Mapping Narratives from within a Visual Dialogue

On Common Ground
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About the Author

My name is Nick Freeburn and I proudly connect to the Bundjalung Nation and I have a long connection to the Casino area in which the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’ was filmed. I developed this booklet, ‘Mapping Narratives from within a Visual Dialogue’ as part of my postgraduate research for the Doctor of Indigenous Philosophies with Gnibi Wandarahn at Southern Cross University, Lismore. The research investigated problems that Aboriginal people encounter while residing in Casino, NSW.

I have worked in government and in non-government organisations, services and businesses for more than 30 years. I am a qualified chef, but instead of practising my trade, I gained degrees in such disciplines as; Indigenous Studies, Research Methods, Indigenous Research and Leadership, Social Science and Adult Education. I am a Justice of the Peace, has served on several Boards of Directors including community organisations such as Buyinbin Aboriginal Corporation and Social Futures. I had also served as a Councillor on the Ethics Council for the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples.

I travelled to Wellington in New Zealand to deliver my paper on ‘Developing Cultural Competence within Adult Community Education Standards’. I also travelled to Reykjavik and delivered a public lecture on ‘Indigenous story telling in Australia’ at the University of Iceland.
Through these stories we are deeply connected to our Country and to our families. We are also connected to the history of colonisation and its terrible impact on our homelands. We are reconnected by our survival and resilience”

Professor Norm Sheehan.

My cultural identity is what I feel in my heart, what I know inside and how I live out my philosophy in my life”

Dr Shawn Wilson

Introduction

As an introduction to this booklet, this section aims to give the reader an overview of the areas of relevancy of the research project. These areas were first identified in-depth by undertaking a preliminarily literature review and then a critical literature review. After having yarning circles with the community and community organisations, undertaking a thematic analysis, receiving feedback and attending meetings with my supervisors, it was apparent that these areas of relevancy will form the columns that this research was built upon. The identified themes had varied overtime, but eventually became the focal point of the research project and are now referred to as the areas of relevancy.

All research participants who appear in this project had agreed to be named.
Preface

This ‘Mapping Narratives from within a Visual Dialogue’ is an artefact that forms part of my studies for a Doctor of Indigenous Philosophies. It portrays the outcomes from my research as five narrative maps and a conclusion (Community Landscape) map. My project involved yarns with local people which were filmed to make a mini documentary titled ‘On Common Ground. These local role models had shared their knowledge and experience of what they perceive to be the issues in these five areas of relevancy:

- Colonisation
- Cultural Identity
- Underlying Issues
- Media, and
- Social issues

The Indigenous knowledge contained in this guide is used as a metaphor and is based on past practices. This derives from an Aboriginal way of being, doing and knowing and will hopefully promote and encourage an open conversation. These will be undertaken within a cultural safe space, without bias, or judgmental opinions and is built upon the foundation of mutual trust and respect.
# Contents

About the Author ........................................................................................................ iii

Introduction ................................................................................................................ iv

Preface .......................................................................................................................... v

The five areas of relevancy ......................................................................................... 1

Colonisation .................................................................................................................. 2
  Colonisation Key ........................................................................................................ 4
  Colonisation Map ....................................................................................................... 5

Identity .......................................................................................................................... 6
  Cultural Identity Key .................................................................................................. 8
  Cultural Identity Map ................................................................................................. 9

Underlying Issues ....................................................................................................... 10
  Underlying Issues Key ............................................................................................. 12
  Underlying Issues Map ............................................................................................ 13

Media ............................................................................................................................ 14
  Media Key .................................................................................................................. 16
  Media Map ................................................................................................................ 17

Social Issues ............................................................................................................... 18
  Media Key .................................................................................................................. 20
  Social Issues Map ..................................................................................................... 21

The Ripple Effect ........................................................................................................ 22

The cultural relation between the ripple effect and the community landscape map ...... 23

Community Landscape Map ..................................................................................... 25

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 34
  Level 1, 2 & 3: The top soil ....................................................................................... 34
  Level 4 and 5: The top soil and the soil just beneath the surface ............................. 36
  Level 6, 7 & 8: The bedrock .................................................................................... 38

Further Readings ......................................................................................................... 41

‘On Common Ground’ ............................................................................................. 42
The five areas of relevancy

**Colonisation**
The impact of colonisation can be felt in the Aboriginal community within contemporary society. This has forced the Aboriginal people to become disassociated through 'Invasion and Alienation', but reconnected through resilience. This can be examined in a variety of areas such as dispossession, invasion, trauma, disenfranchised and loss.

