

ARTICLE

Encountering Literacy with/in Country

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Abstract

This article traces encounters with Country to reorient understandings of what it means to be literate. As a settler Australian educator, I am led by the leadership of First Nations voices that seek to challenge the dominance of the European schooling system. I map three stories of teaching and learning on Country, passing through the stories as analytical sites to re/view how students and teachers can reconfigure ways of speaking, listening, reading and writing in order to connect to Country, and therefore community. The research is approached through postqualitative inquiry, understanding stories as entanglements of humans and more-than-humans that surface tensions, possibilities and provocations for literacy in environmental education. This article moves beyond literacy-as-acquisition to that of literacy-as-relationality with/in the places we live and learn. Storied reflective practice of what it means to be Country-literate is proposed as a method of professional development for non-Indigenous educators and their contexts.

Keywords: Assemblage; Country; decolonising education; literacy; postqualitative inquiry; storytelling

The importance being Country literate

My strength
The strength of that land
You can feel it in yourself, you belong there.

(Rose Bird et al., 2011, 135)

I am interested in the relationship between Country and literacy: what it means to be literate with/in the places we live and learn, and what being Country-literate can *do* to foster a greater sense of connection between humans and the more-than-human, particularly within Australia's education system. For First Nations Australians, "Country" recognises an entity that is more than geography and "includes all living things and the stories, songs, dances, and responsibilities that go with sustaining an environment in which everything is interconnected" (Brearly, 2015, 114). Country therefore inherently denotes connection: an inseparability or "assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that refuses a binary of self and place. To be Country literate is to therefore engage in practices of reading, writing, speaking and listening that respond to our inherent connectedness with the Country on which education takes place.

This interest in Country-based literacy has synchronicity with place-based education more broadly, which is seen to hold political, social, and ethical potential for renewing relationships between learners, communities, and the environments they inhabit (Gruenewald, 2003; Israel, 2012). Environmental education has previously engaged with possibilities of place and belonging

(Birdsall & White, 2020; Clarke & McPhie, 2020; Sobel & Orion, 2005; Yemini et al., 2025), however this article will remain with the terminology of “Country” in recognition of a living, sovereign, and more-than-human ontology. As articulated by Bawaka Country et al. (2016), Country-led relational ways of knowing and being treat space/place as emergent co-becoming. That is, we are not separate from Country; our education and identities are formed through our ongoing relations with it.

As a teacher-researcher, I am bound by curriculum frameworks such as the Australian National Curriculum’s cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ACARA, 2026). This mandate attends to First Nations Australians’ physical and spiritual “special connection to Country/Place” (ibid., n.p), although I am led by Fricker (2025) in my interest in the potential of education to extend this connection to Country for all Australians as a decolonial “opportunity to re-evaluate our view of Country and our relationship with it” (p. 3). As such, a guiding principle in this article is to be led by the leadership of Indigenous voices that seek to challenge the European schooling system that has been dominant since colonisation, and to recentre “Country-based pedagogical practices that ha[ve] supported learning for millennia” (Fricker, 2024, 163). This practice – A form of truth-listening as a settler response to Indigenous truth-telling (O’Mara & Auld, 2025) – is one such manifestation of what it means to practise literacy with/in Country and why it matters.

There is an important body of research that offers frameworks and insights for working with Country in education (e.g. Burgess et al., 2022; Karukiyalu Country et al., 2020; Spillman et al., 2022, 2023). Similarly, the research literature has also sought to expand literacies such as physical literacy (Peters, 2025; Riley et al. 2023), reading the landscape (Stewart, 2008) and place-conscious critical literacy (Comber, 2015; Gruenewald, 2008). While literacy education is typically conceived as practices of reading, writing, listening and speaking about texts (e.g. Farrell et al., 2022), determining what practices count and what constitutes a text have less consensus. Given that place-responsive pedagogy seeks to reconfigure relationships with place, it necessarily does so through literacy practices. Therefore in order to untether these practices from a humanist, western-centric logic (Truman et al., 2021), this article examines how literacy emerges with/in Country, not solely through human application.

Taking a storied approach as an Indigenous and non-Indigenous method of learning (Jukes, Clarke & McPhie 2022; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Somerville et al., 2023), I map three stories of being a teacher and student on Country, attuning to the stories as they surface tensions, possibilities and provocations for literacy in environmental education. Through attending to ruptures, I look to new possibilities for how educators and learners can attend to belonging with/in Country. In doing so, the article invites a rethinking of literacy as situated and relational – reshaping how literacy might be understood and taught in line with First Nations literacy practices.

