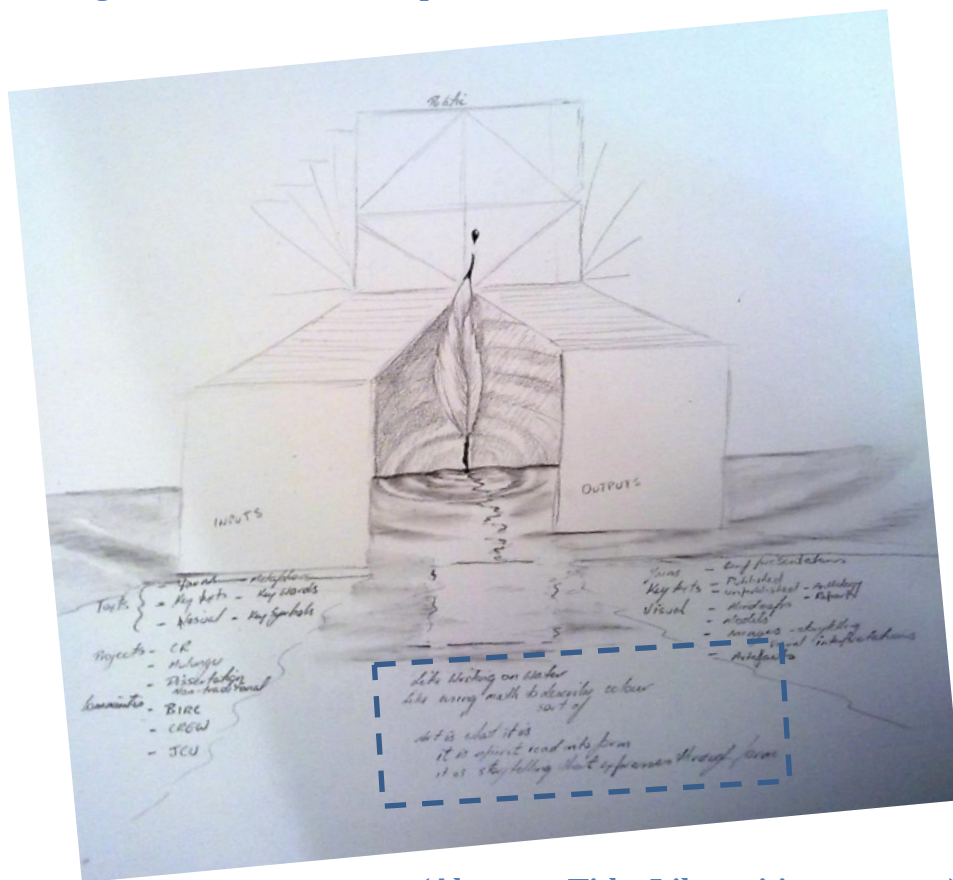
Not all disciplines require PhD dissertations to include a methodology section, and, not all traditions of disciplined inquiry call it “methodology”. The word methodology is generally used to refer to the science and study of research methods and it is relatively common in social and qualitative research to differentiate between methodology and methods in practice. For example, method can be approached “*as a technique for generating data*” and methodology is “*conceptualized as a higher order system that affects the selection of methods in any one instance via a set of principles regarding the nature of knowledge and information and the suitable sources from which such information might be derived*” (Evans, Miller, Hutchinson & Dingwall, 2014). However, according to Maggie Walters and Chris Anderson (2013) there are problems in being able to recognise methodology when we see it. To define this research methodology, I do what most research books and texts tend to do. I “either avoid the problem by not defining methodology at all” (Walters & Anderson, 2013, p.41) or I pick a definition that aligns best with my understanding of the word. Here I use a frequently used definition of methodology: “*the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes*” (Crotty, 1998, p.7). The choice to use poetic and creative methods arose from my original plan to increase the number of stories I knew (and could read into research) about Aboriginal people living life well or ‘*living a contributing life*’ (QMHC, 2015), with ongoing experiences of mental illness and mental health care. Along the way it transformed into an aspiration to amplify the voices of those who in living their stories, story Aboriginal Recovery.

In this work the dissertation as a whole is submitted as a statement of methodology and a non-traditional form of research representation. The “what” aspects of the research methodology are also embedded and expressed within “how” or the way the narrative structure and narrative elements in it are related to the research questions being posed. The approach taken in this inquiry could be described as bricolage or a postmodern, layered and blended approach to writing research and to constructing a narrative (to represent) research; and it does have those aspirations. However, it is perhaps closer to the term ‘métissage’ or “*a research sensibility focused on decolonising Aboriginal and Canadian relations*” (Donald, 2012, p.534) although I am hesitant to apply this word in the Aboriginal and Australian context within which this work exists. It is named and framed as poetic inquiry (or a research and writing strategy that includes poetic, expressive and aesthetic dimensions of knowing), because the metaphors of bricolage and postmodernity do not quite resonate with the metaphors Aboriginal scholars use (Richardson, 2013). At the cross cultural interface that defines Indigenous knowledge, the use of language and metaphors is problematic, if not the problematic, since it is ‘*our metaphors [that] define us and our stories [that] sustain us*’ (Foeman and Nance, 2002; Sharon Moore, pers.comm., 2015).

In not quite naming this work autoethnography or a product of bricolage, postmodern and narrative inquiry I disrupt the metaphors being invoked. Doing this re positions the place and space this text occupies at the edges of more traditional discursive or rhetorical practices of research, that is, within the not quite ‘academic’ practices that performative, dialogic, Arts informed and Indigenous research methodologies occupy (Knowles & Cole, 2008). These practices occupy research spaces where form and content of expression are intertwined elements of research and inquiry spaces. In these spaces oral, performative and social responsive practices are more central to the objectives and subject of inquiry (Richardson, 1999; Prendergast, 2009). In the blended languages of multiply Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural spaces, how words are used adds a critical dimension to inquiry. Figure 18 is an image created to illustrate and echo how the poetic is used in this work to mean that which links the research inputs and outputs. The unfolding page|s symbolically represent the hinge, or the multiple dimensions that poetic embeds.³³

³³ I use the word poetic in the same way that Lasky (2013 cited in M. Lyall, 2014, p.134) does, where poetics is a discourse articulating “*the relationship between the creative work and its critical inputs and outcomes*”. This work therefore presents a yarnning thread, a link, a fragment of a conversation that relates the research produced (in poems and images) with the critical inputs and outcomes that created the need for a|the poetic in this context. Here in the flatlands of printed text this response is reframed and (re)presented as a multilayered and fragmented narrative. It shows more than tells the critical perspective being adopted towards the reconstruction of ‘data’. It also conveys how I deconstructed/analysed what data and research means in the contexts that locate this work, and the conversations that i listened to/read into while seeking stories for recovery in Aboriginal mental health care.

Figure 18: What does the poetic as research look like?



(Alternate Title: Like writing on water)

A|the poetic structure

*“Indigenous methodologies are refined and redefined through the doing, each time it is applied ... but its all the same, same ... (principle)”
(Storyteller 3, pers. comm., 2014).*

A research methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed (Harding, 1987). It entails describing the theoretical approach and perspective (ontology and epistemology) adopted while thinking through method, information collection strategies, analysis techniques and production and presentation of results (Mayan, 2009). The subject of this inquiry introduces a word, an idea and experiential state and an outcome and principle that is increasingly being invoked in the discourses that form mental health care reform.

“During the past two decades the concept of recovery has become a familiar part of the language of mental health policy, services and research literature” (Anthony, Rogers & Farkas, 2003, p. 102).

Since poetic writing rearranges words in a way that disrupts, distils and conveys alternate meanings, this dissertation seeks a different result. Since the structure of the dissertation emerged from a problem with words and how they are used in contexts of Aboriginal mental health care, it is a different effect or outcome the research methodology seeks to produce (see Figure 18: What does the poetic as research look like? , page 97).

*Like writing on water
Like using math to describe colour, sort of
The poetic is what it is,
it is spirit read into form
It is storytelling that expresses content
through disrupting the norm*

Design/analysis

The structure, design and processes involved in creating this dissertation (the text) are separate to the projects that underpin and substantiate the approach developed towards writing it. These projects are listed in the appendix and acknowledgements sections of the text. They include two community based projects framed as Arts-in-Health research initiatives (Creative Recovery to Creative Livelihoods and the Mulungu Yumba Project) and my involvement in two collaborative and Indigenous research networks (or communities of research practice): Collaborative Research on Empowerment and Wellbeing (CREW) and Building Indigenous Research Capacity (BIRC). The design of this work (and the construction of the narratives placed between and outside the brackets of my thesis and dissertation) emerged or rather grew in more organic ways from my

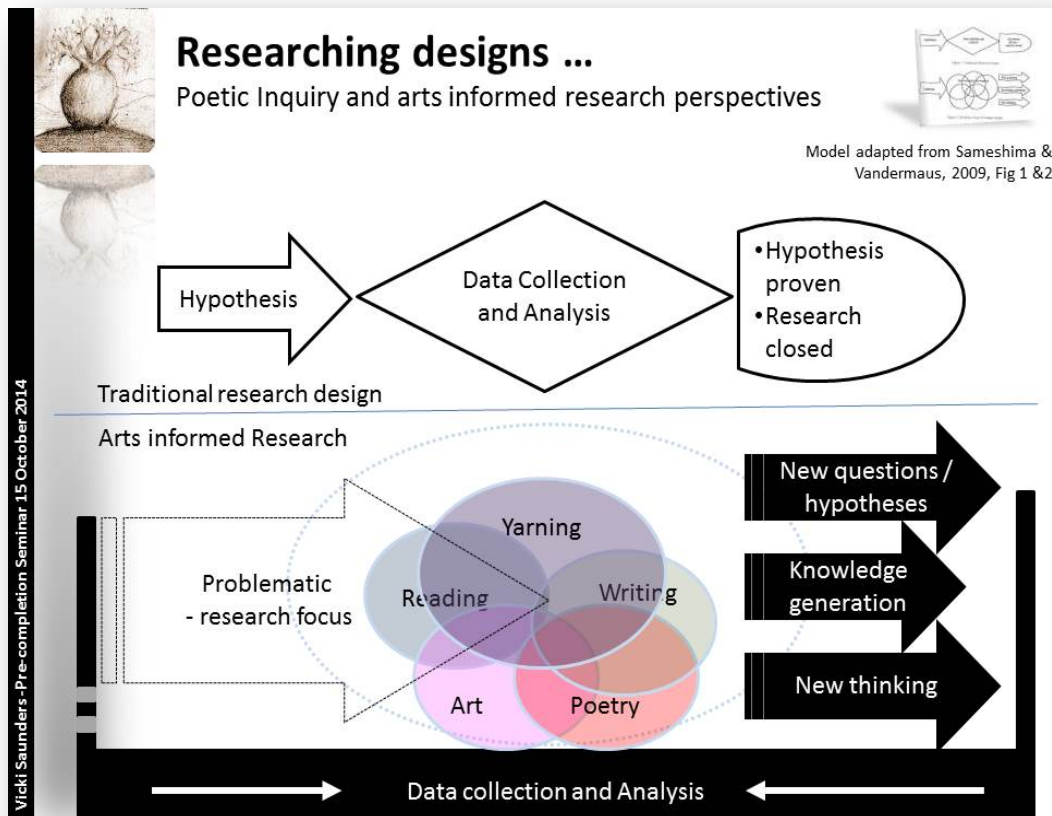
experiences within these projects and communities. They also emerged from the practices of engaging with writing as a way of knowing and a method for ‘discovery’.

In Arts informed research (AIR), form of expression and representation is as important as content. The research design takes a particular and aesthetic form. The aesthetic in this inquiry is conveyed through a poetic which according to Lasky (2013 cited in M. Lyall, 2014) is a discourse articulating “*the relationship between the creative work and its critical inputs and outcomes*”.

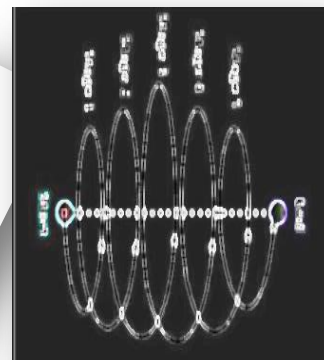
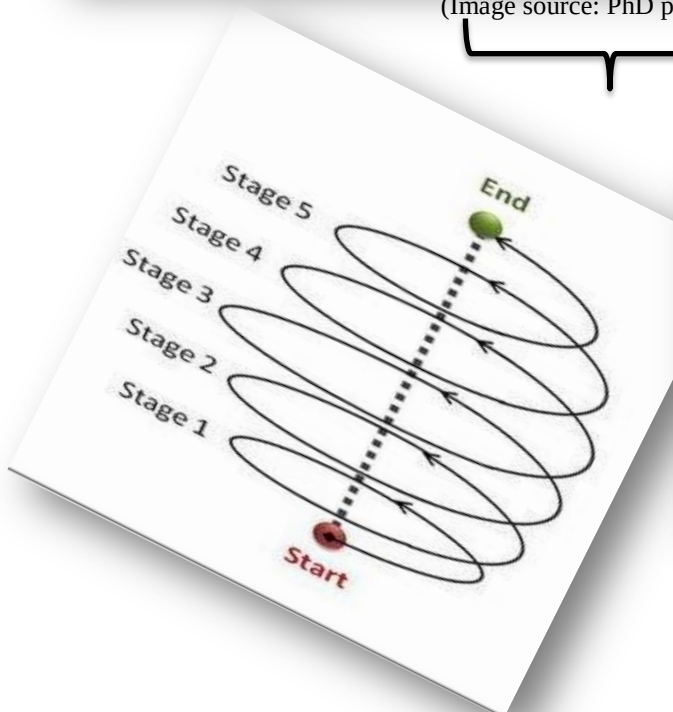
In this work, form of expression is (re)presented or illustrated by the metaphors used to map the conceptual and interrelated elements of the overall research design and methodology (the Bottle Tree and chiasmus). In Arts informed research, aesthetic modes of knowing are acknowledged and represented in research designs and methodologies. As a dimension of knowledge, aesthetic ways of knowing are more traditionally devalued in scientific or more traditional research designs. These designs and methodologies also tend to frame Aboriginality as a risk factor for poor outcomes in mental health care.

In choosing Arts informed research (AIR) strategies to express inquiry, the research design responds to ‘the gaze’ or lens through which research traditions are viewed (in this case by three Aboriginal mothers and 21 others—all with years of experience in Aboriginal mental health care and/or research in Queensland, Australia). As a design response, Arts informed research (AIR) allows me to expand my definition of research to include aesthetic and alternate modes of knowing, doing and being in the storied world this text occupies (Martin, 2006). It creates space to issue an invitation to engage with alternate ways of saying and seeing Aboriginal research and to reimagine what research, and the evidence surrounding Aboriginal outcomes in mental health care, is currently saying. It asks for a shift in the lens through which stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care are viewed. Adapting a model developed by Pauline Sameshima and Roxanne Vandermause (2009), it therefore seeks an acknowledgement of parallax – or the shift in perception that arises with a change in observer positionality in relation to an object. Conceptually parallax is introduced to bring forward the shift in perception and perspective that decolonising research methods engage with, engenders and requires of those who place Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples as objects of the research gaze.

Figure 19: Researching Designs



(Image source: PhD precompletion seminar, October 2014)



Process/ yarning Aboriginal stories

The terms ‘yarn’ and ‘story’ are relatively common in the discursive practices and strategies that frame Indigenous approaches to inquiry (Geia, 2012; Walker, Fredericks, Mills & Anderson, 2013). “*When an Aboriginal person says ‘let’s have a yarn’, (or ‘story now’) what they are saying is, let’s have a talk or conversation.*” (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p.38). Yarning as a relationship building approach to data collection and observation, entails sharing and exchanging information. It involves

“... an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. Yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research” (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p.38).

Used in varying ways in different indigenous contexts (Dean, 2010), its application is challenging to define. It has been advocated as a more appropriate method for data collection, interpretation and analysis (Begley & Harald, 2005; Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Fletcher et al., 2011; Fredericks, et al., 2011; Toombs, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009), and the processes and methods used to generate and construct ‘data’ for this work consisted of:

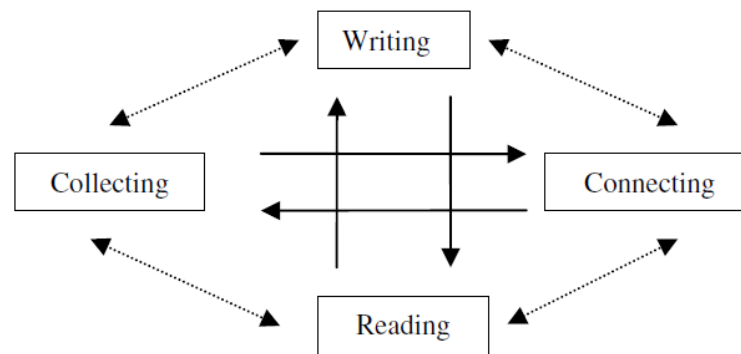
1. Yarning as a more culturally appropriate and generative form of engaging with research participants in a way that redresses the ever present power imbalances that exist in the relationship between researcher/researched (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, Geia, 2012);
2. Reading as framed by the hermeneutic circle³⁴ and reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978); and
3. Writing as methodology (Richardson, 1999) and writing poetically as a way of knowing (Prendergast et al., 2009).

In line with the way others have approached Yarning as a research method, here it is viewed as both a process and an exchange that was used in establishing relationships of trust with others and to demonstrate our relationship with the research topic and goals for inquiry. Through Yarning with others I explored and negotiated the complex spaces and accountabilities that coexist with the involvement of Aboriginal people in research (Martin, 2008).