**Identity**
Identity is an important part of life for Aboriginal people as this comprises of who they are and where they come from. An example of this is Casino NSW and the role in which the whole community has. This includes family, pride, culture, connection and spirituality.

**Underlying Issues**
The underlying issues that affect Aboriginal people living in Casino, ranges from racism to negative attitudes. No one is born racist. A discussion was raised during the research and it was stated that these detrimental issues are being taught at the kitchen table as it derives from a ‘learnt behaviour’.

**Media**
The media can be one of the most influential forms of communication. It keeps you up to date with what is going on in the community and expands globally. This comes from a variety of shapes and forms such as film, television, print, and includes the latest trends, social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

**Social Issues**
Casino has a population of 10,500 people and with having a low population, a variety of social issues can stem from being such a small rural town. As part of the social issues, this can include welfare, anti-social behaviour, education, health problems, and a lack of resources and services which ultimately affects the community in general.
Colonisation

Invasion and Alienation

Title: The narrative map of colonisation is titled 'Invasion and Alienation'.

Colour: Some landscapes contained in the narratives of the colonisation map are yellow as this represents the Sun, which promotes and supports growth, but on the other end of the scale, it can also take lives and have a detrimental effect on people.

Circles: These represent the issues that were addressed in the research project as well as acknowledging that there are unknown issues in the background and they will be identified in additional longitudinal studies.
**Shape:** This narrative map is shaped by the responses to the question ‘how has colonisation affected Aboriginal people?’ from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

**Connection:** The connectors (lines) look like arms stretching out trying to grab what’s around it, attempting to stigmatize everything it can reach and touch, much like an alien invading a place that is already occupied.
Colonisation Key

Trauma
"Transgenerational trauma, that my forefathers went through and it has impacted upon even my grandkids" (Mary Torrens Bell).

Disrespect
"Well you know, we got alcohol, we got drugs, we got lack of respect, but we also got no resources here either" (Mary Torrens Bell).

Loss
"Land dispossession still continues these days" (Aunty Kath Walker).

Impact
"...it has only been 200 years now, compared to them being here thousands of years" (Robert Mustow).

Discovery
"I think it has a big effect of their culture and their lifestyle" (Robert Mustow).

Invasion
"I think in some ways we had probably forced a culture on some people for our own convenience" (Charlie Cox).

Disenfranchise
"I think of a cultural difference" (Charlie Cox).

Dispossession
"The dispossession of our land, everything, just everything, you know we were, everything was taken from us, so as a people it sort of, we don’t know who we are, we don’t know who we are as a people anymore" (Mary Torrens Bell).
Identity

It’s in our DNA

Title: The narrative map of identity is titled ‘It’s in our DNA’.

Colour: Some landscapes contained in the narratives of the cultural identity map are red as this represents the blood of Aboriginal people in remembering our ancestors, including the early conflict days within the colonial era.

Circles: These represent the issues that were addressed in the research project as well as acknowledging that there are unknown issues in the background and they will be identified in additional longitudinal studies.
**Shape:** This narrative map is shaped by the responses to the question ‘how important is cultural identity?’ from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

**Connection:** The connectors (lines) represent the strands that make up the compound of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). This is primarily based on that our identity is in us and forms the basis of who we are and where we come from. In others words our identity can be found within us and within our blood.
Cultural Identity Key

Cultural Identity Key

**Culture**

“Culture to me is everything, and I think it should be everything to everybody else” (Mary Torrens Bell).

**Heritage**

“My cultural identity is important to me, because I am proud of my heritage” (Aunty Kath Walker).

**Connection**

“Everyone is connected and if they’re not related their connected in some way or another” (Charlie Cox).

**Proud (Pride)**

“I am a proud Aboriginal, I believe in my culture” (Uncle Charles Moran).

**Family**

“I sit down like this and I’ll talk to my ancestors and asked them for guidance” (Uncle Charles Moran).

**Belonging**

“It’s a sense of belonging, a sense of pride” (Stewart (Kevin) Freeburn).

**Spirituality**

“I need my culture and I need to be connected to land, in order for me to continue this journey I am on” (Mary Torrens Bell).

**Importance**

“You just get caught up in the Western world that it just gets a bit too crazy and I need my culture...so it’s very important” (Mary Torrens Bell).
Cultural Identity Map
Underlying Issues

Learnt Behaviours

Title: The narrative map of underlying issues is titled as ‘Learnt Behaviours’.

Colour: Some landscapes contained in the narratives of the underlying issues map is blue as this represents the water and sky, which supports life and growth.