Researcher positioning

Phillips and Bunda (2018) note that “In Aboriginal communities, naming oneself through defining, in Aboriginal vernacular, who is your mob and where does that mob come from, what country, is protocol.” (p. xi). I am a settler Australian, born on the unceded lands of the Bpangerang people in North-East Victoria and now living on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country in Naarm/Melbourne. My patrilineal ancestry in Australia has been traced back six generations to immigrants from County Clare, Ireland. When I visited Ireland as an eighteen-year-old, I will never forget how it felt to have the customs official look at the surname on my Australian passport and say to me, *Welcome home*. But Ireland is not my home. My home, though steeped in a legacy of colonialism, is Australia. And although I am non-mob, I have a bond to nurture with Country, and a duty as an educator to help young people do the same.

The work of Fricker (2025) calls for non-mob to be welcomed to Country as a way of decolonising environmental education. Fricker frames this in terms of helping students “learn about Country and their place within it” in order to teach them “about themselves and their communities.” (p. 2). I read Fricker alongside the work of Haraway (2016), who responds to the present troubling times through a call to “make kin in lines of inventive connection” (p. 1). This is a practice of recognising kin (including the kinship between the human and more-than-human) beyond western ontologies of separation, and as a fundamental response-ability of care.

This article is further informed by critical self-reflection (Proud & Morgan, 2021), noting the need to be cognisant of the “social, cultural and historical influences on how [I] see the world” (p. 76), including exposing myself to the limits of the schooling that shapes my thinking. I do not draw on my own stories to centre myself, but in recognition of their capacity to reveal the structures that shape enduring colonial narratives (Phillips, 2020). Importantly, the centring of Country in belonging is not a romanticised notion of reconnecting with nature (Jukes et al., 2022). Rather, I look to rupture notions of belonging as a term of static comfort, extending it to include implication and redress towards Country and its First Nations peoples. Under western neoliberal logic, there is a dominant narrative of Australia’s declining literacy results (Larsen, 2025) that can sideline institutions’ willingness to listen to other ways of valuing and practising literacy. Yet attending to literacy with/in Country is not an alternative to “either/or” mentalities. It is a fundamental reckoning of what and who literacy is for.

Theoretical framings

In this article I draw on postqualitative inquiry in order to move beyond liberal educational traditions of interpretation/ representation (Hart & White, 2022). St Pierre (2021) frames this approach as a methodology that begins “with a philosophy of immanence,” (p. 164) in that knowledge exists within relations, encounters and processes. Working with postqualitative inquiry focuses attention on the entanglements that shape how literacy emerges with/in Country, resisting place as merely context, and the researcher as having assured and sole agency. As a settler-Australian, this is particularly resonant because it refuses knowledge as something that can be extracted to yield seemingly objective truths.

Through the stories that follow, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of assemblage provides an ontological grounding in attending to the interconnections of human and more-than-humans, acknowledging that these are constituted through capacities to affect and be affected. That is, literacy emerges through relationships (and absences of relationships) with places, history, stories, bodies and institutions. In this way, I align with other recent environmental education research that has worked with assemblage theory to attend to the response-ability of researchers and place-based education in co-constituting the world (Riley et al., 2023; Riley & White, 2019), and in interrupting dominant education assemblages (Mannion, 2020).

I read the stories through Jackson and Mazzei’s (2023) concept of “thresholding” as a way of thinking *with* the events and passing through them multiple times in order to attend to “what sparks, jolts, and puts thought in motion” (p. 3). Writing is not treated as a finalised representation of events, but as part of the assemblage itself. Passing through the threshold of the stories becomes a process of ongoing entanglement through (re)turning and (re)membering (Barad, 2017), being open to inconsistencies and resisting a veneer of finalised assuredness. Further, the research literature that is read alongside the stories is also encountered as part of the assemblage, entering into dialogue with the stories. This methodological orientation resonates with First Nations ways of knowing (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011): a “how” rather than a “what” approach to storying that is predicated on responsibility, love and care (Bawaka Country, 2023). Such a methodology does not seek resolutions but rather dwells with the tensions that impact how literacy with/in Country comes to matter.

Story 1: Encountering absence and implication with/in Country

I go walking on Kaluna Island, a traditional women's island formed by the Poodumbia (King) River and one of its anabranches on Bpangerang Country in regional Victoria. The island is accessible by footbridge when the river isn't flowing too high. It is filled with red river gums that are over 300 years old and scar trees of cradles that tell the story of Bpangerang women who birthed their babies and cooked up eels from the dam to nourish themselves. I was born in the nearby public hospital, setting into motion my own entanglement with the land and its stories even before I was conscious of it.