³⁴ “*Using the hermeneutic circle for describing the process of literature research provides a framework that brings together different aspects of the literature review process under one overarching canopy. It facilitates integrative understanding of the different sets of skills used for identifying and obtaining literature of relevance in this particular context. In this framework the stages of searching, sorting, selecting and acquiring as well as reading, identifying and refining are connected. While each stage is associated with different skills all stages inform each other in order to facilitate the literature review process. While searching helps to pin-point literature for reading, reading in turn can inform the search process as well.*” (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010, p.15/16)

This approach acknowledges the value of creativity and art in storytelling and narrative constructions and it positions writing and reading poetically or creatively simultaneously as research data, process and product (see Figure 20: The writing model posited by Murray (1980) and Figure 19: Researching Designs).

Figure 20: The writing model posited by Murray (1980)



Locating myself within an emerging/poetic research sensibility

This chapter is placed postscript in the narrative structure and has been called a Statement of Methodology to accompany the audio-visual material that partially explains the dissertation as a work of poetic inquiry. What I’m trying to do is to assume the impossible/paradoxical/nondual position of not preferencing an either/or Aboriginal non-Aboriginal stance. This is a particular and academic stance towards the identifiers used in the naming traditions that locate my role. I use an/the empty centre to model and visualise how Aboriginal identity construction/negotiation is framed for this inquiry. I draw on the conceptual work of Joe Gone (An Aboriginal scholar, psychologist and healer) to address the need for a more dynamic, relational and context dependant or flexible model of identity formulation in Aboriginal research communities and communities of care. This ‘not-quite positioning’ (and the impossibility of fully occupying it) (re)presents my response to being positioned and to positioning myself within these broad communities and discourses.

“In short, the question of how I choose to define myself is, in many ways, immaterial to the reality of how I am defined”. (Grande, 2000, p. 351).

While I may be saying what I mean in slightly convoluted ways, for me there is a difference between writing a positioning statement of methodology and speaking it. This text occupies/reflects my response to ‘being the gaze’ within the (surveillance of the) gaze that researchers represent. To say I am taking a not quite Aboriginal research stance towards the subject and objectives of research is not quite true—it is a useful fiction, a construction, a writing strategy used to get closer to the truth of a way of positioning that

depends on the particular context. That is it depends on where and when I assert my identity as an Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal person with roles and responsibilities that vary across place and time. At home I would never say, nor do I believe, I am not quite Aboriginal. I am what I am—a *Gunggari* woman with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestors who are respected and acknowledged. Depending on place and time, I align myself within the language and identifiers that are appropriate or used in each context. Here in the still, flatlands of text, out of context, naming this perspective is illusive.

The not quite research/art; not quite Aboriginal/non Aboriginal stance towards researching is an attempt to make more visible a central premise. I assume that we are (and I am) multiple identities living in a multiply constructed world; and in this context, in the world that an academic text constructs, multiple names or multiple ‘I am’ statements are not easily written or read.

To theoretically position this dissertation for submission into an academic context means aligning it within the multidisciplinary, discursive and theoretical spaces that in a sense allow research/ers to say research and to say what research can ‘say’. However what research ‘says’ about Aboriginal people, Recovery and mental health is part of the problematic this work engages with.

“I see in current societal attitudes that there is one thing worse than being mentally ill, and that is being Aboriginal and mentally ill”
(Holland, 1992, p.14)

Originally framed as informal semi-structured interviews, over time Yarning was preferenced as a way to inscribe the data gathering and validation processes. To yarn is to spin a tale, and spinning a tale means following where the different story threads go. This dissertation (re)presents where the many stories that Yarning uncovered, went.

Rendering poetic inquiry into prose

Poetic inquiry is defined, practiced, and understood in many ways (see for example, *In Education*, volume 20 (2) Special Edition, 2014). While poetic inquiry is defined, and practiced in many different ways, it is generally situated within Arts based research (ABR) practices. Poetic inquiry uses, in part, Art as “a way of knowing” and “a socio-political and critical act of resistance to dominant forms,” and a “phenomenological and existential choice that extends beyond the use of poetic methods to a way of being in the world” (Prendergast et al., 2009, pp. xxi-xxv). Poetic inquiry is approached here as a way of listening and an alternate research storytelling form.

To render research practices and data through the poetic in this work meant unlearning other ways of writing. It meant learning to read in a whole other way, and to write in a way that extends beyond the rational into the extra rational, non-linear and undifferentiated. Writing from within the paradigm shifting, recovery-oriented research perspective (Amering & Schmolke, 2009) that this inquiry engages with means that I am committed to a particular stance or view about writing and research where I cannot

assume that you, the reader, do not already know the answer to the problematic I am researching. That is, if I remove the double negative, I assume the reader, each individual reader, holds an answer to the research questions that I have posed. I also assume (drawing on a vaguely remembered quote from a Narrative Therapy workshop I attended in 2010) that no matter how big or intractable a problem people are always resisting it and that by looking at how life as lived is storied, and how these resistances are placed in stories, solutions tend to be found.

Aboriginal mental illness is generally/has been framed as ‘mental health’ and more often as an intractable problem—a complex or “wicked” problem. Through Yarning, reading and writing, I focussed on generally accepted impressions that were further explored with others and through targeted literature searches. These impressions were recorded in different forms of ‘text’ over time and the artefacts of inquiry are expressed in these forms as a result. The expressive forms, or writing strategies adopted and gathered throughout the development of this dissertation include the poetic, imaged or visual and prose. To write inquiry and to write as a form of inquiry and a way of doing research required over 30 field notebooks to capture and demonstrate the evolving impressions of inquiry gathered and validated. These impressions were tested and explored with others by presenting them as statements of research rendered visually, poetically. These statements are organised as ethic, aesthetic and poetic:

- An ethical statement:
 - o resistance to this research problematic occurs through the preferencing of other words (for example, social emotional wellbeing, *Binan Goonj*, *Dadirri*) or non-words (such as silence and the use of gestures and images);
- An aesthetic statement:
 - o the research problematic is a problem with words and the way mental health and Recovery is framed/storied in Aboriginal mental health care; and
- A poetic statement:
 - o performed through written ‘voice’ and sometimes through the withdrawal of voice—silence is used as an active response and a significant storytelling strategy.

The processes through which these impressions were formed and the way I have re-interpreted them through the lens of poetic inquiry, involved iterative ‘yarns’ over a five year period with a core group of research advisors or co-storytellers. In Arts informed research (AIR), the (true) object of analysis is found in the particular and the introspective and subjective; the (true) subject of research is expressed in the personal, the imaged and imagined, and viewed through the general.

The (true) object of analysis in this work are:

- a) the difference between hearing and listening or *Binan Goonj* and

- b) the moral or value that Arts informed research (AIR) and ethical subjectivity makes visible within research practices (and audible in the ‘voices’ that identify research).

The word ‘listening’ is sometimes used interchangeably with that of ‘analysis’ throughout this section. It is used to mean the same thing as analysis but introduces a different dimension – In the *Ngungikurungkurr* language this dimension of Aboriginal listening is called *Dadirri* (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 1999) or for those who engage with what Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann (1999) introduced as *Dadirri* –it is a form of deep active listening that is comfortable with silence. *Dadirri* in this work, is presented as a notion or theme that appeared in many different forms and Aboriginal languages, amidst the data collated and coconstructed. It also appeared as a way to inscribe an analytic process that actively engages with the said and unsaid, the visible and invisible in each context. As a process it is oriented towards (the active and doing aspects of) listening and inquiry to resonate with and build or enhance Aboriginal spirit, wellness, community and continuity. Carolyn Ellis (1999) might frame this way of listening as heart-felt research where the subjective, that which is felt, intuited and experienced, frames the objective for research. This way of listening makes visible that which responds to the research object, or the eye of the beholder. In some places I have used words to express what this means – in other parts of this text I have not. In some places I have left spaces where words have been, or should be. In some places I have also played with the structure and organisation of the thesis elements to disrupt the reader’s expectations, to introduce a pause and to leave space for the readers’ response.

Statement of impact and significance

“...Increasing the ability of service users to engage with researchers and practitioners to define relevant, researchable ‘problems’, and to design and conduct research on them, may therefore enhance the function of social research to promote a more equitable and more inclusive society”.
(Fisher, 2002, p.311).

No one identified a pressing need to conduct poetic inquiry within Aboriginal mental health care research. No-one suggested this was something that needed to be done. The decision to engage with the poetic (and an Indigenous poetic (McLeod, 2014) was arrived at after years of deliberation on the ethics of doing (and being) research, particularly in the Aboriginal contexts and communities that shape/bound/frame what I know/learned through inquiring. In the end these deliberations were turned into an aesthetic, or rather re-positioned into an aesthetic response, for a purpose. The approach (or methodology) was adopted for a particular, situated, and temporal reason—namely to seek to use language well (or to use rhetoric) where ‘using language well’ is a guiding value for the form of expression or ‘voice’ being used and part of the problem being addressed.

More specifically, the need to do research this way was arrived at after a careful exploration of a question that echoed through every phase of the research journey *“If you*

do not have hope, what hope is there?" In a sense this question read its way into every 'text' I engaged with; and I read into it a re-interpretation of my role as researcher. To put it another way, I decided since my primary role here is to write a research story, I asked what is the best way for written words to be used in this particular situation? How can the (reading) space and the privileges of voice that writing a dissertation, and being an author, affords be best used?

The need that drove the original proposal before it transformed into poetic inquiry exists on a number of levels that relate to:

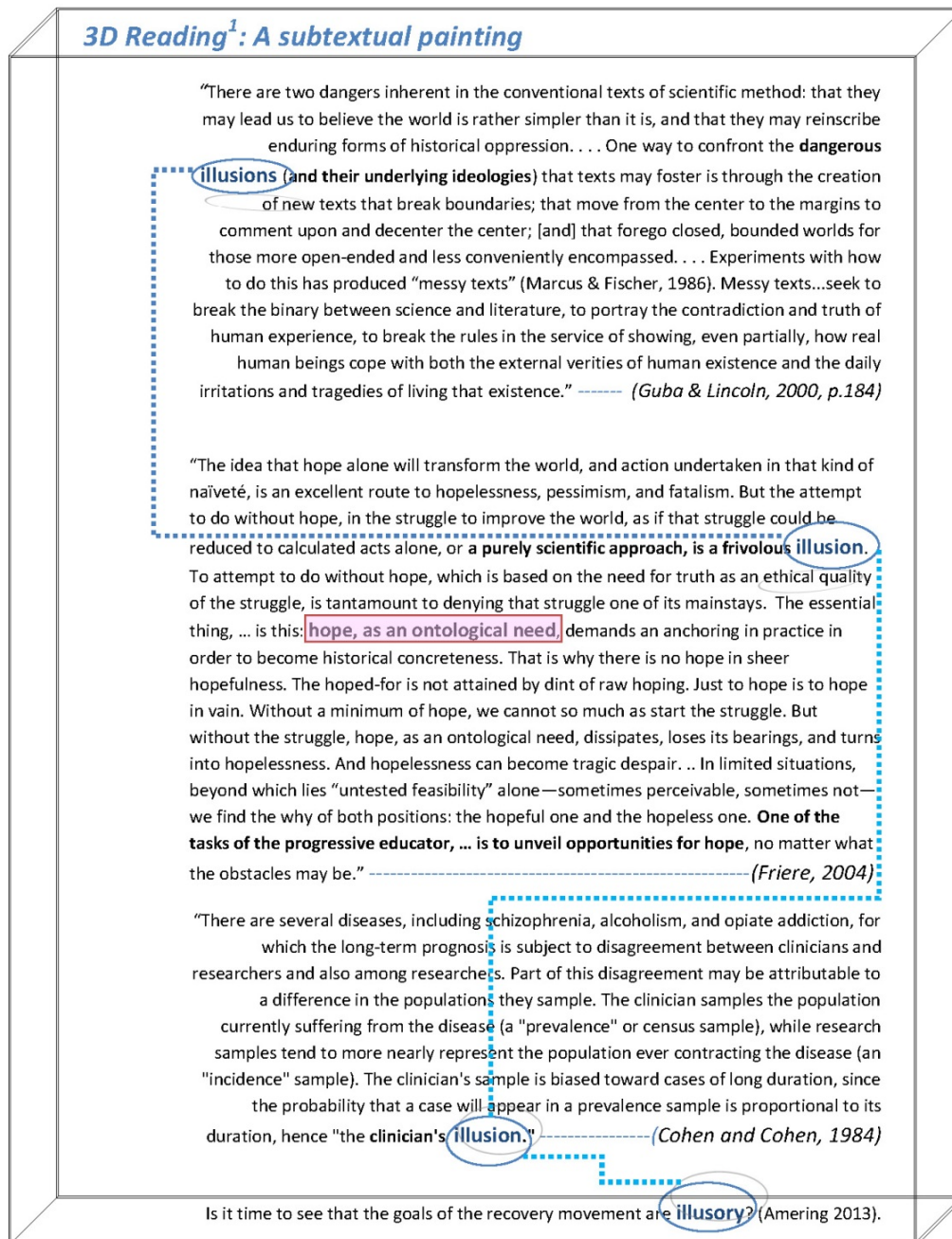
- the absence of data on Recovery outcomes in Aboriginal mental health care reports; and
- the absence of stories of Aboriginal Recovery in those places and spaces of mental health care that I was working with and that I am attempting through poetic inquiry to speak into ...

The need for this particular approach to research and the way it has evolved over time, relates to the way the word 'Recovery' and its existence was and is challenged both in general conversations and in the literature (Adeponle, Whitley & Kirmayer, 2012). As I started to gather and organise a range of different 'texts' I began to wonder whether what I was looking for was an illusion. The word illusion recurred often enough in these 'texts' to emerge as a theme and as a narrative thread. In transforming the word illusion into an organising theme derived from/of inquiry, it introduced or made visible another dimension in researching practice/processes and the goals of research. This dimension relates to the places where theory transforms into practice, into praxis, where *creating praxis remains the ultimate goal of teaching and learning experiences*" (Killingsworth Roberts, Brasel & Crawford, 2014, p.2).

As a form of praxis, meaning is made through the poetic – or that which links research inputs with outputs – and the silence that became more visible as a non-response, an absent|ed response, and as an active response throughout inquiry.

"... composing poetry becomes a cultural tool to make sense of the day-to-day lived experience of the inner world of what it is like to be a multiply-positioned self" (Weibe, 2012, p. 44).

Figure 21: A 3D reading: painting with words



¹ ©Ray Stanley, 2011.

“Narratives adopted by different cultures to depict their [...] experiences cannot be amalgamated. But the stories they tell can be juxtaposed. Illumination lies in the juxtaposition. Whether we write or tell a story orally, each of us chooses to emphasise ‘what matters’. Orality sifts and selects, while a written diary presents a partial record. In the telling, there are always silences. But by using different sources, the silences in one source may be opened by the substance, and the understandings, in another.” (Binney, 2010, p.329).

Concluding statement| coda

“... research is never fully independent in a context where it is funded by and serves the purposes. Increasing the ability of service users to engage with researchers and practitioners to define relevant, researchable ‘problems’, and to design and conduct research on them, may therefore enhance the function of social research to promote a more equitable and more inclusive society”. (Fisher, 2002, p.311).

To conclude this statement of methodology, it ends by returning to the poem that introduces this section and statement of methodology. It ends this way to reiterate the reasons

- a) why this inquiry became focused on the poetic;
- b) why this section has been placed as an attachment: and
- c) why as a statement of methodology it sits outside the brackets of the thesis text.

These reasons are (re)presented below:

1. **The what of questions asked comes from the questions ‘why’:** What this inquiry sought were stories of Aboriginal Recovery in mental health care. Why? Because there was a need to respond to the nature or types of questions that inquiring about stories of Aboriginal Recovery raised. It evolved into poetic inquiry because I was asked, and I in turn also asked, questions such as “*What good is research in this context?*” (Bainbridge, et al., 2015) The reasons why I have conducted this inquiry are to respond to the central concerns raised by those it involved, as well as to make more visible and to amplify the silences that centre my interpretation of their collective research response. Since I was told on a number of occasions that “*there is no such thing as Aboriginal Recovery*” my questions tended to revolve around why that is so, and why that perception is apparent|evident|evidenced.
2. **To have a question answered depends on who it is asked by:** This work became a work of poetic inquiry because of the words of a five year old child. It also responds to a key theme/concern raised by those who asked me what Aboriginal Recovery means—this theme or concern centres on the difference between hearing and listening (of *Binan Gaonj*) and narrative incoherence. These concerns highlight the value, and absence and presence of Aboriginal voices in research and of their stories of Recovery in places where mental health care services are provided to Aboriginal peoples. It is because of the need to address issues of ‘silencing’ and ‘voice’ that I approached the “*representation crisis*” inherent in cross-cultural studies using poetry and different manifestations of silence and

voice in this text. In this work, the words listening and analysis are used to mean the same thing. For those who engage with more expressive or Arts informed research (AIR) forms of inquiry (Ellis, 2004; Shidmehr, 2009), and for those who know what *Dadirri* – or deep active (and Aboriginal) listening means – analysis is a deeply personal practice of listening to what the ‘heart’ says. It takes courage (or *puuya kuntha* – strong heart) to listen to Aboriginal stories sometimes. In these stories, *Dadirri* appeared as both a method and a theme in the many conversations I engaged with and over time it also became a process or method of inquiry. It is a learning process oriented towards (the doing dimensions of) listening and a type of research where the subjective, that which is felt and experienced, frames the objectives for research and the criteria by which validity and credibility are established in research practice. This way of listening as analytic process revolves around an ethic and aesthetic that makes visible that which responds to objectifying and/or of being objectified, or read as an object of research, willing, able, consenting or not.