Circles: These represent the issues that were addressed in the research project as well as acknowledging that there are unknown issues in the background and they will be identified in additional longitudinal studies.
Shape: This narrative map is shaped by the responses to the question ‘what kind of underlying issues exist in Casino?’ from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

Connection: The connectors (lines) represent the underlying current that can be found in water and the air currents in the sky. You can’t see them, but you know they are there, somewhere. This is based on opinions and negative attitudes, no-one can see them, but you know they are there as they become obvious through actions and behaviours. Creating the understanding that no-one is born racist, being stereotypical or having negative attitudes without being influenced as that it is something you learn as you’re growing up. In hindsight, when looking at the map, the connectors are blue in colour and looks like an underlying current that can be found in water and air.
Underlying Issues Key

**Negative**

“They have had either a negatively interaction with an Aboriginal person or the community in general or they have had no interaction with an Aboriginal person or the community in general” (Jon Bell).

**Stereotype**

“They stereotype everybody you know, put them all in the one little basket and that’s not right” (Aunty Kath Walker).

**Opinions**

“The kids don’t always get an opportunity to form their own opinion because often the opinion is formed for them” (Charlie Cox).

**Attitudes**

“Just some of the attitudes of people you know when they are talking about or too other Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people you can pick up on their attitudes” (Aunty Kath Walker).

**Ingrain**

“I think too often we stereotype and I think that probably is ingrained in our community” (Charlie Cox).

**Racism**

“Following people around in the shops, Aboriginal people in shops think they are going to steal something” (Aunty Kath Walker).

**Being Taught**

“A lot of attitudes are learnt around the kitchen table” (Charlie Cox).

**Division**

“When you start dividing culture that is where the racism comes in” (Robert Mustow).
Underlying Issues Map
Media

Nothing is what it seems

**Title:** The visual map of the media is titled *Nothing is what it seems*.

**Colour:** Some landscapes contained in the narratives of the media map is green as this represents the grass and landscape, within the Bundjalung region. This includes the trees, grass, shrubbery, plants and includes all types greenery.

**Circles:** These represent the issues that were addressed in the research project as well as acknowledging that there are unknown issues in the background and they will be identified in additional longitudinal studies.
Shape: This narrative map is shaped by the responses to the question ‘how does the media portray Aboriginal people?’ from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

Connection: The connectors (lines) represent the media and how people see things. When looking at this visual, some people might see the connectors as pipes coming out of the ground or some others might be looking down into tunnels. This is based on the simple notion that not everyone may see the same thing. Therefore how the media tell stories are not always supported by facts and truths, but by the way people see things, through opinions, subjective attitudes or by being lost in translation.
Translation

“They might be asking men about women’s questions, which is totally taboo with Aboriginal people” (Uncle Charles Moran).

Achievement

“As far as media promoting Aboriginal people as such I don’t think they do enough” (Charlie Cox).

Promoting

“I’m not a great fan of the media. Because you know, it promotes itself” (Charlie Cox).

Negativity

“They never really show, there is so many positive things happening in our communities” (Mary Torrens Bell).

Critical

“A lot of the questions they are asking could be personal” (Uncle Charles Moran).

Ignorance

“I think also they haven’t been invested enough to think about who Aboriginal people are and sometimes sort of ignorance perpetuates ignorance so because this other group portrayed these people as this” (Jon Bell).

Improving

“I think it’s changing, it’s getting to be positive and supporting now” (Robert Mustow).

Sensationalism

“Too much about statistics, instead of putting these feels good things about achievement” (Charlie Cox).
Media Map

Media: ‘Nothing is what it seems’
Social Issues

Broken Spirit

Title: The visual map of social issues is titled ‘Broken Spirit’.

Colour: Some landscapes contained in the narratives of the social issues map is brown as this represents the land. The land is a cultural connection between both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that live within the Bundjalung nation. In hindsight, by living in shared space, we are all living ‘On Common Ground’.

Circles: These represent the issues that were addressed in the research project as well as acknowledging that there are unknown issues in the background and they will be identified in additional longitudinal studies.
**Shape:** This narrative map is shaped by the responses to the question ‘What are the social issues in Casino?’ from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

**Connection:** The connectors (lines) represent Aboriginal people and their spirits. This narrative map shows that Aboriginal people have had their spirits broken (as the lines are not connected, but are separated) as this stems from various issues that derives from past practices. This has now resulted in becoming a sustainable part of contemporary society.
“The main thing that happens in town here, is the drug and alcohol abuse that leads to anti-social behaviour” (Aunty Kath Walker).

“Employment, education, housing, health, training there’s load of issues” (Stewart (Kevin) Freeburn).