Signage at the entry to Kaluna Island, which is claimed as crown land, does not mention its Bpangerang connections. Instead, my knowledge of the island comes via stories shared by a community Elder who walked the island with the local Landcare group and wrote up a report that includes documentation of the island's history, flora and fauna. Passing through the threshold of reviewer feedback, I was asked to consider the appropriateness of including my time on Kaluna Island in this article and whether I had permission to be there. The question unsettled the narrative I had been constructing about locating a sense of belonging with/in Country. Like the rest of Victoria, the near-erasure of Bpangerang people under colonial violence complicates what "permission" can mean. The Bpangerang Uncle who walked the island with the Landcare group did not frame it as a prohibited space, but this nonetheless poses a deeper question of what it means to walk on Country as a settler who is implicated in dispossession. Country leaves me in tension: wanting to write with its stories while remaining attentive to the ethical complications of doing so. For non-mob in particular, attuning to this tension offers one pedagogical entry point for listening to Country.

The connectedness I feel to my hometown's history, beauty and power is a marker of my adult life and constitutes knowledge that is separate from anything I learnt in my formal education during primary or secondary school. For years, I knew nothing of its stories and so was illiterate to Country, with no capacity to attend to the spiritual and ancestral energies of place that can counter stories of human (settler) exceptionalism (Malone et al., 2020). The extent of my formal education was such that I wasn't even aware of my own illiteracy. Despite a 1989 government policy commitment to "provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures" (Department of Education Employment & Training, 1989, 2), I don't remember learning anything of the sort during my schooling across the 1990s and 2000s. No doubt my own teachers' limited preparation in this area reflected broader systemic silences within Australian education (Rose, 2012).

When I walked on Country as a school student, I experienced brittle brown grass and grey-bare gums that I framed negatively against the lush European woods of Enid Blyton's *Faraway Tree* stories, a staple of my childhood reading diet. This saw me positioning my home country as a place of *lacking* in terms of what it could offer my imagination and cultural compass. It is for this reason that First Nations author Tony Birch (2025, n.p) stresses the need for Aboriginal stories to be told as a way of avoiding a cultural terra nullius. He argues that "If young, non-Aboriginal people are not growing up exposed to, and learning about, Aboriginal storytelling and Aboriginal history, they also have a terrible deficiency to deal with in their own life." The stories I consumed were nearly all Euro-centric. The hills of the nearby Warby Ranges held the story of the infamous Irish outlaw Ned Kelly and his gang but were otherwise a-historical and inanimate to me.

Country may be "our first and most important teacher" (Fricker, 2025, 5), but without formal education guiding learning with Country, there is no capacity to engage it as a co-constructor of knowledge and identity. Belonging may be imagined in relation to land, but as Moreton-Robinson (2015) demonstrates, colonial understandings of place are structured through possession and absence, rather than reciprocity. The Gay'wu Group of Women (2019) teach that "you don't need to look somewhere else for answers, to go away and explore" (p. 111): a relationship *with* Country, and a meaningful learning *from* Country is always there to be experienced. While this affirms belonging with/in Country as an always-was potentiality, if its teachings are not located in

mainstream education, the capacity to read Country differently is positioned as specialised knowledge rather than a foundational literacy practice.

Story 2: Encountering literacy with/in Country

Part of my teacher training was conducted in an Aboriginal community in central Australia. This placement was a programme run through the university that facilitated small numbers of pre-service teachers to do their rounds in communities such as the one I visited. As is representative of the teacher workforce, the cohort selected for the programme were non-Indigenous, and the programme was a western delivery of education to the communities. Arriving in Garramilla/Darwin in the Northern Territory and then driving hours by car, the community was referred to and understood as remote. However, following Prout Quicke (2020), this concept is a settler-colonial spatial logic that reads such communities as inherently remote, rather than being remote relative to western conceptions of geographic and cultural centrality. Guenther and Osborne (2020), for example, use the term Red Dirt schooling to reframe this colonial reading of space.

A diary entry from the time recollects my arrival on the first night:

Before we had quite reached the streetlights marking the small grid of [the community], we stopped the car in the darkness and got out for a while to look at the stars. The Southern Cross was hard to find because there were so many other stars seemingly just beyond reach that you don't ever see in the city. We stayed there for a while just looking into the sky. I counted four shooting stars.

It occurs to me now, in a way that it didn't at the time, that this Country I had positioned as remote was in fact central on its own terms, and that the density of the night sky exceeded the spatial logic of centrality that I had brought with me. Literacy here was an assemblage of spatial perception, colonial language (the Southern Cross), and misrecognition of remoteness. Country was teaching, but my literacy education had not sufficiently prepared me to read with it.

In the morning, the Country revealed itself – red earth stretching out beyond the shelter of a long snake hill. Once in the classroom (a single portable for the entire secondary cohort), learning barriers presented themselves. Microphones were used to offset the hearing difficulties which affected the majority of children. Despite best intentions from the teacher, I soon learnt my first word in the community language (“boring”). I remember the heavy scent of mice that clogged the back of your throat upon entering the classroom – the plague that the community was experiencing seemed as fitting a metaphor for colonial-induced damage as you could hope for. English literacy lessons that included worksheets featuring culturally distant concepts such as microchips and premiums on vintage cars sat uneasily within this context. The broken interactive whiteboard on the wall, alongside a sticker that proclaimed, “Public schools: Worth funding well,” seemed to symbolise both the aspirations and deficiencies that shape Red Dirt schooling (Beresford et al., 2012).