Occupying a space in research made visible by the increasing presence of multidisciplinary and non-traditional texts in the texts that ‘write’ research, this work engages with the crisis of representation that post-modern scholarship and inquiry introduced. Since this inquiry includes and privileges poetic and alternate ways of knowing, doing and being in research, it does not control for the effects of personal or subjective bias but rather makes them more transparent; where construct, face and catalytic validity are used as ways to check how the “*credibility of data minimize the distorting effect of personal bias*” (Lather, 1991, p.63 cited in Fusco, 2008, p.177)

- a) Construct validity, is about “*determining that constructs are actually occurring rather than mere inventions of the researchers perspective requires a self-critical attitude toward how one’s own preoccupations affect the research*”.
- b) Face validity, “*is operationalized by recycling description, emerging analysis and conclusions back through at least a sub sample of respondents’ the purpose is to ensure that one’s work makes sense to others*”; and
- c) Catalytic validity “*represents the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it. This means providing new understandings by disrupting current ways of thinking*”. (Lather, 1991, p.67-68, cited in C. Fusco, 2008, p.181).

Through writing, how my own preoccupations have affected the research are made visible through the poems, the images and the placement of words and non-words on the page. Each narrative element as well as each of the writing strategies used in this work has been validated through ongoing yarns with at least one of the three main storytellers, and with one of the 21 other people involved in its creation. Many of the elements were also validated by gathering feedback through public presentations and performances. Since this dissertation aims to express that which others feel needs to be said, constant member

checking occurred throughout all phases of inquiry. In some of the narrative layers included within this text, these processes are both described and performed.

In un/re/learning how to listen to ...other peoples' words ... and to create a valid text that responds to the context from which it emerged, a poetic approach was used to speak back to, to echo and to reflect the stories i have heard about Aboriginal people in mental health care. The responses that inquiring about Aboriginal Recovery generated with Aboriginal consumers and providers of mental health care services, were gathered and reinterpreted iteratively and collaboratively into a way of responding and form of expression. The standpoint and approach adopted for this text (and response) adapts the primary object of research (the dissertation) into a thesis (or suppositional statement) that takes as given, as a belief and fundamental assumption that (at least for this particular quest, and in this two dimensional context):

The **what** of questions asked,
comes from the questions **why**.
But that of course, depends on **who** it is asked by.
How answers are found is all about **where** and **when**,

And in what you already know is where answers are placed in the end.

The stanza above introduces a poem called "*Methodologically speaking*" that was written before the formal processes of PhD candidature had begun. It was written at a time when I was unaware that a conclusion had already been formed; these words begin a poem that emerged at the end of completing another research project (Saunders, Haswell-Elkins & Brownlie, 2015). They express something about the experience of having heard/read too many stories about Aboriginal people in mental health care with the same ending. Here, where the beginning phases of researching are reviewed and transformed into conclusions, where analysis has already occurred, and is still recurring even as I write, my questions are still the same questions that I started with; still unanswered, although in doing so answered in a non-traditional and even circular way; yet still posed in a way that aspires to be responsive to the (discursive) contexts in which this work is located. To resolve the representational challenges that Indigenous research inherently poses and that recovery-oriented principles amplify in mental health research, I have written this work in a particular way. Circular, repetitive, incoherent in places, it presents a deliberately non-traditional, and awkward text designed to disrupt the readers' expectations about where, how and whose stories of Aboriginal Recovery are located in mental health care and in this dissertation.

The methodology is offered not as an exemplar, but rather as a case study of an integrated approach where exegesis and creative work are conceived as intertwining explorations of the same research materials. Creative writing practices were used to gather and interpret data. In Arts informed research (AIR), organising words into a narrative of key subjective, collectively research/ed experiences is about the

relationship between form and content where interpretation of (research/ed) experiences are re-created through the aesthetic. It is through the aesthetic expression and form that the content of interpretation becomes/transforms into a potential poetic. The word poetic is one approached here as a dog whistle word, that is, it is a word that barely audible for some or in some places and it is generally heard in a way that is pitched below sound, and because it is a word with “*much historic baggage*” (Lyall, 2014), care needs to be taken in how it is used. I use the word poetics in the same way that Lasky (2013, cited in Lyall, 2014, p.134) does, where poetics is a discourse articulating “*the relationship between the creative work and its critical inputs and outcomes*”. This work therefore presents a Yarning thread, a link, a fragment of a conversation that relates the research produced (in poems and images) with the critical inputs and outcomes that created the need for a[the poetic in this context—here in the flatlands of printed text this response is reframed and (re)presented as a multilayered and fragmented narrative to show more than tell the critical perspective I have adopted towards the reconstruction of ‘data’. It also conveys how I deconstructed/analysed what data and research means in the contexts that locate this work, and the conversations that i listened to/read into while seeking stories for Recovery in Aboriginal mental health care.

Before commencing this work of writing, I read and listened to the primary texts several times and sketched notes about the metaphors, themes and events that seemed to cohere into organising structures. I did the same with much of the literature. I searched the literature for the presence or absence of particular words and types of stories; and like Echo in the myth of Narcissus I used other people’s words to create my ‘research voice’. Unlike the purpose of rhetoric, which is to persuade, the purpose of the aesthetic and poetic, like Echo, is to lead the listener, the observer, another, through their own words, towards another reference point, perspective and position. Here reference to the myth of Echo ends and in a sense resonates a warning. In leading the listener, the reader to another reference point or position, the writer also assumes certain storytelling roles and responsibilities. To echo the words of others can also cause harm.

In using a ‘poetic voice’ I undermine and reposition the more authoritative voice expected of me; the “I am” statements more frequently used in the qualitative, indigenous and social disciplines of research practice than in the public health research literature, more traditionally read in policy and practice contexts.

I am
– adopting the role of scribe for those whose stories I hold.
I am
– choosing to express their story not in words but in the way the pages unfold

I am ...
scribing the poetic, to express
Through a poem and a palimpsest
peoples’ right to speak and be free of violence,
and my responsibility as a storyteller to not remain silent

Beginning at the end| Storying Aboriginal Recovery

Figure 22: Storying Aboriginal recovery (Spiritual healing)



© 2015 Storyteller 2 (artists name withheld. Image not for reproduction).

In the end I return to the first question she asked me:

"Are you also going to say what the conservative whites want to hear?

Are you going to make the words of my elders, yours, disappear?"

40 years of 'consumer advocacy and participation' lie behind her words

She's said them often enough I don't need a recorder to remember what I have heard.

The Burdekin report, Ways Forward and years of reports starting for her with Dr Kahn³⁵

She tells me again about the mental health risk of being Aboriginal and a professional code about doing no harm

40 years of reports, and in the words that she has written and as an activist shared Evidence that health care occurs from a cultural perspective, statistically laid bare

She talks often of transgenerational trauma, and a soul sickness, professionally unexpected

and of Aboriginal expertise, knowledge, and wisdoms so often un/dis-respected.

Critical of top down approaches and psychiatric services more generally,

she proceeded to then go on to ask me

"After all these years, you listened, now you tell me what's this Aboriginal Recovery this story that you see?"

I try to speak but she again reminds me of a statement she made 20 years ago and a story she still has to tell

About the numbers and practices that relate Aboriginal mental life as a living mental hell.

Her final statement, one that she still wants me to say

20 years later at the end of the day

ends with a question that still speaks to me

about ancestors, creators and the land, and the Aboriginal deaths that she too often tends to see.

"In the western world of 2000 years of Christianity when they speak to their god it's called praying however, when their god speaks back to them it's regarded as abnormal behaviour and schizophrenia and they can lock you away. In my Aboriginal world of over 60000 years when I speak to my creator and ancestors and they speak back to me it's regarded as normal behaviour and culturally appropriate. How do we link these worlds together to respect one's cultural and religious values which are so needed for reconciliation and to heal mother earth." (Dr Gracelyn Smallwood, pers.comm., 1999, 2010, 2012, 2014)

³⁵ HREOC, 1993; Swan and Raphael, 1994; and Kahn, Henry, & Cawte, 1976; Kahn, Kennedy, & Cawte, 1978.

“...” | ethically speaking

I asked those involved about the ethics of voicing their stories in my thesis and listened to how the main storytellers’ responded. I heard and I wrote:

Ethics yarn, Storyteller 3; 6-7-2009-10

1. *“It’s all ethics – the whole thingis”*
-

Ethics yarn Storyteller 2; 3-6-2013-54

1. *“It’s not about informing ‘clients’ about their treatment and their choices.*
2. *“It’s’ about treating people the same way as they want to be treated.”*
3. *“It’s about consultation, respect and being discrete.”*

Ethics yarn Storyteller 2; 3-6-2013-54

1. *“It’s about doing it in a respectful environment where no one else knows about their treatment because no one else should know. Everyone knows who the clinic staff are and who they’re looking for. Shame. Too shame.”*
2. *“It all happens through Yarning”. You’re doing a story the whole time. Developing the relationship by personalising it through the stories. You’re investing in a story ... banking... Being innovative and resourceful. That’s ethics or empowerment isn’t it? That’s changed now ... we’ve changed that now.. (empowerment/ethics) is always about activating the space. The fundamental requirement is to develop individual empowerment through that space (enabling environments). We’re all on a journey of personal empowerment.*
3. *“You need to hear first up then down though ...”*
4. *“We are never recovered – always becoming.”*

Taken out of context and transformed into written text, their answers may not speak to you as they did/do to me. At the time they were spoken in way that demanded a response that was at once personal, moral and methodological. Guided by their words, I approached the project of writing this dissertation as all (about) ethics. It is framed or positioned as a way of addressing the representational issues that attend voicing other peoples stories as/in research. In leaving the central and unpinning stories out of the text, the stories I gathered from people who demonstrate Aboriginal ways of living life well

with ongoing experiences of mental illness and mental health care, are made more visible. Presenting them this way also echoes the form or the way in which these stories are /were often presented.

“...”| Ways of seeing and saying research

I used the poetic, and the silent spaces it brings forward in this inquiry as the centre around which inquiry unfolds – like a hinge. I used the poetic to scribe the bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of telling stories and of presenting what is known. The following poem was written and submitted as part of a thesis proposal (Graduate Research Office, 2011). This poem was written and included in the proposal to demonstrate both the rationale and the process for using creative and Arts informed research (AIR) methodologies. It also includes a conclusion.

The following poem also illustrates or reflects the way the inquiry was conducted and planned and the form of expression and writing strategies I planned to use. Here it is placed as the final fullstop. It is the last paragraph of my dissertation rendered through an image and a poem.

It is placed to reiterate the process through which inquiry emerged and how it became organized over time: namely in the way the image came first, then the poem, then the prose and through this understanding. Whilst at this point in the text the process moves from prose to poem to image, it has been placed to mirror and echo the story, poem and perceptions (and the questions) that began this inquiry.

1. *“If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?”*
2. *“How many endings do you know of living Aboriginally, mentally well and recovered?”*

"..." i cannot say what i cannot 'see'

i cannot say what i cannot see
This is a 'truth' that I somehow
Know, do and be
And what I 'see' there are so many ways to say
And in the Storying there are many rules to obey

English is slippery in cross-cultural translation spaces
There are spaces within spaces at the so-called interfaces
Ab and Non discourses divide where words are found absent
Where words are contested for what they really (re)present

While discourses clearly divide they do and have actually intersected
Novel views emerge there in patterns unexpected
I 'see' patterns in spaces of shared understandings recorded and timed
A thin red line threading, feeling, knowing, being entwined
Meanings recovered from the abstract as dadirri's living songline
A thin red line spun and sung of unseen storylines

Like the process of Storying a journey with no visible endpoint
A mimetic spiral where the end of the story becomes it's starting point.

(Vicki Saunders, 2010)

Figure 23: Evidencing Recovery outcomes in Aboriginal mental health care.

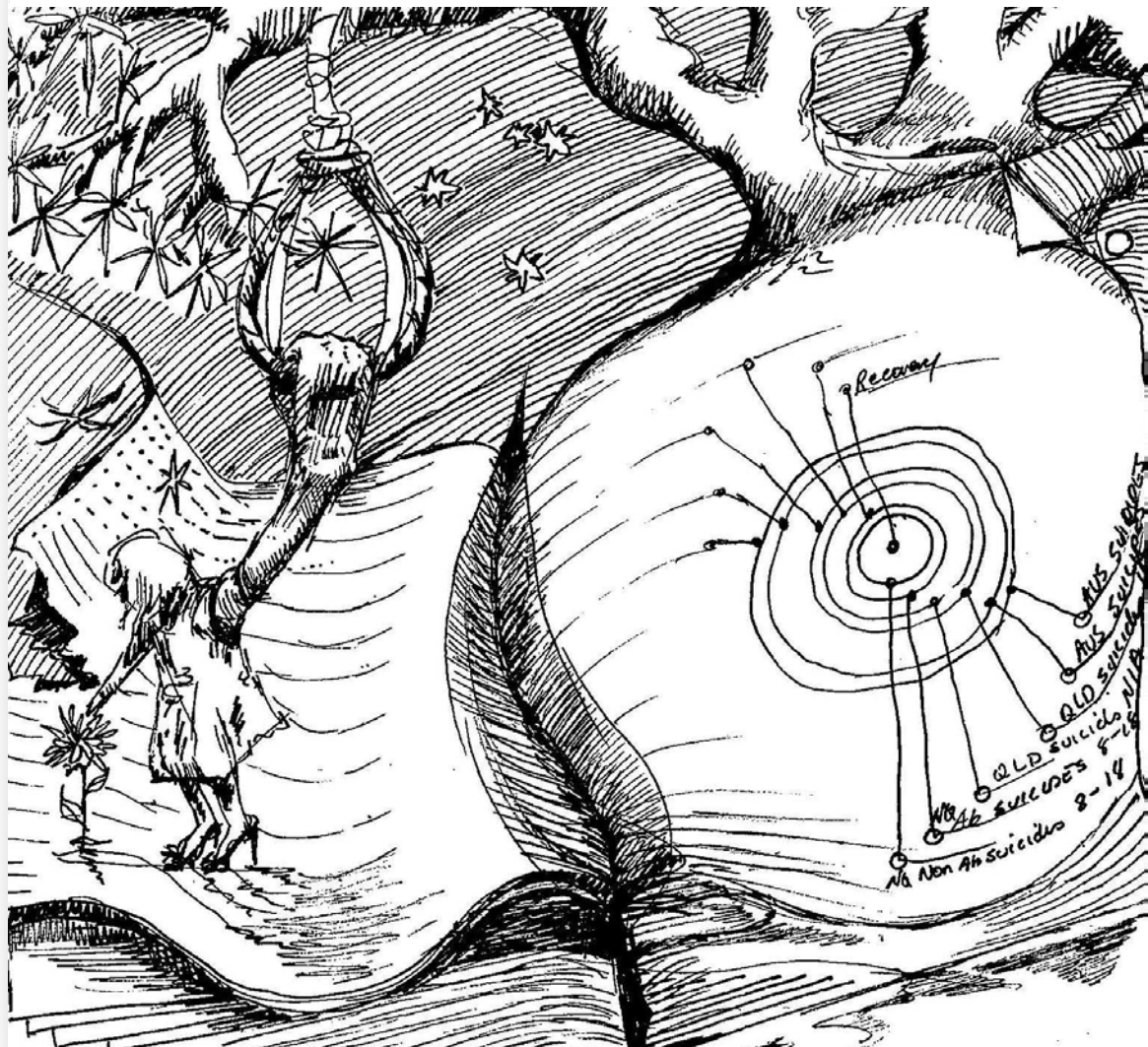
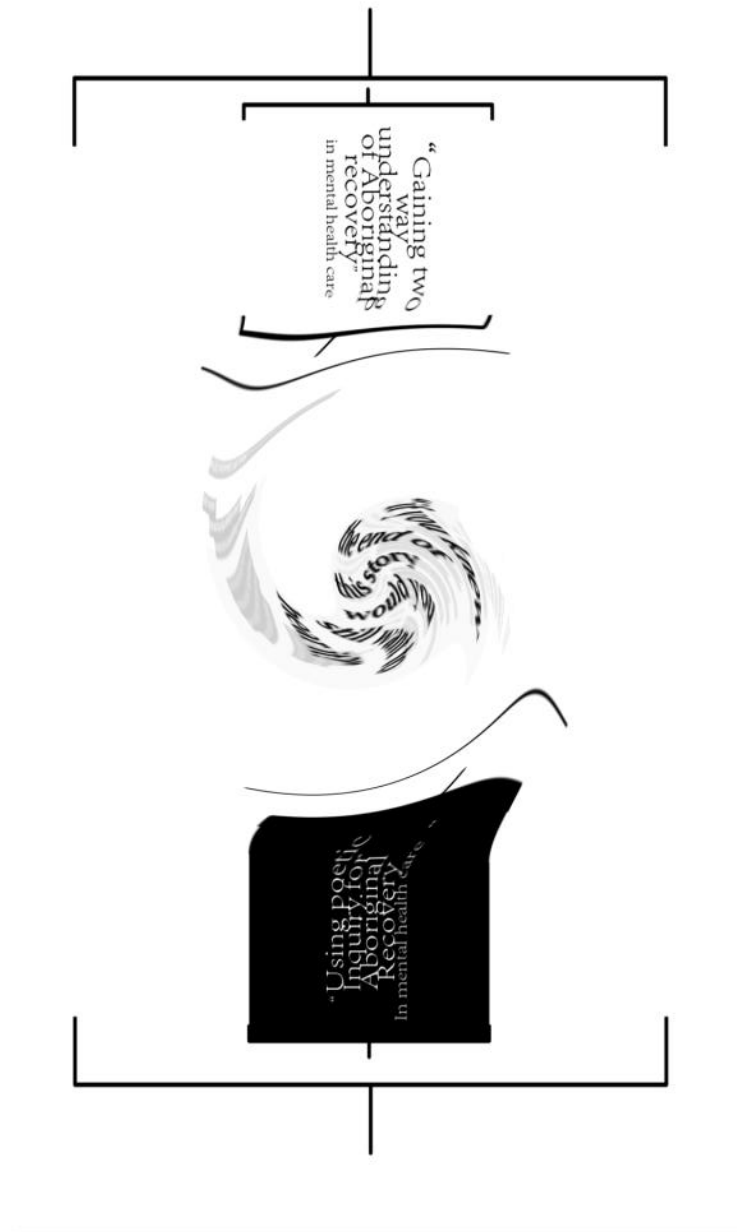


Figure 24: "..."