“Every town’s got social issues” (Robert Mustow).

“So if we can get, you know, more employment, I think the more that any culture has to do with another culture is more understanding, but when you start dividing culture, that is where the racism comes in” (Robert Mustow).

“Even beyond whatever racial politics there are, ultimately I think are about a lack of opportunity, not just for black kids, but for white kids as well” (Jon Bell).

“At the same time, I think that is there is an element that we are all on the bottom together” (Jon Bell).

“I think we need to do more around connecting with our people again, especially our young ones” (Mary Torrens Bell).

“A lot of social issues, sometimes people need to take a bit of responsibility for their own future” (Robert Mustow).
Social Issues: ‘Broken Spirit’
The Ripple Effect

Using the landscape of Casino NSW as a metaphor, the ripple effect can be culturally interpreted as colonisation having an impact upon a Country that alienated the original habitants, the Aboriginal people. This was through government policies, laws and negative attitudes that led to the Aboriginal people becoming alienated in a country in which they were born and raised.

The ripple effect is a metaphor that was developed based on the landscape of Casino NSW in 1948. This first occurred during a time when practices had included assimilation and segregation policies. The data was retrieved from the Annual Report of the Aborigines Welfare Board 1948. In the report it had discussed local issues such as discovery, pride, improving, importance, heritage, ignorance, racism, ingrain and being taught, disrespect and having no resources.

The ripples that have symbols in the middle are issues have identified based on the findings contained in the Annual Report of the Aborigines Welfare Board 1948.
The cultural relation between the ripple effect and the community landscape map

This had changed the traditional positioning of the landscape by examining what had affected the Bundjalung Country and its natural surroundings. Colonisation is what had impacted upon Aboriginal people and the landscape. This effect can still be experienced in today’s society by discussing how the ripple effect was first recorded in 1948. Particular comments made in the Aboriginal Welfare Report had discussed the Casino All blacks and their effect on the Casino community. These attitudes and experiences is what created a way to understand how the ripple effect contributed to the varying landscape from a metaphorical perspective.

This can be translated by looking at Colonisation as the first impact and as it travelled down into the ground, it hit bedrock and forced other issues to become a ripple effect. Additional variables contributed to other ripples forming and from that the ripple effect started spreading and causing disturbances in the landscape which primarily affected the community. As the roads and river are still in the same position, they are present in both ‘The Ripple Effect’ and ‘The Community Landscape Map’. The Community Landscape Map discusses the location of each symbol in the soil and how they can be found in various levels and depths of the landscape (which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section).

The ripples without any symbols in the middle are issues that have not been identified yet, but will be able to be recognised through other longitudinal studies.
Community Landscape Map

These circles represent the five areas of relevancy that forms the foundation of the research project.

All of these areas can be found in the central business district of Casino NSW. This is why these circles form the centre of the Conclusion (Community Landscape) Map.
These circles represent the residents of Casino NSW.
The white lines represent the different roads that lead in and out of Casino NSW. The blue lines represent the Richmond River that flows through Casino NSW.
The white lines represent the top soil (level 1, 2 & 3) that can be found in the landscape of Casino NSW.

The top soil is always shifting and changing much like the community relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.
This is representative of people living in the Casino community who are being influenced within 1 or more of the 5 areas of relevancy.

The 2 footprint trails walking away from the centre of town represent Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. This is a metaphor for cultural protocols and the traditional practices that Aboriginal people adhere to within contemporary society.

The 7 footprint trails walking towards the centre represent non-Aboriginal people.

This is a representation of how a small community can influence and affect Aboriginal people in contemporary society. In hindsight, it’s similar to how a majority group tries to influence a minority group by making them confirm to their ways of being.
The brown lines represent the top soil that is just above or beneath the surface (level 4 and 5) of the ground in Casino NSW.
The yellow and brown circles together are housing estates and is where a high number of Aboriginal people live. The black represents level 6, 7 & 8 (bedrock).

The two yellow and brown circles represent the effect of colonisation and social issues that are present in the 2 estates.
The green and blue circles represent 4 housing estates that are expanding, along with high fences and hedges surrounding their properties. The 2 blue circles represent the industrial estates.

The blue lines represent underlying issues which derive from being taught, stereotyping and division. The green lines represent the media and how they portray Aboriginal people.

The map on the following page combines all the issues outlined in these diagrams, representing an interpretation of Casino’s landscapes from an Aboriginal social researcher’s perspective.
Conclusion

As a reader when looking at the landscape, what do you see? As a community member when looking at the landscape, what do you see? From my own perspective, as a social researcher and community member, I can see the relationship between the land and the community, the community’s relation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and as a metaphor, how the findings impact upon the Country and the environment in which this research had taken place.

In analysing the community landscape map, it consists of different components (and colours) that relate to one and another in various ways. The conclusion map incorporates both the data and research findings that had derived from the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’.

Level 1, 2 & 3: The top soil

On these levels the issues are located above the ground (or at the forefront) and what is known in the community (these can be viewed from the symbols in and around the inside of the brown lines) as these issues that are openly discussed in the community, therefore they can be found above the ground and include conversations around loss, dispossession, culture, spirituality, stereotyping, opinions and ignorance.

However, the issues that were found to overlap were trauma and health, family and negativity, critical and employment. In contrast this means that health is caused by trauma, there is negativity (can also be referred to as lateral violence) among families. The findings also include employment opportunities are critical and needs to be improved.
This diagram represents level 1, 2 & 3.
Level 4 and 5: The top soil and the soil just beneath the surface

On these levels are the issues that are located above and/or just beneath the surface (in the top soil of the ground). These are topics that can be a little uncomfortable and/or highly controversial at times, when discussing about them within a community context (these are the symbols placed on the thicker outer brown lines).

The issues that overlap includes impact, negative and anti-social (behaviours), mistreatment, connection and education, disenfranchise and welfare, belonging and housing. In differentiating the correlation between these findings, in can be interpreted as the impact of a negative influence derives from anti-social behaviours. Mistreatment breaks the connection for Aboriginal people and seeps down into lifestyle which ultimately affects their learning environment.

Aboriginal people had their rights taken away, which lead to Aboriginal people becoming involved in the welfare field, through past practices and contemporary policies. The final overlapping issue is based on Aboriginal people sense of belonging and how they are having a more difficult time with trying to find housing in one particular place.

Other issues that were identified include attitudes (in most cases are negative), achievement (there needs to be more recognition in the media), translation (stories are lost) and sensationalism (tends to report on issues that incite an interest).
This diagram represents level 4 and 5.
Level 6, 7 & 8: The bedrock

On these levels are the issues can be found below the ground (or in the background) and goes all the way down to bedrock. These issues are not discussed in the community (as these are embedded deep in the ground and therefore are not wanted to be seen or discussed).

The areas that overlap include ingrained (racism) and improving, importance and racism, discovery and no resources, division and disrespect. In examining these further, some issues are ingrained (such as racism) in the community, but they are improving.

Cultural identity is important for Aboriginal people and that racism does exist. The discovery of Australia still affects the Aboriginal community, while at the same time, it has led to having no resources to access for the whole community in general.

The final issue that exists in Casino is that there is division and disrespect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Other issues that were identified in the research includes heritage, being proud to be an Aboriginal person, the media does not promote positivism enough when reporting on Aboriginal issues and that the majority of the local issues are being taught around the kitchen table.
The black represents level 6, 7 & 8 (the bedrock)

The map on the following page depicts the full Community Landscape Map with the inclusion of the symbols.
Further Readings


‘On Common Ground’

Synopsis

The mini documentary is titled ‘On Common Ground’ and consists of seven local people as they share their opinions about what they understand to be contemporary issues that affect Aboriginal people while living in Casino.

During the making of the documentary, local people were asked about their opinions in regards to the contemporary issues that affect Aboriginal people that currently reside in Casino NSW. The discussion is around five areas of relevancy which includes colonisation, cultural identity, underlying issues, the media and social issues.

The local people who were selected for this study were identified as role models and are active in the community in one way or another. The people that had contributed to this mini documentary included two Aboriginal Elders, a vice chairperson of an Aboriginal organisation, both the current and former mayors of Casino, a filmmaker that is contributing to the film industry and an active community member working to make a difference in the community.

In this mini documentary, the participants share their own experiences, thoughts and personal stories in an attempt to raise awareness about the contemporary issues that affect the local Aboriginal people residing in Casino NSW.
Mapping Narratives from within a Visual Dialogue represents the results of the research project ‘Investigating issues that affect Aboriginal people living in Casino’, titled ‘Living on Common Ground in Two Worlds’. The narrative maps ‘Colonisation, Cultural Identity, Underlying Issues, Media, Social Issues, the Community Landscape Map and the mini documentary ‘On Common Ground’ are all associated through a cultural connection.

It is essential to read the booklet and looking at the narrative maps, with an open mind. Also the reader must be respectful of the contents, findings and writings as they relate to Indigenous Knowledge, community, culture, beliefs, traditions and practices of Aboriginal people living in Casino NSW.

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