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Appendices

Appendix A: Collection of research poems (2009-2015)

If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?

Could you still hear it?

Using poems and images for [Aboriginal Recovery]



List of poems

Abstracting	139
For whom do I write.....	140
Recipiscence.....	140
A poem happened	141
Thesis poem.....	141
Standpoints	143
Re-covering methodologically	144
The un-bracketed story	145
'talk for me sis'	146
Truth has a central place in a work of true fiction.....	147
On truths and knowledge as products and processes.....	148
True 'knowings'	149
Post modernists say	150
Ontology Dadirri.....	151
Proofreading reality through the lens of darkness	153
Is this way -The path of science?.....	153
Qualitative and quantitative inquiries.....	154
Translating the translators	155
Only the wounded can heal	156
I heard on the wind.....	157
'Perhaps This gap	158
If you knew the end of a story, would you still want to tell it?	159
I cannot say what I cannot 'see'	160
Do you know who I am	161
Poetic fragments	161
Inductive Reasoning	163
The Gift	164
Death by a 1000 papercuts	164
i/We learned through sharing stories	165
I see a tree.....	166
In the blink of an eye.....	166
What happens after the story has been told.....	166

Using poems to represent the results of research.....	168
Gulli Dalla	169
Ethical moments Aka's poem.....	169
Significance poem	170
A poem in response	171
Select references referred to in the poems.....	172

Uwalla ooka min diya niya noogalla nulla

This collection of poems accompanies and underpins the dissertation that presents my thesis in written form. This way of representing research is designed to bring forward the oral and visual traditions that shaped its development as a work of poetic inquiry. It starts with untranslated *Gunggari* words from the language of my father's ancestors to acknowledge your presence and to acknowledge the many people who have helped me in its creation. These Aboriginal words are also used to acknowledge

You - The land in which we meet
You - the ancestors past, present and future I greet
You - the Traditional custodians and elders in this place
 (those both present and whose presence is absent in this case)
You - who sacrificed much to get me here and whom I hold dear
 (Nick, my mother, sisters, nephews, and extended families)
You my supervisors whose advice I have tried hard to follow
 (Prof Usher, Prof Tsey and Dr Bainbridge)
You my communities of BIRC, CREW and JCU scholars
 (SONMN, IHU, SPHTMRS, Cairns Institute)
You who provided support financial and academic care
 (Wuchopperen & Mulungu Aboriginal Medical Services, RRMHS (Old
 Health), CRRMH, NHMRC and JCU GRS)

And last but not least **You** who are t/here
 Inspiring, listening, challenging me to make sense of narrative incoherence
 & **You** who helped turn this into something with a distinctly poetic appearance

This collection of poems was written while conducting an inquiry into one of the endings of stories told of, and by, people living with mental illness: these are story endings grouped by a word (and social movement) that is now widely becoming known as Recovery in settings of mental health care. the inquiry that foregrounds this book of poems is focussed on how the current endings of stories surrounding Aboriginal peoples in mental health care contexts are being ‘heard’ and how they relate to the word Recovery as both a paradigm shift and story of social change. These poems illustrate a plotline; one that threads through multiple storylines to form the thesis (or suppositional statement) in the dissertation that accompanies these poems. The thesis involves how the endings of the ‘stories’ being told of Aboriginal people at this point in time seem to be interfering with the processes of being able to listen to them.

Listening for the purposes of this text does not involve sound. It involves the pregnant pause, the expectant silence that occurs after a story has been told and before and between other words that are spoken. These silences are positioned here as the (narrative) place where theory transforms into practice—praxis. It is positioned as the place where individuals transform understanding into experience and where mental health care praxis occurs and is researched. Hearing and listening are common phrases in the texts that Aboriginal scholars engage in and with, and create. To hear but not listen is to be Binan Boonj or Binna Gurri or ‘deaf’ – more colloquially in Aboriginal English it also refers to being Womba or mad. These words are often used to refer to a common observation that listening doesn’t often occur at the cross cultural interface of health care. Hearing and listening are also critical aspects of the interpersonal transactions that create ‘mental health care’ – in some contexts this is called the therapeutic alliance.

While ‘listening’ to written stories of Recovery, the word hope was the most frequent word that occurred in definitions of mental health Recovery. Hopelessness, disempowerment, anomie were some of the words read into and yarned about while exploring notions of Aboriginal Recovery. (evidenced in a different way by the lack of change in the statistics and statistical interpretations that underpin ‘evidence-based practice’ in the field. These words were also evident in a yarn recently with an Aboriginal woman with years of experience as a carer and mental health care practitioner. Her final statement to me was:

“being Aboriginal is about being connected to land – We are flatlining as a people. It’s time to deal with cultural cringe and the difficulties non Indigenous Australians have in dealing with us as a sovereign people”

I listened not so much to her words but the tone of her voice as she conveyed them. I heard “*we are flatlining ... it is timeto say what has to be said*”.

To say what has to be said in the context of Aboriginal Recovery and mental health care relates to the challenges of engaging with people, including myself, who sometimes do and do not know how to “listen”. Poetry is my way of listening and, through using Arts informed research practices, engaging with the spaces between the words I have heard and through (re)writing now perceive and those I’m still listening to... looking for ...

Yantel our ou

Abstracting

How do you even begin to talk of Recovery of the 'mental'
from an Ab-Original-perspective?
It's hard enough to do so from the perspective
of Non-Ab-Original perspectives collective
"I/we don't know what mental illness is" I've heard too often to ignore
How then do you open this locked culturally languaged door?
For those of Ab and Non Original cultured ways of 'being'?
And for those who proclaim a so called "non-Indigenous" mental way of seeing
the words "mental illness: has a strangely different, illusive, unknowable meaning
that goes beyond normal communicable ways of languaging and perceiving?

To be 'mental' is an intrinsically human kind of condition
To be Aboriginal- though is way beyond my or Ab Original volition
I am neither for nor against the word, "mental" in the English words I have to use to ascribe
From my perspective this word is meant to include not exclude those that the word 'mental' categorize
From my perspective as both Gungarri woman and Othered academic
There seems to me to be a mental kind of condition that is becoming somewhat epidemic
The mental part of being does not translate well in the different languages of cultures
And to try to do so in English feels like joining some sort of colonising mental vultures

The words mental illness relate in English to words used to describe the psyche
Originally come from those that ascribe the spirit, the soul and what physical sight can't see
To engage in dialogue about the Ab- and Non Original psyche and spirituality
In scientific speak, this part of life is excluded from the dominant discourse of reality

How then to gain an understanding of that which very few, but more than expected, "know"
Of something only those who've lived through it, can really describe and ultimately show?
One consensus currently asserted by an awarded leading mental health scholar
causal explanations aren't always cost effective therapeutically nor in dollars'

Trying to make others words through writing make sense,
I wondered then who it was in need of Recovery, recipiscence
Recovery the regaining of senses after trauma,
Recipiscence means being ... a sense of returning to, being, normal
Not wanting to go there at least here and now... I only 'show' what "I see"
And to try to evoke a sense of you in words I know, do and be/
So you too can see and recognise
Aboriginal Recovery when unstoried it is right before your eyes.

For whom do I write

I write for you but mostly for me
I write to re-cover a story I've long longed to see
I write a story in words to see what they could show
I write to re-cover something lost a long time ago
I write for you who cannot see the words you say
And for those who can and can't hear them Aboriginal way
I write of laws that these words in the saying obey
And of what the word Recovery to me in it's absence conveys
Of what I write – there are no words for what can't be said
Of what i write is what goes on in the ears between our heads
In that space the empty power of words is all I can see
And how they shape how I know, do and be, me the non- and Ab-Origine
Perceiving this, i perceive something hidden in clear view
To show it though – that depends entirely on you
It can't be shown in words, this story I'm trying to tell
What I've 'seen' was unperceived a storied living hell
To talk of Recovery to those who can't yet know what it means
Means covering the meaning of words and where they have been
And the un-bracketed background against which they still can't be seen
Invisible perhaps, perhaps a story nascent
What have the words Aboriginal Recovery really meant?
For those of Ab and Non Original descent
Perhaps recipiscence?

Recipiscence

In the pause between words
Is where you begin to see
Hopefully to see what it is I see
In these words are meanings that say something to me for you
Even though I know you can't ever see through my view
But in that pause between words is where I'm still listening for you
To say what can't be heard not in sound but through
Reading into your words I try to see what you realise
Unfortunately spoken in a language that's invisible to the eyes
To put your words into view and to say them back to you
Is to present the heard beyond words and without words too
Perhaps in the pause between words spoken 'as above so below'
And between the words I have to use in order to show
Lies a radical hope for which I stand and which I yet hold
A hope gained from stories i've heard and that don't often now get told
i see when i saw the words Aboriginal and Recovery as told and as meant
Distilled down doesn't it mean recipiscence?
To regain the senses and that which re-awakes
A sense of life as celebrated evolving in the presence of too many wakes

A poem happened ...

A poem happened ...
How i hardly know
In the blink of an eye
A tree/vision began to grow
Through a lens coloured rose,
I listen still to how it grows.

Beyond critiques and values framed by the word me-sis
A poem happened and turned into a thesis
A suppositional statement embedded in a rhetorical question
About Recovery from a perspective non-original, non-Western

It happened because I listened for Aboriginal stories of Recovery to speak
And in response, my words became strangely ephemeral and weak.
What can you say? What sense can you make?
Of the journeys, the mentally ill of ab-origin take?
Of a 10 year old grandchild who chose to end life,
Of elders who mistake alcohol for their husbands or wives
Of the illnesses related to the colour of stigmatised bodies realised
Of the crisis in life expectancy that stories normal Aboriginal lives
And of never-ending cycles of poverty and violence
... what sense can be made of Story deafening in it's silence?
Un-Storied citizens out of mind, out of sight

Writing now, trying as hard as I might,
the page still remains blank Resolutely white.

Thesis poem | Niya Noogalla Nulla

If you knew
the end of a story
Would you still want to hear it?
Could you still hear it?

Not quite
Once upon a time
I know
But this is where it begins

With a question
About the endings
Of stories that have been told
And how having heard them
Affects the ending yet to unfold

Your answer depends

And this story relates,
To the endings that you and I hear
and in the hearing help to create

To story
What hope there is for those called
Aboriginal and mentally unwell?
Begins at endings
Hard to hear
More so to tell.

It's difficulty lies
In tales of old
Hidden in stories unheard
between the spaces of those that are told
To story a tale of "mental health's"
Aboriginal meaning
Means fundamentally describing
Another's and an "othered" state of being
In the straight jacket of English
This seems an impossible task
One more easily approached
Through the silences between stories and art

To inquire of Aboriginal health of the mental
When you know everything is related
Starts with our ancestors
the end that was our beginning,
And how country and 'Australia' was created.

In the end this story is still my question
A bit Ab-Normal, Ab-Original and Ab-Western
Do you want to hear a tale heard before
again get uncovered?
Could you still hear an ending already known,
That still waits to be discovered?
What endings have you heard
Of living Aboriginally,
mentally well and recovered?

Standpoints

My standpoint is to listen and to re(say) what i hear
And somehow order a story in words to make its intent clear
An impossible task that I knew from the start
But i thought it might be possible because it can be seen in Aboriginal art
And in the echoes of, and in, my own beating heart

If I'd remained faithful and fixed on my word
I would have missed stories I could not have "heard"
And the point of doing this research would have become somewhat absurd

My standpoint?
Where is the researched "i" placed and imagined in front of your eyes?
For what I stand words can't make this point, they tend to disguise
The words i use here are like flowers that float on the winds that blow
Loosening petals and word seeds from where they currently grow.

You can't stand where i am now that is not yours or my place
Although yours is the essential other positioning my identity and race
My standpoint exists though in another 3rd dimension and space
And in this space positioning moves at more of a cyclonic pace

My positioning depends on an imagined you
Seeing you always in 3 dimensional view
Reasoning this way and following through with this logic
The othering of care seems often racially culturally pathologic
Stripping the words used to describe Aboriginal Recovery bare
Requires a kind of wording that takes great care
The hope shifting paradigms of research and health care's role power
Understanding that is like climbing sisyphus' mountain or rapunzel's tower

Like origami the Recovery paradigm has form and sometimes function
But its aesthetic purpose has a compulsory, universal compunction.

Re-covering methodologically

There are many ways to ask a question
And many questions to ask
The trick to seeking answers
Is knowing which answer you want at the start

But questions have a habit
An irritating trend
An inevitable growing spiral
With no beginning and no end

The what of questions asked
Comes from the questions why
And to have the question answered
depends on who it is asked by.

How answers are found
Is all about where and when
And from the answers you already know
Ultimately is where 'new knowledge' is located
in the end.

But knowing and knowledge is a funny thing
In the world of Indigenous science
Especially in the field of research about those
named Aboriginal or Indigenous mental health clients

In the "mental health" arena –
to be Indigenous is mainly deemed a curse
In the discourses of 'health',
it seems nothing is counted nor countered worse.

Indigenous questions are all about Who
And how our stories are related
And answering unasked questions
About how knowledge is used and how 'truths' are created
At mental healths' so called cultural interface
Where 'knowledge' and 'truth' are impossibly blurred
Only questions bound in the 'logic of care',
Cognitocentrism and pathology tend to emerge.

At heart the Indigenous quest is critical
It's challenge – a way of seeing
how knowing relates to doing
and what this means for being
a human researched being.

Being human
is to story that which we deem 'real'
about the truths that we know
and can't separate from those which we feel.

Where whose reality? is the central question
In The field defining the 'real' that gets heard
To ask Indigenous questions
makes an attempt to find "a 'real' answer" faintly absurd

To be able to ask
My first questions come from the heart
Do I have the courage?

How will my words be used?
And how do you express in words of science
Questions better asked of spirit and through art?

The un-bracketed story

The rigor of phenomenology comes from the bracketing of assumptions
Usually concrete
And posit truth as a living experience, as a verb, never complete

The un-bracketed story is a curious thing
Designed with intent to make the heart sing
To not suspend, or hold prior knowledge or belief
Or the natural attitude towards the unknown in which knowledge seeks relief

Scientific attitudes of neutrality and objectivity, putative at best
Are i guess
What poetic inquiry and art exist to test

To see beyond the duality of art and science to new horizons of meaning
Requires an attitude change and a new way of deeming

A shift in view, from shifting positions
Perhaps the unexpected gift of cultural collisions

As Bahbah says of cultural interfaces
It's not just about the oppression of colonised races
It's about oppression of the colonisers too
And the space and place from which landscapes of the heart are viewed.

'talk for me sis'

One time I asked

"What would you say
What word
if not 'Recovery' would you choose?"
"In maintenance", was the first word she used.
Followed closely by others
as she asked who is it though that really recovers?

Before that we'd talked of domestics and violence
Aboriginal stories and the 'great Australian silence'.
We'd talk of identities inscribed as victims or survivors of transgenerational trauma
Of being in ways that are spiritually,
collectively considered Aboriginally Ab normal.

I asked "What would you say if you could?"
She said "Don't you mean ... should?"
So I asked "What should you say then, if you could?"
She said "Does saying do you any good?
if you did they'd lock you up, they would

This Recovery thing" she said
This mental bit in the Aboriginally well head
it's not mental, it's more how you socially emotionally feel
and this includes your feelings too sis, so lets get real".

she said "This question you asked, that you say you wanna story
you and I both know that's a whole 'nother kind of story.
Still you ask me, same as that other mob do too
Talk for me sis, they say. I ask 'em sometimes why can't you?"

"See some mob afraid they won't understand them big words
And some too shame, too sure their voices, their words won't get heard
And some of them questions them tests they get asked, just too absurd
I mean do you hear voices? What murri gonna say no?
Then quick as a flash diagnosed. You know?
That's when we lose em, lost in that mental health care song
Then they start seeing somehow 'not us', that they don't belong
That question do you cut yourself?
The initiated couldn't truthfully say no
But what does that questioner really want to show
If it's asked of a person uninitiated that you don't yet know?
Them mob, them ones too shy, they mean no when you think they've agreed
You ask what needs to be said?
Indeed!

See the language is different and so it's about how not who or what it is you see

Think of it this way, some think four dimensionally, some less than 3D
'As a man thinks so he is'
But being human isn't about thinking, is it?
feeling is a big part of what knowing and knowledge is"

So I said "What would you say, if you could say what you wanted to?"
She said "It's not what I'd say but how what I say speaks here to you
In ways I really haven't got a clue
In what you do with my words and in words as you will
or in writing them down dissecting them, laid bare, still
this is about them mob perhaps held within your care
perhaps they are still there
medicated and can't tell you why or what for
Those that think meds only get you out from behind locked or closed doors
f
What I'd have to say," she said, "if I felt I should is this
It's in what you do with their story where Aboriginal Recovery really is.
It's about how other people story us and do not makes sense"

So I asked "if not now, then, whence?"

Truth has a central place in a work of true fiction

When truth is unseen the false can become true
... What a strange contradiction
But then of course everything depends on how the seen is viewed
And in narrating re-piction'ed
Not unlike Recovery's place in mental health care's worded storied forms
In time it's place is to shift positioning of the clinical and scientific norm
Outside of care though the word Recovery disappears
Becoming stories of meanings held tacitly, precious and dear

At times and in places my heart heard stories my ears were not able to hear
While I've looked and I've searched and I've still yet to hear
What I've searched for even though its form is in plain vision, crystal clear.

It is my thesis that the stories being told
are becoming, not quite yet though, outdated and old
they get in the way of those that could yet be heard
imagining what they could be I don't think is that absurd
in Storying this, i walk a fine storyline, more tightrope
between fact and fiction that is where I find hope
between fact and fiction
is a story of academic contradiction
here only told as a true kind of fiction

On truths and knowledge as products and processes

When Hume dismantled the edifice of scientific truths endeavour³⁵
And took reasoning to it's logical conclusion
He knew the demise of truth wasn't forever
Just that science hadn't yet found the grail
of truths' reality, illusion?

Kantian reality became then seen as conforming and created through the mind
Proclaiming one truth and yet not;
as one truth, one for each of mankind

It seems we can now 'know' nothing
outside of direct experience
a law long learnt from lessons taught
testing 'truths' time place adherence

Within the confines of space and time,
only one truth has ever evolved prospectively
The invisible, silent knowings we know as 'belief'
unconsciously held collectively

Of collective beliefs there is much that I could say,
but mostly it's about power
and How 'real' truths make false 'othered' truths, die or submit and cower.

To find the words for what is nigh on impossible to say
Cultural factors, and errors of [linguaging](#) must necessarily come into play
English, as non-native knowledge system imposed,
Expresses more answers than the discursive questions posed

English loses rigidity after transplanted colonisation
yet there is much that it has gained
An absorbcency that barely 'holds' the meaning that the "English Word" contained
These gains are evidenced as pragmatic, paradigmatic shifts,
Their value not so much in rigour or validity but rather innovative, emergent,
More useful meaning making gifts

³⁵David Hume regarded all human knowledge as opinion. Paradoxically while he began with the intent of "applying vigorous Newtonian 'experimental' principles of investigation to man, to bring the successful empirical methods of natural science to a science of man" he ended up casting into question the objective certainty of empirical science altogether. "If all human knowledge is based on empiricism yet induction cannot be logically justified, then man can have no certain knowledge. With Hume the long developing empiricist stress on sense perceptions, from Aristotle and Aquinas to Ockham, Bacon and Locke was brought to its ultimate extreme, in which only the volley and chaos of those perceptions exist, and any order imposed on these perceptions was arbitrary, human and without objective foundation. In terms of Plato's fundamental distinction between "knowledge" (of reality) and "opinion" (about appearances) for Hume all human knowledge had to be regarded as opinion." (Tarnas, 1996, p. 339)

This gift of being able to 'see' through our own othering eyes
To suspend judgement for awhile and decolonise
'Seeing' as seen through the most ancient of 'novel' views,
Is an inquiry about perception, seen through a lens
....now tinted straightjacket 'not-quite-white' hues.

In the rigorous English of Indigenist discourse
Words tend to be used to position knowledge and it's source
Decolonising streams of inherited thought
painfully carved in constraining non-native words
Evidencing that 'the truth' stilled in words, is intellectually absurd

To Indigenist researchers knowledge is not a noun but a very powerful doing verb

True 'knowings'

True knowings are the epiphanies grown in the safe, between spaces of intellectual friends
that mutually respectful meaning making ultimately creates in the end

Indigenous truths are not oppositional constructs to the truths of Non's
They are the links between non-Indigenous concepts, not that which they bond.
In relationship, only one truth known has ever emerged
An Indigenous knowledge story long silenced and submerged
That each person's 'family' is not nuclear
but Earth wide
That knowledges are a map,
of shifting coastlines that ebb with the tide

Knowledge of ancient internal cycles
once sung in rhythm and rhyme,
Taught an old wisdom that causal links
don't survive long beyond context and time.

You see, time recedes as dreaming ontologies into different laws of space,
back **to** that which **comes from** the lores of the original 'creation' place.

Totemic patterns in lore stories attest truths long time tested
Only to emerge now, held as new truths embodied, not quite 'Western'
Long scattered and hidden during the killing times of invasions
When ways of listening induced blind spots, internalised oppression through research's public
proclamations

Gathering songlines now as long silenced stories spoken from more Indigenous voices
About the true identity of Indigenous; of living life well in spite of disempowering imposed 'choices'

Empowerment arises when knowings come through the heart not the mind

When Indigenous people you see, know they are simply invisible not primitive, stupid or blind.³⁶

Indigenist identities are more than Non's or Ab's counterpoint mirror
– more than Ab-Normal, Ab-Original variables from a shameful historical knowledge era
But here this story ends because it's in danger of non-compliance
Of straying into story maps, of the knowledge countries of those non-science
Indigenous Identities are of course, not simply non-NON-Indigenous

But these stories are held usually in story maps of the collectively spiritual and religious.

Post modernists say

All knowledges are true
And yet no one truth posed is...
Even the truths inquired into
and authored as this thes-is.

If what they say is true
Then 'any claim of truth' always contains fiction
Thus even truths post modernists hold to
Convey an obvious, unresolvable contradiction
To resolve this tension clearly isn't the point
To do this through reasoning would primarily mentally disjoint
This tension of opposites simply brings forward that which is absent
The unknowable unknown, never seen, like death always *in potentia* present
Thus the foundation for truth is always an attitude of faith by which we contain
The Knowledge that the unknowable (and the null) will always remain

This foundation of faith is oft divided into the scientific or the religious
perhaps this is the gift of inquiring/seeing through the myth of Ab-original Indigenous?

Ignoring the obvious, unresolvable contradiction
The unseen endless pattern of contra-contra-diction?
How could this story possibly be told as Ab-Original, Non-Fiction?
To position as Ab tells more about the opposing position of the Non
Defining a truth and social reality, not originally-Abs' but whose and which Non-?
Seen through a veil, an endless diachronic creation impossible to see beyond

What does truth then become if it can live on only in the abstract?
In this nowhere borderland what becomes of all our evidences and fact?
From this view Knowledge emerges from gendered, collective race mind
Woven as personal truths, each true and false, each one of a kind.
Forsaking truth claims, then in a post-modern discursive space
Evidence is mapped within time lines drawn around context and place

³⁶ “I am an invisible man... because people refuse to see me... that invisibility... occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom i come in contact. A matter of construction of their inner eyes... I'm invisible not blind” Ralph Emerson (cited in Anderson, 2003, p.37)

Seeing Truths not as the objective but an x on a moving non-linear timeline,
Not unlike the sacred sites sung and created along a dreaming songline
If we story our lives and live these stories as we so clearly do
There must be faith in the stories narrated that sense is made through
part myth, part analogy of viewing through a lens,
it is the "minds eye - I" that negotiates and creates stories of sense
in the end.

This eye that creates, the varying forms of authoring and being authorized,
Negotiates the known and the knowable, linguistically resized
Accepting fictions premise that all is potentially real
this thesis has become a narration of what the narrator intellectually feels.
As text it is a story of inquiry written to re-assert what some see as a myth
About a question about hope that I originally started this journey with.
Except I now know that hope and wellbeing only emerge in time and in place
And both Ab- and Non- Originals create the identity of what is Australia's Original race
'I see' a story³⁷ that yarns of listening found,
Trying to evoke an oral tradition in this texts non aural sound

Ontology|Dadirri

There are worlds within worlds
And many worlds besides
The question is not whether they exist
But the fact they often conflict and collide

In the nowhere spaces between,
Questions become strange and fundamental
About that which is normal and real
In relation to that which is deemed others and mental

There is no one way of knowing
That determines any answer you see
The answers lie in what is said and done
And in what we allow ourselves and the "other" to be

Within these answers lie core values
that go beyond and underpin belief
Unquestioned, unseen knowings of what's real
like the dark shadows of a bas-relief

With what do we judge the origins of truth and the norm?
To see no Ab in life's ever evolving changing form
To be able to see no Ab-Normal, No Ab-Original
To be seen as 'normal' and Australia's first only originals?

³⁷ "The story is the most powerful thing on earth because it will last as long as there are two people left on it. And when there is only one she will whisper these stories to remind herself of what has been lost and, in that way, she will have the company of her ancestors".(Bruce Pascoe cited in Anderson, 2003, p.5)

To recover health that is mental
From stories of those colonised
Do you think we can ever see this
Through colonised eyes
Using colonial words and tools ?
Is this something that can be realised?

How then to tell this story
Which is not really mine?
What is my inquiry about?
What is this unknown story for which I pine?

A story from which I seek a truth
That can't really be consciously known
The focus of Dadirri is not on what is being said
But how what is not heard is actually what's being shown

What have I not heard from stories about Aboriginal Recovery?
I really don't know how to tell of what it is I am 'uncovering'
In stories written down, irrespective of ages
it's mostly complex pathology and mortality that fill the pages.
The dual, triple diagnosis of being that excludes the religious
And the mental health risk of simply being Indigenous
Beyond words and worlds that slip and collide
It's hard to find 'Ab-Normal' 'Ab-Origines' through decolonised eyes.

At the health care interface of cultural morbidity and strife
I read that I am of generations of family with short expectations of life
In the ripples of these books I looked for the shape of the moon
And I read of the trauma of weeping ancestrally placed wounds,

I read of causal pathways linked to the systemic racism of the 'othereds' hate
And asked isn't non-compliance and misdiagnosis simply failure to communicate and relate?

Internal worldviews and those that are out
Does it matter whose view of truth it is that has clout?
Does truth really matter if there is no one who listens ...
Niya noogalla Binanj goonj at the heart of Aboriginal truths & wisdoms

Proofreading reality through the lens of darkness³⁸

Is all about shadows and the reflection of light.
At the cultural interface where black meets white

Reality blurs there becoming not quite white or black
And answers appear as ephemera way off the beaten track

Questions evolved from why who's wrong or right
To how do values inform knowledge of a wounded collective psyche

this territory is fuzzy and logically untenable
the knowledge being sought is simply unwinnable.
Invoking the ab-side of madness is madness itself
Largely connected to the borders between internal/external embodiments of 'self'.

Selves individual and collective, both co-exist in balance
To assert knowledge of either is this researchers potential poisoned chalice

Thus knowledge isn't claimed, it is storied without any one ending
Yet it isn't the story that gives meaning to the Aboriginal psyche's mending
Rather the meaning of Storying comes from the spaces in which they're told
In places where meaning arises from those that people personally/culturally hold

This place is an ethical space created with shared vision and from trust
Without this place hard won knowledge simply turns back to dust.

Is this way -The path of science?

To hear stories
of Indigenous mental health clients

of hope and healing amongst those
of ill mental health
of the Recovery experience
it's in what people do
that is knowledge's real wealth

To listen as opposed to hear
something intangible is set in motion
an understanding of meaning that is
physical, spiritual and mental and always emotion

words about meaning
can only be conveyed

³⁸ Inspired by Chan J (2010) *Corvus: A play in fragments*. <http://www.masthead.net.au/issue10/chan.html>
accessed 29/03/2010.

how meaning is heard and received
has no laws that can be obeyed

meaning we 'know' because it sits upon belief
what can a thesis about story endings
Realistically of meaning achieve?

unquestioned, unquestionable belief
is the endpoint of paradigmatic reasons
collectively fluctuating in form
in cycles across time's unfolding seasons

inductive, deductive
and abductive reasoning naturally occurs
how understanding is expressed
depends on what form the audience prefers

to combine them all only occurs in the silences of active listening.
Is this Dadirri's definition of hearing
That hope perhaps is glistening?

To hear an understanding that rings first true
Know that 'truth' is only real
when it is agreed with by others
but first of all, by you.

Qualitative and quantitative inquiries

Qualitative inquiry they say doesn't really matter or count
But numbers don't give meaning to the evidence case they mount
Meaning is interfered and transferred from the words used to ascribe
The health outcomes of praxis and context that numbers deduct, compare
Multiply and divide

In order to count, what is it that matters most?
In the numbers of health science, what is this evidences' symbiotic host?
Through words we share meaning but it is only through action we know
of a truth that experiential shared knowing alone reveals and allows to show
The quality of knowledge is it's value in guiding where it is we end up going
accumulating and evolving into what we know as collective fact and of knowing

In the fluid spaces around rhetoric and strangely slippery English words,
shared meanings are created, manifest and in story emerge
the quantity of knowledge gathered this way really matters not
if none of it is used – what wisdom have you really got?

Abstract units of rational reasoning has a theoretical place and space
But can it really be used to understand an othered concept of wellness and of race?
The counting of health outcomes of Australia's Aboriginal colonisation
can't ever really be just an abstract statistically causal realisation

The words of science are used to promote a certain way of 'seeing'
Like using math to describe colour or an Aboriginal state of ill or wellbeing?
In counting embodied health transactions, and valuing unwell bodies mental, social and physical
quality of life determines quantity, it's not really that primitive, "Indigenous" or mystical

Unadjusted for injustice the causal health network becomes significantly stronger,
Aboriginal life expectancy, why do we want to know how much shorter or longer?
Can you count all the outcomes from transgenerational, internalised pain?
Socially determined and adjusted, the Indigenous death risk still seems to remain.

The causal link between study factor and outcome is only one kind of evidence
A relationship to reality by nature deduced and irrevocably bent
As categorical variable Indigenous wellbeing that is achieved mentally
Is assumed and defined culturally, but usually in English fundamentally.

Translating the translators

(Or English as the language of the market – or a polyglot)

If only we could see the transactions that we evoke through word
If only we could see what cross culturally it is that is heard

How do words hold value in the transactions they negotiate
Not in dollars, but in the value of shared meaning we so often under cut and overrate?

Words valued in yarns, have value not about the gaining or the losing
Their value is in that which keeps our different worlds moving, improving.
We live in complex networks through which words are the warp and weft
Creating proof of wrong or right, and values right and/ or of left

Seamlessly weaving the fabric of reality³⁹ moment to moment in time/context
Whether in words of speech, in yarns or lectures or in complex written texts
The invisible and visible words that are 'heard' are ripples across the river of time
Psychologically, physically, and emotionally held in rhythms or stories or song lines
No river is ever the same they say each time that you step in it
But still it is bounded and we float bound somehow beyond words within it

³⁹ *The enchanted loom* is a famous metaphor for the human brain invented by the pioneering neuroscientist Charles S. Sherrington. (Hansotia, 2003).

Well and being are words heard, but they are not the meanings they exchange
They have a form and value that the market can think quite strange
Wellbeing in words, is not something that can be bought, stolen or traded
Only felt, shared, given, and expressed in words ever culturally shaded

Of un-well being, as a social emotional illness of the mind
To recover wellbeing is something of a very different kind
Some say mental illness is spiritual or has a different kind of purpose
One that manifests way beneath the visible, social, emotive surface
In words it may be easy to say, but it's cause is intangibly more complex
Whether understood as genetic, biological or the result of ancestral hex

Un-wellbeings meaning to me means something socially emotionally must be heard
Even if in word sounds that kind of Storying seem manifestly absurd
But here in lies the rub, that story lies not in one that is tellable by me
its found in stories of how the listener listens and imagines the other to be

That story to me is about the stories you've heard, that you think you already know,
And how you story others, mental, and how those stories manifestly change and grow
As healers mental health professionals seem to have a major training gap
Not assessable in any text or theory that we can grade applaud or clap

In self-reflection i'm told is where theory meets with praxis
In mental health care this is about the listeners role and the care that forms it's axis
Theoretically then what is the role of listening and it's non-caring mental health prophylaxis?
Binan goonj...

(Reflection after trip to Lockhart river 26-3-2010)

Only the wounded can heal

Only the wounded can heal
this is Jungs oft cited truth
and only to the extent they're healed themselves
that therein lies the proof

so why are you as healers, here in this indigenous interventionist hell?
You don't buy so what is this product you're trying to give and to sell?
This healthcare that you promote and tell?
For some of you your tales come across as somewhat fake
Harvesting social awkwardness when you talk for/about us and translate

Forgive us for forgetting sometimes we don't come from original sin
That we are not defined by your version of the "Ab-Origin"
Your origins if you check aren't originally from here
And your foreign words so few of you know how is to hear

We the Aboriginal are many, all culturally spiritually wounded

And getting tired of constantly being identified and moved on
But if you listen the connections are all still there
If you listen to the stories the elders keep trying to share
That our lives are one constant transformation
And that feeling safe doesn't come from control and world domination

The ability to heal and be well, isn't about control but of interrelated balance
Our ability to heal and adapt in that way, is and was our most prodigious talent
To maintain a sense of mental wellbeing and of living lives well
Takes many things but mostly its about how we're socially emotionally held
Even though Australia is the largest island girt by sea
We are not islands you know, these things that you call you and I me
i see somehow that you are part of me and I you, regardless of our colour
Thats' why when talking of healing of the mental i say
niya noogalla nulla

I heard on the wind

A song
long forgotten
that we still sing

It goes like this

I think I know a truth
Truly I think I do
Perhaps only true for me but it might be for you too.

I saw it's pattern
In the nowhere lands
of the mixed origins of the colonialised space

in Aboriginal stories of wellbeing
at mental healthcare's cross-cultural interface

in Ab stories of surviving a lethal statistical race
of healing found between non's and Ab's - Origins of place

This truth I think I know seems to be simply this
Truth as a verb has a purpose easy to miss

The knowing aspects of knowledge is what is felt in recognition
Perhaps a remnant of an older form of Life's evolving repetition

Silently reflecting a rusted iron clad hypocritical Oath
hypocritically invisible sometimes beneath a white professional cloak

The no harm referred to as health care's code for relating to another

often involves the othering of care for those not non-other

less regard, impartial is the health care deed
Regardless of religion race and creed
More regardful than what or who indeed?

In the silences between words that categorise
the lens that once focused blurs as veils fall from my eyes
and I realise...

words rarely spoken aloud now..of seeing Niya noogalla nulla
academically meaning the answer I seek right now
is a different kind of fulla

decolonised 'truth's' goal of critiquing ways of knowing
seeds knowledge of a mind we're still sowing and growing
seeded in stories of the other you that you call me
of knowledge known in stories that cannot unknown again be

the truth lived by the Ab-Original
and the evidence that statistically backs
is summed in one phrase now
politically asserted for now ... 'close the bloody gap

'Perhaps This gap

Perhaps this gap
between truths Ab Original and those of Non
attests a time proclaimed post that we've now gone beyond
colonial identities transplanted and decolonised
begins a healing long dreamed realised

of Ab-Normal Ab-Original lives now led
Binna gurri, Womba is not about the brain
But what's heard between the ears between our heads

pandora's box holds the shadowed other referred to here as you.
Released shadows once realised as true
The truth is Murri not blind just invisible
Against pink tinted white
Blazing dark colours are strangely missable

A truth long silenced untold
That connects cultural life and wellbeing
the non culture is really reflected in written abstractions
of romanticised primitive ways of seeing

have we gone beyond
in our minds an identity
imposed by those of origins non?

One fact known of the non physical,
that which encompasses the origins of mind
this thing we call illness follows law of quite another reasoning kind

There are inside worlds and those that are out
the ones we attend to aren't the ones that hold unconscious clout
what does it mean to hear voices and to make sense of what is heard?
How unreasonable to call the whisperings of ancestors diagnosably absurd?
do you hear voices ... Freud, Jung and Jaynes all say that we do
soundless voices guiding the meaning made of self in relation to others too
perhaps you hear the echoes of your mother and father?
Their words as truth heard still
as the mind stills and lets dadirri gather

are these the voices of judgement deemed the diagnosable?
Or the voice of an unheard inner self?
Are these voices whispering where you need to go
to find the healing for well Health?

What is this truth I hear you ask of me
hoping I have it for you?

If you knew the end of a story, would you still want to tell it?

If you knew the end of this story, if the end of this story was known
What would be the point of telling again what has already been evidently shown
Maybe the point of the re-telling is to show what sharing stories has always shown?

In western tales, mental health is perceived as something that it is actually not quite not
If *health is life is health* then what's this 'mental' thing of health you say you've got?
In English Aboriginal stories become divided into the 'mental' and the physical
Where the physical is real and the Non somewhat mythical/mystical

Into a way of seeing cause and its effect, without acknowledging it's unheard correlates
Like a film of net, this work tries to retell again what it is that it creates,
the doing of words that the words 'Aboriginal Recovery' relates

Of Being in time always striving to live life socially emotionally well
It seems that's why we story our lives within the stories that we live and tell.

I cannot say what I cannot 'see'

This is a 'truth' that I somehow
Know, do and be
And what I 'see' there are so many ways to say
And in the Storying there are many rules to obey

English is slippery in cross-cultural translation spaces
There are spaces within spaces at the so-called interfaces
Ab and Non discourses divide where words are found absent
Where words are contested for what they really (re)present

While discourses clearly divide they do and have actually intersected
Novel views emerge there in patterns unexpected
I 'see' patterns in spaces of shared understandings recorded and timed
A thin red line threading, feeling, knowing, being entwined
Meanings recovered from the abstract as dadirri's living songline
A thin red line spun and sung of unseen storylines

Like the process of Storying a journey with no visible endpoint
A mimetic spiral where the end of the story becomes it's starting point.

Do you know who I am

I wonder if you do
Do you?
Wonder if I already know you?
Some of you here I know are not really present
And some of you here are absent but in spirit sent
and as I write, maybe not as you read, no one is here
as I continue trying to make the ambiguous, the ambiguity more clear
as I pick up my pen once more
to try to remake the 'me' that is the authors core, once more
that you are here getting to know
as iteratively I make the storied data images that here I try to I see and 'show'

Poetic fragments

What is it that we see without ever seeing?
It can break the heart
But not the mind
Like the air around us
Necessary but not always kind
It is something we face
Minute to minute without ever noticing
Our gaze on distant realities and places
Our eyes ever focussing
How easy to say and through words experience knowing
How hard in the doing, in the spaces we're always evolving, growing
In slowing and shifting the gaze inward
To a home we collectively barely know
Is that what it is we can't 'see' but keep being shown?
26-10-2009

Voicing a story

To voice a story
Without owning it's glory
Is a difficult thing to do
Because the story in the end
Owns you
A fine line to walk
Textualising in order to go beyond talk
The rhetoric of authoring
Is experientially cauterising

19-2-11

This story starts with you

This story starts with you
Ee tree
And your different unstoried view
Looking from another way of seeing
Involves invoking another and an othered way of being
To be given stories to hold
A storytelling role unfolds...

29-12-2011

To see and to perceive

To see and to perceive
And to know what it is you see
Means first knowing where and how it is you and the Other'be'
For Merleau Ponty the lens of 'seeing'
is also synchronically the lens of social embodied 'being'
A lens long obscured by the diachronic of Descartes fundamental error
And the paradigm shift engendered by that mind/body split tale bearer
Descartes premise of the split between the material and non-material
Is somewhat like the split between the real and the ethereal
It's premise originates its' said in Christian doctrines of faith
Obscured by times depths as it evolves con/currently in sciences wake
This split is ironically schizophrenic in it's form
Because it relates to what is 'seeable' in norm and ab-norm
Whatever 'norm' means I leave that up to you
All i'm interested in is what through your lens does Aboriginal Recovery mean to you?
And how do you recover what was once a 'normal' now imagined Ab-Original-view
Perceiving is deceptive and dangerously creative too
Particularly for the insane by which i mean those who have broken a social or collective taboo
Talking about Womba stories comes with other dangers and challenges too.

To try to talk to Binna Gurriss those who come with a different/ Binan Goonj view
Is actually I'm told a Womba kind of thing to do
It's best to just listen and to wait until they ask
So to tell my story is more of a waiting kind of task

Do you want to hear this story is the question of my thesis
But the 'results' i found are my hypothesis' antithesis
It seems sometimes there are few who want to listen
Because their stories (and my audience) are those who haven't learnt how to properly listen
And because their stories usually make the eye glisten
To glisten is to gleam,
to shine and to reflect what is seen
a strange kind of vision in what is seen too
through a liquid film always moving and shifting distorting the view

to understand Aboriginal Recovery can bring tears first to the eye
because so many more Ab than non in this heroic journey/battle die
besides to create a story of Aboriginal Recovery at this time would statistically be a lie
and dishonour the memory of those for whom many grandmothers still cry

to lighten the tone,
and to get away from things that cut too close to the bone
perhaps in form it's best to view this poem as like a game of "i spy"
I spy with my little eye 'i'
Something starting with the letter A
A is the first letter of the alphabet
That written English words obey
I spy something identified as a lore to obey
What i spy is something intrinsically original to here
What i spy is something you 'see' rather than can 'hear'
Can you hear this story in the way I mean/I've meant for you to do?
I guess that's my question to see if you want me to show what I "see" to you?
How I 'see' your answer of course for now is only a creatively imagined kind of view
Gained from listening to the stories that have been told
About recovering a sense of wellness contained in stories of days (not that) old.

12-7-2011

Inductive Reasoning

Something that can't be reasoning induced
Or logically inferentially deduced
Rather reasoning becomes- Ab-ducible
And scientifically Non Ad-ducible
If we try to deduce what is understood of this topic
What is 'seen' is a view multiply microscopic
If we try to induce what is understood of the Aboriginally mentally chronic
What is heard is a silence writ in words stereophonic
Silence given voice in academic spaces newly emergent
About how Recovery is theoretically and socially determined
They say it is a basic human right to have your story heard
But the responsibility in telling it is finding the right word
Recovery isn't it - this is clear
What is re-covered from the stories i hear?
To cover is to clothe perhaps to coat
To do this again

15-5-2011

The Gift⁴⁰

There is a gift in Aboriginal notions of Recovery and mental health
But it doesn't relate to donations or to shared wealth
The trick of this gift is to not know
...and to know that meaning always moves
That it's not in the holding of it
.... That its' value for meaning making proves

Written down words simply still the knowable at different stages and ages
Creating black signs and word histories trapped forever
.... On flat white pages

Now we know—knowledge as a gift is both curse and raw primal power
Storied mostly in how we conquer, and make the other, unknown, unwritten cower

In One-time to talk of others is strange in a way that goes back beyond time
With it's Othered history for which we are recovering and still yet pine

Indigenous stories tell of a gift, a dream of long ago,
a place still found now to which most cannot remember how to go
a place of lore, an inner country bestowed ancestrally at birth
with a law that is known by all but worded too simply now as Earth.

1/12/2011

Death by a 1000 papercuts

A papercut they say won't kill you
I argue that it can
If you get cut enough times
Paper can kill any wo/man

How much can you take
Is the sole variable question
I ask trawling through forests
of books originating from the non Indigenous, Western

How much can i take?
Not much to me it seems
Just one look at those pages now
Makes me turn a virulent shade of green.
My colour fades to a shade
I once heard seanie choolburra mean

⁴⁰ 'to possess is to give' (Hyde, 2007, p. 9).

He said I don't want to be black anymore
I want to be green
And didn't you know by the way
Black is the new green.
I think I know what he means
But then on white paper black words aren't quite what they seem

A 1000 cuts from libraries full of dead tree pages
I've decided finally I've had enough
Despite developing tolerance incrementally in stages
I know now i'm simply not that tough

I admire those who are
Who can take the insults and the slanders
And who can rise above like the 'stars'
The race dividing public panderers

But i know I'm not that strong
my strength comes not from long sung lines of songs
they weren't passed on, sung or told
although the words are still being sung, now that i'm starting to get old

These things are tiny though, more feather touch than cut
Compared to others stories
Where its not paper or skin
but a noose or precious blood/song line that is irrevocably cut.

i/We learned through sharing stories

i/We learned through sharing stories
of Recoverys' Aboriginal domain
That there are other ways of safely handling words and the anger and the pain
That working with Aboriginal stories engender and the harm they seem to gain/contain

there is a responsibility intrinsically involved
in being privileged, these stories to have been told
it comes with a 'gift' that the listener now must hold
what is the gift from listening to what I have been told?
...and am now trying to tell
Many might see it as a moral and a story of an Ab-academic mental hell
As a gift i'm not sure from listening that i have been blessed
But i'm told I need to tell this story at someone else's bequest
I was told by people who knowledge is important to me
To show more people this story that somehow I (am beginning to) have been privileged to see
5-10-2011

I see a tree

I see a tree
Where none stands before my eyes
Conceived of words
It's form i now, in words, try to realise
I see a tree where none stands before my eyes
It's form and it's shape make me realise
Whether tree of life, knowledge, family or man
It orients me to the many views from where i and others stand
It relates my sense of Aboriginal non Aboriginal being and it's 'norms'
In the way it's trunk, is bottled upside down round in many forms.
This tree i paint and anchor with too many words to clearly see
Is better expressed poetically in Billy Neidjie's sacred ee tree⁴¹
It shows me the how of what it is 'I and others see',
and in seeing this, do
And what that tree means and says, in the saying that I do
Of what you may already 'know'
... to you

17-10-2011

In the blink of an eye

The goal was to find the invisible space within the blink
To feel those thoughts that are left and do not sink
Miniscule seconds forming hours of non-sight
Showing not the view but space squared light
Not quite a place ... yet apperceptibly true
To me, it seems that a black metered frame holds/sings this place into view

What happens after the story has been told

What happens after the story has been told
No-thing,
it seems, sometimes I have been told

So what's the secret to the power entailed...
In creating a story, in text written (and two dimensionally taled)
in (Aboriginal non Aboriginal) storied form?
how does the present, (re)presented in and/by others,
transform?

⁴¹ Bill Neidjie (c. 1920 – 23 May 2002) was the last surviving speaker of the Gaagudju language, an indigenous language northern Kakadu after which the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park is named. He was a senior elder of Kakadu National Park & a traditional owner of the Bunitj estate in northern Kakadu, perhaps the most spectacular National Park in Australia.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bill_Neidjie

A present tangibly shaped and acknowledged ...
in/by our histories
Currently, concurrently...
within our many tangled myths and mis/stories.
perhaps just one of those unsolvable mysteries...

Collectively, individually stories are given tale
In the space/time and contexts from which those stories hail
If the intent of a story is to find a space in and from which to transform ...
It engages within that strange place that we sometimes call the "Norm".
Which, by definition goes, in a creative, unpredictable way
In the form of what happens after the story ...Mainly in what others have to say.

In talking of that, in drawing your attention to this
I'm wondering what will change, when you realise what this story is ...
In words,
framed poetically for perceptual not conceptual clarity
I'm talking of something i call projected, population level, mental parity

Strangely worded, in this context, to mean what would be ...
If you could only see
Your capacity for hope
If you 'knew' or had heard too many stories of children (and adults) hanging on
to (by)
the end of a ((non) Aboriginal) rope.

If you knew of the ways some stories in the telling seem to poison my soul
And the ways those stories retold transform ...
My 'collective' "I"/my community as a whole
toxic, harmful stories that don't quite pass on
what those (children) hanging on, do, have done
with the ends of a rope...
ultimately ... (Radical) Hope

I don't want (You) to cry or feel sympathy for them
Here I only talk of stories that are currently told about them
You can't cry sympathise with a printed text of tales
Or about words written black ink on the white page it pales.

You can if you want ... cry or sympathise
But that's not the point I want you to 'see' and to realise
Not so much to do... but do if you must
It's in what You say ... that I place in words my trust
About that which I cannot say...
In words ...

Using poems to represent the results of research

Using poems to represent the results of research
Calls into question the results and their value and worth

To re-search, to seek again for the gap between what's known
For novel patterns that have not yet been shown
Means again to perceive and in perceiving, be perceived
And to loosen meanings that have perhaps been misconceived

Doing this is necessarily part of the path
To understand something new means 'not knowing' at the start
A state of almost illiterate, inarticulate confusion
Amidst readings of discourses in ever burgeoning literary profusion

As I read not knowing why the writer wrote
And I hear their words in a voice they never spoke
The voice of another similarly exploring knowledge gaps in the dark
Holding onto the reasons that writers hold in their hearts

As I write, I'm acutely aware of the time that writing costs
And the people in communities, while I write, whose lives are being lost

As I write, Aboriginal lives enter systems of care, into relationships they are not responsible for
And professional lives form treatment, care and sometimes more
I'm conscious of my role, and as a research result
To call my work 'not quite...' for me is not an insult

To write while holding a stance of not knowing
Is to narrate while narrating what the narratives are showing

To write poem and mean research is inevitably a political stance
Partially positioned as art it stands a better chance
The value of poetry as a research result and worth
Like art its value lies in the eyes of the beholder, reading evidence into words.

In a post modern world - a central question emerges of texts and their insights
This question? Do readers read what writers research and write?
Studying this involves a linguistic style necessarily narratively turned
Creating havoc in the meanings writ, meanings that tend to get books burned

Scorched by the readings that transformed my understanding of role and soul
And my understanding of this inquiries meaning as a whole
Fragmented, disjointed perhaps subjectively unconsciously misdirected
I simply write and in writing seek the readers' perspective...

Gulli Dalla

Are you going to say what the conservative whites want to hear?
Are you also going to make the words of my elders, yours, mentally disappear?
40 years of 'consumer advocacy and participation' lie behind Prof Smallwood words
She's said these words often enough I don't need a recorder to remember what I have heard.

The Burdekin report, ways forward and years of reports starting for her with Dr Kahn
She's reports again the mental health risk of being Aboriginal and a professional code about doing no harm
All these reports, in the words that she has written and as an activist shared
identify that healing occurs in a cultural perspective, laid statistically bare

She talks often of transgenerational trauma, and a soul sickness, professionally unexpected
and of Aboriginal expertise and knowledge, and wisdoms so often un/dis-respected
critical of top down approaches and psychiatric services more generally,
she proceeded to then go on to ask me
after all these years, you listened, now you tell me what's this Aboriginal Recovery
this story that you see?

She reminded me again of a statement she made 20 years ago and a story she still has to tell
About the numbers and practices that relate Aboriginal mental life as a living mental hell.
Her statement ends with a question that still speaks 20 years later to me
about ancestor creators and the land, and the Aboriginal deaths that she too often tends to see.

"In the western world of 2000 years Christianity when they speak to their god it's called praying
however, when their god speaks back to them it's regarded as abnormal behaviour and schizophrenia
and they can lock you away. In my indigenous world of over 60000 years when i speak to my creator
and ancestors and they speak back to me it's regarded as normal behaviour and culturally appropriate.
How do we link these worlds together to respect one's cultural and religious values which are so needed
for reconciliation and to heal mother earth." (Dr Gracelyn Smallwood, pers.comm., 2010)

Ethical moments | Aka's poem

Under a tree
In the shadow of a setting tropic sun
In a country far from mine
Is where this poem in words begun
We were sitting quietly yarning
In the way that women will
And her grandchild spoke a word
And for a time, time stood still.
Barely out of nappies
What she said invoked a widely held taboo
And in that moment
I know that we had all heard it too.

Don't they say from the mouths of babes
Oft comes an undeniable truth
And in what they say
Lies incontrovertible proof?

In that moment
In the silence of an inability to respond
Echoed a word on lips
On which it simply did not belong

I took my lead from Aka's years of maternal Aboriginal wisdom
And did what she said then & became quiet and listened
Aka sighed mid-yarn
Before responding to what we'd heard
And yelled out suddenly
"don't you ever say that word"
That we create our worlds in words
It has been often said
But to not say a word, still leaves a lot that is said
While not a swear word
It is a taboo in most religious traditions
Although in war it does become a strangely noble kind of mission
How does a child learn this word
And how do we know from whence?
And In the way this word was used
These children playing clearly knew what it was it meant.
Amidst the slipperiness of words and the meanings that are inferred
This poem is an attempt to unhear what it was that I had heard
And to follow Aka's command and her wisdom
This poem is my attempt to never say it and to listen.
24-1-2014

Significance poem

What good is a poem
To those dead, unstoried, still
What good is a poem
To those lives that are storied ill?
What good is a poem
To those who proscribe the value of pills?
What good is a poem
For those searching and in seeking always will?

A poem does nothing except say things that cannot be said
A poem does nothing that does not first occur in the listeners head

A poem just says stop for a while and listen to these words
And seek your own questions for the poetic answer you have (just) heard

A poem in response

What is it that makes knowledge possible?
How is it ever indeed possible to know?
In deed is it ever probable to do so?
To say theoretically I know?

When is philosophy not a theory you know?
From where does knowledge come and to where does it go?
Where is the line set between the known and unknown
When here ... now ... is all that can really, in reality, be ever known
All else is thought, imagined, remembered, described, represented, re-shown
Counted intellectually mentally grown

Specifically we can know things but generally we can't
And it is this assumption that gives the originating question a particular academic slant
Theory assumes relationships between the known and unknowable clues
Valuing prediction and control generally from a western philosophical view
And perhaps from my, your perspective too
Theory speaks of abstract laws in language that languages reality's' physical spaces
But does it also govern the language of reality's human, social cultural spaces ... races
Different words create and narrate theories of that which humans know
And the stories that transmit socially how they go
what they say
Valuing prediction, theory prioritises certain analytics in order to better convey
sensitise
knowing time will prove, and knowledge always needs contextualising
Beyond particular times and spaces, claims of theoretically knowing become very unwise
To embed knowledge in stilled spaces condensed,
Does math govern emotion and behaviours and the means through which we think?
Can statistics explain how decisions are made before we even blink?
Is it reasonable to hold to the canons of analysis and argument
When the answers they provide, allow, prove, aren't the ones the question addressed, meant?
The possibility of knowing whilst remaining curiously unknowing
Begins the possibility of wisdom that ever needs growing

A spiritual truth more so than scientific,
metaphoric more so than realistic
still wisdom isn't just about reason
and all knowledge has a rhyme and a season
is there the possibility of dialogue between?
About what it means to know the world and what we see?
If all viewpoints were deemed equal, different all possible
A reasonable canon of analysis and argument to make a positive claim
The possibility of knowledge lies in what human values gain...

Select references referred to in the poems

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Appendix B: Select details from the Storytellers involved

Storyteller Identifier	Identified role as:	Described experience/s in Aboriginal mental health care as those of a:	Words used to relate 'Aboriginal Recovery'
ST2	'About healing'	Psychiatric nurse, consumer/advocate/recovery peer support worker	In maintenance
ST3	Nurse, researcher	Nurse/consumer/advocate/carer	not a victim
ST4	Activist/advocate	Nurse/activist/advocate/carer	Crazy
ST5	Health worker	After 5 years working for remote area mental health services I am not so much a consumer but a SEWB worker –somewhat experienced but with a lot of learning to do. "Likely to do more harm than not – still learning."	Balance and wellbeing or balanced wellbeing. Recovery is being able to deal with what might have tipped you over edge before and if happens again have found some balance somewhere to manage it.
ST7	Mental health Nurse in SEWB context	Consumer Carer advocate Aboriginal mental health nurse/academic/SEWB worker	From surviving to thriving – not averse to the word Recovery because i trained in that model but it's hard because i don't think they're unwell anyway
ST6	Mens group facilitator	Consumer/carer/advocate/peer worker	Walking the talk
ST8	Torres Strait Islander woman, Aunty	Family	" ... "
ST9	Mental health nurse	Indigenous Nursing advocate	" ... "
ST10	consumer advocate, artist	Artist	Allinya
ST11	carer and advocate, artist	Healing	Ullbulla
ST12	mental health workforce coordinator	carer, provider, advocate, '20 years working in this field trying to make a difference'	"nothing comes to mind... maybe healing. Recovery is such a final word. Healing is a process. One word can have many meanings

ST13	Psychiatrist/ Public health physician	Advocate	Capacity for optimism, creating enabling environments
ST14	SEWB worker	SEWB worker	" ... "
ST15	Academic	Consumer	In Recovery
ST16	Retired academic/'ca rer"	Carer/advocate	" ... "
ST17	Ex psychologist	Aboriginal Carer/"?"	" ... "
ST18	Ex-SEWB worker	SEWB worker	Home, belonging
ST19	carer and advocate/po et	Consumer	" ... "
ST20	retired SEWB worker	Carer/health worker	" ... "
ST21	mental health workforce coordinator	Carer/advocate	" ... "
ST22	Activist/elder	Advocate/community leader	Well/fighting fit
ST23	Psychologist/ health statistician	Researcher	It depends....
ST24	Researcher	Family	" ... "
ST25	Nurse	Aboriginal Mental health nurse/academic	not asked
ST1	Researcher	scribe	Recipiscence

Storyteller id	Level of involvement	age	Gender	Identifies Indigenous identity as:	Indigeneity Identifier	Signed consent forms	Number of yarns
0	Me	40-50	Female	<i>Gunggari</i>	Aboriginal	Ongoing	ongoing
1.1	Pilot	40-50	Female	<i>ngadjun-jii</i>	Aboriginal	Yes - 17/5/10	1
1.2	Costoryteller	>50	Female	<i>Wiradjuri</i>	Aboriginal	Yes - 7/7/2009	
1.3	Costoryteller	>50	Female	<i>Birri Gubba</i>	Aboriginal/South Sea Islander	Yes 5/9/2008	>30
1.4	Costoryteller	>50	Female	<i>Gungalidda/Barawa</i>	Aboriginal	Ongoing verbal contingent consent	>30
2	level1	<40	Female	Torres strait islander	Torres strait islander	Verbal and email confirmation	>10
3	level1	40-50	Female	<i>Kalkadunga</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	>10
4	level2	>50	Female	<i>Gungarri</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal –will consent after sees the final text	>10
5	level2	40-50	Male	<i>Jirrba</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	3
6	level2	>50	Female	<i>Gudjal</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	>10
7	level1	>50	Male	<i>Birri Gubba</i>	Aboriginal/South Sea Islander	Verbal	>10
8	level1	40-50	female	Torres strait island woman	Torres strait islander	verbal	4
9	level3	>50	Male	<i>Gugu Badhun</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	3
10	level1	>50	Male	White	non-Aboriginal	Verbal	5
11	level2	<40	Female	<i>Tjapukai</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	2
12	level2	40-50	Female	<i>Gunggari</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	5
13	level1	<40	female	No comment	Aboriginal	Verbal	4
14	level3	40-50	Male	Non-Indigenous	non-Aboriginal	Verbal – to use notes and remain anon	1
15	level3	40-50	female	Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Verbal - so long as not identified	>10

16	level2	>50	Female	Murri	Aboriginal	verbal –also consent to use poems from her anthology	1
17	level1	40-50	Male	Non-Indigenous	non-Aboriginal	Verbal	>10
18	level1	40-50	Female	Torres Strait Islander	Aboriginal/Torres strait islander	Verbal	6
19	level2	>50	female	<i>Bunggari</i>	Aboriginal	Verbal	2
20	level2	>50	female	Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Verbal	1
21	level1	40-50	Female	Aboriginal	Aboriginal	verbal	5

Appendix C: Publications

a. Peer reviewed publications

1. van Luyn A, Gair S and **Saunders V**, (2016). ‘**Transcending the limits of logic**’ Poetic inquiry as a qualitative research method for working with vulnerable communities. Chapter 5. In: S. Gair & A. van Luyn (Eds.). *Sharing qualitative research: Showing lived experiences and community narratives*. pp 79-95.
2. **Saunders V**, Usher K, Tsey T, & Bainbridge R. (2016). If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it? Using research poems to listen to Aboriginal stories. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, in press.
3. **Saunders V**, Sherwood J, & Usher K. (2015). If You knew the end of the story, would you still want to hear it?: The importance of narrative time for mental health care. *The Qualitative Report* 20 (10), 1594-1608.
4. Bainbridge R, Tsey K, McCalman J, Kinchin K, **Saunders V**, Watkin Lui F, Cadet-James Y, Miller A, & Lawson K. (2014). No one’s discussing the elephant in the room: Contemplating questions of research impact and benefit in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian health research. *BMC public health* 15 (1), 696. DOI 10.1186/s12889-015-2052-3
5. Elston J, **Saunders V**, Hayes B, Bainbridge R, & McCoy B. (2013). Building indigenous research capacity. *Contemporary Nurse*, 46 (1), 6-12.
6. Leenders M, Dyer G, & **Saunders V** (2011). Work in progress: creative recovery to creative livelihoods. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 19 (1), S45-S48.
7. **Saunders V**, West R, & Usher K (2010). Applying indigenist research methodologies in health research: experiences in the borderlands. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 39 (Supplement), 1-7.
8. Haswell-Elkins M, Reilly L, Fagan R, Ypinazar V, Hunter V, Tsey K, Gibson V, Connolly B, Laliberte A, Wargent R, Gibson T, **Saunders V**, McCalman J, & Kavanagh D (2009). Listening, sharing understanding and facilitating consumer, family and community empowerment through a priority driven partnership in Far North Queensland. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 17(1 suppl), S54-S58.

b. Completed reports

9. Leenders M, Dyer G & **Saunders V**. (2011). *Creative Recovery to Creative Livelihoods – a Work In Progress: Exploring the potential for participatory arts engagement to support wellbeing and livelihoods in remote Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland*, Australasian Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, Cairns. Qld. (+ DVDs): Queensland Health.

10. **Saunders V. (2015).** Consumer Participation in Mental Health Evaluation. Scoping document prepared for FNQ MHU: Queensland Health. (available from Qld Health).

c. Publications in progress

1. **Saunders V. & Redman Maclaren M. (2016).** Poetic inquiry in cross-cultural research. In: P. Liamputtong (Ed.). *Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*.
2. **Saunders V, Haswell M, & Brownlie A. (2016).** Capturing Indigenous mental health acuity: Experiences from a hospital chart analysis at a tertiary Mental Health facility in Far North Queensland. Submitted to Queensland Health for approval to submit to the *Journal of Rural and Remote Health* (July 2015).
3. Haswell M, Tulip F, Bethmont A, **Saunders V**, Wargent R, & Brownlie A. (2016). Upward trends in Indigenous population-based hospitalisation and bed occupancy rates for severe mental health disorders in Far North Queensland. Submitted to Queensland Health for approval to submit to: *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (October, 2015).
4. **Saunders, V**, Leenders M, & Dyer G. The value of Aboriginal art in mental health care. Manuscript in preparation for: *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*.
5. O'Donovan R, Chamberlain-Salaun J & **Saunders V.** (2015). Consumer participation in accreditation processes: A consumer technical expert's perspective of the National Standards for Mental Health. Manuscript in preparation for: *The Patient Experience Journal*.

Appendix D: Conference Presentations

1. Russell L, & **Saunders V**. The transformative potential of Indigenous storytelling. *Healing Our Spirit Worldwide - The Seventh Gathering Mauri Ora*: Kirikiriroa, Aotearoa, 15-19 November 2015.
2. **Saunders V**. Using poetic inquiry (for) recovery in Aboriginal mental health care. (Poster). *Creating Futures Practice, Evidence and Creativity in Tropical and Remote settings*: Cairns, 11-14 May, 2015.
3. **Saunders V**. Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery. *Creating Futures*: Cairns, 20-23 September 2010.
4. West R. & **Saunders V**. Understanding Social Emotional Wellbeing **(Poster)**. *Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Knowledges (ISIK) Conference*: Perth, 30 Nov–2 Dec 2009.
5. West R., **Saunders V**. & Usher K. Finding our voices: using Indigenist Research Methodology within a PhD. *Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Knowledges Conference (ISIK)*: Perth, 30 Nov–2 Dec 2009.
6. Dyer G, Leenders M, & **Saunders V**. *Creative Livelihoods*, a work in progress. *International Arts and Health Conference: The Art of Good Health And Wellbeing 2010*: The Sidney Myer Centre, University of Melbourne, 16-19 November 2010.
7. Leenders M, Dyer G, & **Saunders V**. *Creative Livelihoods – a Work In Progress*: Exploring the potential for participatory arts engagement to support wellbeing and livelihoods in remote Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland. *Artspoken Queensland Regional Arts and Culture Conference*: Bundaberg, 13-14 Oct 2011.
8. Russell L, & **Saunders V**. Telling our own stories of recovery: The transformative power of Indigenous Storytelling. 8th *Health Services and Policy Research Conference*: Wellington, NZ, 2-4 December 2013.
9. Russell L, & **Saunders V**. Telling our own stories of recovery: The transformative power of Indigenous Storytelling. *International Indigenous Development Research Conference*: Wellington, NZ, 25-28 November 2014.
10. **Saunders V**. Reconciling voices: on seeing and saying stories of Aboriginal Recovery. (Poster). *International Indigenous Development Research Conference*: Wellington, NZ, 25-28 November 2014.
11. Russel L, & **Saunders V**. Reconciling voices: on seeing and saying stories of Aboriginal Recovery. *HE MANAWA WHENUA: Indigenous Research Conference 2013*: Hamilton, Aotearoa, NZ, 30 June – 3 July 2013.

- 12. Saunders V, & Usher K.** “If you knew the end of a story ...”: using poetic inquiry for recovery in Aboriginal mental health care. (Poster). The 3rd Asia Pacific International conference of Qualitative Research in Nursing, Midwifery and Health Research: Compassion and care in a changing world: Newcastle, NSW, 1-3 October, 2014.
- 13. Saunders V, & Redman-Maclaren, M.** Using poetry in cross-cultural research: lessons from the field. The Fifth International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry: Vancouver, Canada, 8-10 October 2015.

Conference presentation -1

The transformative potential of Indigenous storytelling

Russell L. and Saunders V.

presented at the

Healing Our Spirit Worldwide - The Seventh Gathering Mauri Ora Conference

at

Kirikiroa, Aotearoa, 15-19 November 2015

ABSTRACT

From an Indigenous research perspective it is crucial to contextualise, historicise and politicise our stories. Through stories we share passions, sadness, hardships and joys; we share meaning and purpose; we connect to others; and we understand our place in the world. Storytelling also plays an essential role in healing and recovery, and the profound importance of being heard for the story-teller is internationally recognised in mental health recovery. Studies show that in being listened to, in telling their life histories, people whose lives have been scarred by mental illness gain control in the restoration of their life, self-worth, validation, confidence, autonomy and self-trust. The origins of this presentation lie in the experience of having heard too many stories with the same outcome. Both have used storytelling in their respective postdoctoral and doctorate research projects to allow Indigenous peoples to make sense of, and give meaning to, their subjective experiences of mental illness. The process of telling, hearing, sharing and cogenerating Indigenous 'stories' of recovery, has the potential to transform lives. Indigenous researchers Russell (Māori) and Saunders (Aboriginal) share their common findings and health gains for Indigenous peoples realised through the use of storytelling in their respective postdoctoral and doctorate research projects which allowed Indigenous peoples to make sense of, and give meaning to, their subjective experiences of mental illness.

Conference presentation -2 (poster)

Using poetic inquiry (for) recovery in Aboriginal mental health care.

Vicki Saunders

presented at the

Creating Futures Practice, Evidence and Creativity in Tropical and Remote settings
Conference

in

Cairns, North Queensland, 11-14 May, 2015

ABSTRACT

The purpose of conducting the inquiry foregrounded by this presentation was primarily to hear (or be able to hear), and to privilege, a type of story ending that is not often heard in the discourses or texts that form Aboriginal Mental Health care. This is an ending to a story that coheres with the word Recovery in mental health care contexts. Poetic inquiry was used as an approach to qualitative research that aligns well with the aspirations of Indigenous peoples and with Arts informed activism. Use of this approach responds to the ethical and aesthetic imperatives posed by asking about recovery in Aboriginal mental health care. In this inquiry, the use of poetry evolved from a reflective writing tool, to a method of data collection, data construction, analysis and interpretation; and is also posited as both an outcome and an overarching methodology that fits well with the ethics and the aesthetic imperatives that shaped this work. These imperatives are synthesized by the phrase (report title) and cross cultural need to “tell stories in ways that make us stronger”. Two of the poems produced whilst asking questions about Aboriginal recovery in mental health care in North Queensland, Australia are explored in this poster/presentation. An arts-informed approach to social inquiry has been and is used to create space for, or a point of departure in, the conversations at the cultural interface that I listen for. The goal of this poster is to amplify or bring forward notions of ‘voice’ in this context and to make more visible the different ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal storytelling guided/informed the development of this work.

Gaining two way understanding of Aboriginal Recovery

Vicki Saunders

presented at the

Creating Futures Conference

in

Cairns, North Queensland, 20-23 September 2010

ABSTRACT

The term 'Social and Emotional Wellbeing' is more commonly used by Indigenous people when referring to 'mental illness', because it conveys a more strengths based and holistic understanding consistent with Indigenous beliefs about health. Indigenous mental health concepts also incorporate the holistic nature of health and well-being and advocate the inclusion of mind, body, spirituality, environmental and spiritual constructs (Vicary & Westerman 2004). The concept of health includes not only the wellbeing of the individual, but also includes the family and community in which they live (NAHS 1998). Historically, mental health services for Indigenous people have been organised around a Western model of psychiatry, focused on the individual, which has been found to result in significantly poorer outcomes for Indigenous people (Haswell-Elkins 2007). The author is interested in creative processes and models that articulate in poems, paintings and stories key conceptual aspects of Indigenous Social and Emotional Well-being. The purpose of the study is to allow Indigenous people to voice their stories and understandings of mental illness and recovery. The significance of this study will be not just to document Indigenous stories in relation to mental illness and recovery but to engage Indigenous people in processes that better articulate concepts of social emotional wellbeing and mental health using a creative storyline process.

Conference presentation - 4 (poster)

Understanding Social Emotional Wellbeing.

West R. and Saunders V.

presented at the

Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Knowledges (ISIK) Conference

at

Perth, WA, 30 Nov–2 Dec 2009

ABSTRACT

The term ‘Social and Emotional Well Being’ is a phrase more commonly used by Indigenous people when referring to ‘mental health’, because it conveys a more strengths based and holistic understanding and is more consistent with Indigenous beliefs about health. Indigenous mental health concepts incorporate the holistic nature of health and well-being and advocate the inclusion of mind, body, spirituality, environmental and spiritual constructs (Vicary & Westerman 2004). In addition, as defined by the NAHS, 1989 health is defined as “not just the physical well-being of the individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life”. Historically, mental health services for Indigenous people have been constructed around a Western model of psychiatry, focused on the individual, which has been found to result in significantly poorer outcomes for Indigenous people (Haswell-Elkins 2007). The idea of Social and Emotional Well Being is generally not well understood outside of the Indigenous community. The authors have developed a model which is articulated in a painting and story depicting the key aspects of Social and Emotional Well Being. The model also highlights practical strategies for non-Indigenous mental health professionals working within the landscape of Indigenous mental health. This poster will provide an overview of the model developed jointly by the authors and include a number of the early iterations.

References: Haswell-Elkins M, Tulip K, Saunders V, Wargent R, 2007. “Eight Year Review of Hospitalisation Patterns to the Mental Health Unit Cairns Base Hospital 1999/2000 to 2005/2006.” Final Report to Queensland Health, Northern Area Health service, April 2008. National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party: A National Aboriginal Health Strategy. Canberra: Department of Aboriginal Affairs; 1989. Vicary, D. & Westerman, T.G. (2004). ‘That’s just the way he is’: Some implications of Aboriginal mental health beliefs. Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental health (AeJAMH), 3(3).

Conference presentation – 5

Finding our voices: using Indigenist Research Methodology within a PhD.

West R., Saunders V. and Usher K.

presented at the

Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Knowledges Conference (ISIK)

in

Perth, WA, 30 Nov–2 Dec 2009

ABSTRACT

For Indigenous scholars in the health sciences, finding ‘ways of doing’ Indigenous methodologies can be challenging to say the very least. Undertaking Indigenist research for postgraduate Indigenous health studies is often situated at the interface of health and social research paradigms. Indigenist research (Rigney, 1997) originated from within the traditions of the social sciences and therefore Indigenist academic discourse and pedagogy values qualitative and post positivist research practice and theory. The health sciences traditionally are seen to value more quantitative and positivist research practices and theories. For Indigenous scholars, attempting Indigenist research within this context, there are significant obstacles to be overcome when applying Indigenous research methods and methodologies within the health disciplines. Indigenist research approaches have only recently entered the academic discourses of health science. As a result, only few courses currently exist at the post graduate level for higher education students in health or their supervisors to build capacity in negotiating the Indigenist health research methodology labyrinth, although there are recent initiatives aimed at addressing this need. The effort involved in negotiating Indigenist health methodologies is challenging and exhausting yet more Indigenous scholars are enrolling to do so for reasons many find hard to articulate. Indigenous students and scholars continue to develop and try new ways of research, use innovative and creative ways of expressing their data, and many lead the way into previously uncharted territory. However, this undertaking incorporates many risks and challenges while attempting to develop new Indigenous knowledge. While qualitative researchers have moved forward

considerably in their attempts to provide an alternative way of researching to the scientific or empirical approach, to move beyond this arena, it is often necessary for the researcher to undo previous learning or to let go of preconceived ideas—a type of unlearning or ‘decolonising’ (Smith, 1999). This challenge for Indigenous students, as for all students, can be overwhelming. Perhaps, however, in this current era of Indigenist research, having established an academic argument that is now “harder to dismiss” (Rigney 2009) (that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in research are valid) research in the future may perhaps begin to focus on the ‘gifts’ that applying Indigenist research processes can bring to academic outputs and outcomes; particularly within the Indigenous health arena where the impact of research as a health intervention is most needed to be evidenced in positive ways. This seminar will illustrate some of the methodological challenges involved for higher education students in Indigenous health research and their supervisors and highlights the need to introduce Indigenist and decolonising methodologies into the undergraduate and post graduate health research subjects and programs. It will also offer insight into working with Indigenist methodologies in health research from three perspectives; an overview of the challenges and opportunities that have arisen will be provided by two Aboriginal PhD students and incorporate examples of their own use of creativity in their search for an Indigenist methodology. Their PhD supervisor will provide a different perspective of sharing the journey as a non-Indigenous person.

Conference presentation – 6

Creative Livelihoods, a work in progress

Dyer G., Leenders M. and Saunders V.

presented at the

International Arts and Health Conference (ISIK): The Art of Good Health and Wellbeing
2010

at the

University of Melbourne, Vic, 16-19 November 2010

ABSTRACT

Précis: Creative Livelihoods: A Work in Progress - describes the evolution of the Creative Recovery concept to encompass the potential for participatory arts engagement to encourage livelihoods in vulnerable communities. An innovative research methodology has been applied to conduct the evaluation of the project which encompasses the notion of gaining a 'two way understanding' from Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Storylines.

ABSTRACT: Creative arts initiatives have the ability to promote the health and wellbeing of people suffering from a range of mental health problems as well as providing an opportunity for employment in remote communities which traditionally have a limited scope for gainful employment. This presentation will highlight the challenges and opportunities of using collaborative, innovative arts and health partnership models to address SEWB, in remote Indigenous communities in Cape York. Creative Recovery is a community arts based approach to mental health recovery in remote Indigenous communities. Originally launched in Lockhart River (October 2008) the project has now extended to other communities across the Cape, including Aurukun and Mornington Island. The success of, and key learnings from, the pilot phase in Lockhart River has enabled expansion to other communities. A similar project in Cape York, Ghost Net Gear focused on creating saleable artworks in remote communities by recycling reclaimed ghost nets that have washed up on beaches in the Gulf. These types of projects offer unique opportunities in remote Indigenous communities for social enterprise, utilising creativity as the tool for meaningful engagement. They are best practice examples of projects which respond to challenging environmental and social changes and they both have enormous potential to grow and contribute to the wider social and economic future of the remote Indigenous communities of Cape York. Ongoing evaluation of the project, has evolved into developing innovative and adaptive methodological approaches

to building an evidence base in this area and demonstrating the multiple ways that creativity and the Arts can contribute to the health and Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing agenda. The significance of this research will be not just to document Indigenous issues and needs in relation to mental illness and recovery but to employ and engage Indigenous people in empowering programmes that directly affect their lives and their social emotional wellbeing; as well as building research and community capacity in the use of creative storyline techniques.

Conference presentation – 7

Creative Livelihoods – a Work In Progress: Exploring the potential for participatory arts engagement to support wellbeing and livelihoods in remote Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland

Leenders M., Dyer G., and Saunders V.

presented at the

Artspoken Queensland Regional Arts and Culture Conference

in

Bundaberg, QLD, 13-14 Oct 2011

ABSTRACT

Creative arts initiatives have the ability to promote the health and wellbeing of people suffering from a range of mental health problems. Such initiatives can also provide an opportunity for employment in remote communities which traditionally have a limited scope for gainful employment. This presentation will highlight the challenges and opportunities of using collaborative, innovative arts and health partnership models to address SEWB, in remote Indigenous communities in Cape York. Creative Recovery is a community arts based approach to mental health recovery in remote Indigenous communities, originally launched in Lockhart River in 2008. The success of, and key learning's from the pilot phase have enabled expansion not only to other communities (Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee), but also to the development of relationships with other creative projects throughout the Torres Strait and Cape York. Ongoing evaluation of such projects is of critical importance. For Creative Recovery this has necessarily evolved into the development of innovative and adaptive methodological approaches to build an evidence base. Broadly the aim is to demonstrate the multiple ways that creativity and the Arts can contribute to the health and Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing agenda. The significance of this research however, will be not just to document Indigenous issues and needs in relation to mental illness and recovery. It also aims to employ and engage Indigenous people in empowering programmes that directly affect their lives and their social emotional wellbeing; as well as building research and community capacity in the use of creative storyline techniques. These types of projects offer unique opportunities in remote Indigenous communities for social enterprise, utilising creativity as the tool for meaningful engagement. They are best practice examples of projects which respond to challenging environmental and social changes. There is enormous potential for this concept to contribute to the wider social and economic future of remote Indigenous communities by encouraging creative livelihoods.

Conference presentation – 8

Telling our own stories of recovery: The transformative power of Indigenous Storytelling

Russell L. and Saunders V.

presented at the

8th Health Services and Policy Research Conference

in

Wellington, NZ, 2-4 December 2013

ABSTRACT

Objectives: Stories have been a primal form of communication since time began. Through stories we share passions, sadness, hardships and joys; we share meaning and purpose; we connect to others; and we understand our place in the world. Storytelling also plays an essential role in healing and recovery. The process of telling, hearing, sharing and cogenerating Indigenous ‘stories’ of recovery is powerful. So powerful in fact, it has the potential to transform lives.

Methods: As Indigenous researchers, both Russell (Māori) and Saunders (Aboriginal) have a passion to improve the health of their people and to reduce the health disparities in their lands. Both have also used storytelling in their respective postdoctoral and doctorate research projects to allow Indigenous peoples to make sense of, and give meaning to, their subjective experiences of mental illness. Their presentation will share the common findings and health gains for Indigenous peoples they have found in doing so.

Lessons Learned: Storytelling recognises the profound importance of being heard for the story-teller. Internationally the value of mental health stories in recovery has been recognised. Studies show that in being listened to, in telling their life histories, people whose lives have been scarred by mental illness gain control in the restoration of their life, self-worth, validation, confidence, autonomy and self-trust.

Implications: Awareness of the role of stories in healing and recovery is important to help bridge the knowledge gap between cultural and medical systems. For Indigenous peoples whose understanding of story includes truth-telling, this is particularly significant for optimising health outcomes.

Conference presentation – 9

Telling our own stories of recovery: The transformative power of Indigenous Storytelling

Russell L. and Saunders V.

presented at the

International Indigenous Development Research Conference

in

Wellington, NZ, 25-28 November 2014

ABSTRACT

Stories have been a primal form of communication since time began. Through stories we share passions, sadness, hardships and joys; we share meaning and purpose; we connect to others; and we understand our place in the world. Storytelling also plays an essential role in healing and recovery, and the profound importance of being heard for the story-teller is internationally recognised in mental health recovery. Studies show that in being listened to, in telling their life histories, people whose lives have been scarred by mental illness gain control in the restoration of their life, self-worth, validation, confidence, autonomy and self-trust. The process of telling, hearing, sharing and cogenerating Indigenous ‘stories’ of recovery, then is powerful. It has the potential to transform lives. As Indigenous researchers, both Russell (Māori) and Saunders (Aboriginal) have a passion to improve the health of their people and to reduce the health disparities in their lands. Both have also used storytelling in their respective postdoctoral and doctorate research projects to allow Indigenous peoples to make sense of, and give meaning to, their subjective experiences of mental illness. Their presentation will share the common findings and health gains for Indigenous peoples that they have found in doing so.

Conference presentation – 10 (poster)

Reconciling voices: on seeing and saying stories of Aboriginal Recovery.

Vicki Saunders

presented at the

International Indigenous Development Research Conference

in

Wellington, NZ, 25-28 November 2014

ABSTRACT

Through stories we share passions, sadness, hardships and joys; we share meaning and purpose; we connect to others; and we understand our place in the world. Storytelling also plays an essential role in healing and recovery, and the profound importance of being heard for the story-teller is internationally recognised in mental health recovery. Studies show that in being listened to, in telling their life histories, people whose lives have been scarred by mental illness gain control in the restoration of their life, self-worth, validation, confidence, autonomy and self-trust. The process of telling, hearing, sharing and cogenerating Indigenous 'stories' of recovery, then is powerful. It has the potential to transform lives. As Indigenous researchers, both Russell (Māori) and Saunders (Aboriginal) have a passion to improve the health of their people and to reduce the health disparities in their lands. Both have also used storytelling in their respective postdoctoral and doctorate research projects to allow Indigenous peoples to make sense of, and give meaning to, their subjective experiences of mental illness. Their presentation will share the common findings and health gains for Indigenous peoples that they have found in doing so.

Reconciling voices: on seeing and saying stories of Aboriginal Recovery

Russel L. and Saunders V.

presented at the

HE MANAWA WHENUA: Indigenous Research Conference 2013

in

Hamilton, Aotearoa, NZ, 30 June – 3 July 2013

ABSTRACT

The question being posed rhetorically in this paper is: “If you knew the end of a story would you still want to hear it?” Through poetry and an imaginary dialogue, the author draws on personal experience and conversations with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal “consumers, carers and mental health professionals” to pose, and attempt to answer, an unanswerable question. The aim of doing this is to draw attention to the ways the endings of stories of “Aboriginal Recovery” are currently being told and heard; particularly, by You, the reader, and by others who contribute indirectly and directly to the way those stories end...

Conference presentation – 12 (poster)

“If you knew the end of a story ...”: using poetic inquiry for recovery in Aboriginal mental health care

Saunders V. and Usher K.

presented at

The 3rd Asia Pacific International conference of Qualitative Research in Nursing, Midwifery and Health Research: Compassion and care in a changing world

in

Newcastle, NSW, 1-3 October, 2014

ABSTRACT

This (poster) presentation illustrates a research/ed response to having heard too many stories with the same outcome or ending in the field of research praxis described as ‘Aboriginal Mental Health care’. The purpose of conducting the inquiry that foreground this poster and visually representing inquiry this way is primarily to hear (or be able to hear), other outcomes and story endings that are not often storied in Aboriginal Mental Health care. Poetic inquiry was used as an approach to qualitative research which aligns well with the aims of Arts informed and transformative research. In the inquiry that this presentation (re)presents, the use of poetry evolved from a reflective writing tool, to a method of data collection, data construction, analysis and interpretation. It is presented and illustrates both a methodology and way of representing research results in this context. The images explored in the poster show how poetic inquiry was viewed/and approached. An arts-informed research approach was used to create a space for, or points of departure in, ongoing conversations in Aboriginal mental health care, and to amplify the Aboriginal voices informing the development of this work.

Using poetry in cross-cultural research: lessons from the field

Saunders V. and Redman-Maclaren M.

presented at

The Fifth International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry

in

Vancouver, Canada, 8-10 October 2015

ABSTRACT

Poetry creates new ways of knowing and is increasingly being used in qualitative research. For researchers, writing poetry enables a reading of data that moves beyond an efferent to a more aesthetic frame. Writing poetry as a research practice promotes narrative competence and enables alternative ways of interpreting the stories that are shared. This is particularly important when facilitating research across cultures. We use this presentation to share poetry we have written during our respective doctoral studies. In this presentation, we reflect upon our place and our role as researchers working in Papua New Guinea and in Aboriginal communities in Australia, respectively. We share our use of poetry as method and product of critical reflexivity and as a way to authenticate the stories and ‘data’ our doctoral works represent. By sharing poems with participants, and by taking back to participants our reflections through poetry, research findings were rendered more ‘readable’ in a number of ways and more accessible for a wider audience. Writing poetry became a way to process and synthesise our experiential learnings as novice researchers working in fields of research that can at times be deeply unsettling.

Appendix E: Statement of Ethics

In using a methodology that privileges a relational way of being and knowing the world, notions of ethics, ethical approval and consent becomes more complex and nuanced. I draw on the words of Prof Juanita Sherwood to inscribe my approach to the ethical concerns raised throughout inquiry as ‘*living ethics*’. I also draw on her advice that it is “*all ethics when you are doing Indigenous research*”. How I have interpreted this statement is that a written signature on a piece of paper obtained at one point in time, while a necessary element of the ethical approval process in research, is insufficient and in some ways inappropriate for the form of inquiry I have engaged in. Others have also used the term living ethics to refer to “*an ever-evolving process that begins with a commitment to embrace self authentically—emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. Living ethics is essentially about a way of being in participation with others and myself. ‘Living’ conveys a spirit and energy of inquiry and ‘ethics’ brings forth values, beliefs, and caring, which opens space to understand, accept, and be in relationship. This collaborative process of inquiry allows us to peel back the layers of experience to learn deeply about each other*” (McGinn, Shields, Manley-Casimir, Grundy and Fenton 2005, p. 560). To be able to develop this work, to create an ethical research space and to ‘learn deeply about each other’ informed consent became an ongoing and iterative process undertaken with those whose stories this work involves, even now.

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