I went for a walk one afternoon with some of my students to the dry creek bed to watch them do backflips and go digging for bush onions. Afterwards I sat with them while they explained family connections in the community. A stick was used to draw lines in the red dirt, linking one family member to another. When the drawing got too big it was wiped clean and the learning began again. I had learnt that the community didn't like too much direct eye-contact, so the mediator of the earth provided space for them to talk in a way that I hadn't experienced in the classroom. Sitting on Country with these students constituted a dialogic and reciprocal teaching moment (Edwards-Groves & Davidson, 2020) and an example of where Country moves beyond the context of the learning to become its core. Rather than mastery of decontextualised symbols, literacy was enacted as Country-mediated meaning-making: the stick was a writing tool, talk emerged through Country, the sand was a temporary text, and kinship lines were living archives

that were renewed through the wiping of sand. This encounter destabilised literacy as something to “grasp” and reframed it as movement. More than this, the body moving on Country with the stick was inseparable from the story being co-constituted. Literacy here exceeded the traditional notion of the individual (Barad, 2007). Stepping into this threshold – both on the dry creek bed and conceptually – literacy moved away from curriculum delivery, English worksheets and content mastery, and was instead encountered as relational mapping, embodied listening and Country-mediated reading.

It is important to acknowledge that the school was working to bridge community educational priorities with their institutional mandates. There were local cultural aids in the classrooms, afternoon bush-learning with Elders, community-building initiatives and apprentice-based practical learning for senior students. What unfolded in that dry creek bed was not an alternative literacy programme. It was a different ontology of literacy – one in which meaning is read, spoken, and listened to in relation to Country (Bishop et al., 2014; Martin, 2008). In this encounter, literacy did not simply transmit knowledge; it reoriented attention, making visible the interconnections between human and more-than-humans, and challenging deficit framings of learning in Red Dirt communities (Guenther & Osborne, 2020). In this encounter, literacy was reconfigured as relational, embodied, and inseparable from Country.

Story 3: Encountering curriculum with/in Country

In this final story I examine an experience of working to engage Country-as-curriculum, this time tracing possibilities and tensions as an experienced teacher working in an urban schooling setting. This experience was prompted by the introduction of the 2023–2027 Victorian Certificate of Education Literature study design, which included a unit of study titled “Voices of Country.” The study design states that students will “consider the interconnectedness of place, culture and identity through the experiences, texts and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (VCAA, 2023, 14). The curriculum thus signals a commitment to what Martin-Booran Mirraboopu (2003, 211) frames as “matters pertaining to the protection and preservation of [First Nations] country and its Entities and the protection and preservation of [First Nations] Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing.”

Prior to teaching the course for the first time, I wrote an email to a network of Victorian literature teachers, part of which is included below:

I have to admit – when this new Study Design was released, I fed back to VCAA [Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority] that even though I support teaching Indigenous texts, I wasn't sure about a mandate to teach them at Year 11 Literature, as a school may be integrating Indigenous texts at several other points in the 7-12 curriculum. However now that I've spent more time looking at the Study Design I really like the specific direction this Outcome is asking us to take with not only what is taught but how. That's what I've tried to incorporate into the attached PPT with incorporation of Indigenous pedagogy and the role of learning and connection to place . . .

Passing through this threshold once more, the first thing that strikes me is my reference to initial hesitation with the curriculum mandate. The curriculum acted within the assemblage of institutional schooling – text selection, compliance, curricular sequencing, pedagogy – exerting its agency and limiting my own. (Re)viewing this moment, the agency of curriculum can be experienced as imposition and invitation. It can feel like constraint on teacher responsiveness to local contexts, but at the same time can act as a catalyst to overcome hesitancy in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture – a hesitancy that is rooted in affect, knowledge gaps, and structural constraints (Andersen et al., 2025). In this case, curriculum compelled me to research the Country on which I taught (a metropolitan government school in

Naarm/Melbourne). This was a task I would likely never have undertaken without the curriculum mandate. Literacy-policy thus propelled me to rethink my practice, complicating curriculum mandate as purely colonial imposition.

Introducing my class to the Voices of Country unit, I organised an excursion to the nearby Maribyrnong River, a site known as Pipemakers Park on Wurundgeri Country. The aim was for students to learn about First Nations perspectives within their local community (Harrison, 2011) and to situate these experiences within the broader historical and social legacies of settler colonialism (Seawright, 2014; Tuck et al., 2014). My attempt to engage with the “voices” of Country took the form of researching a local heritage study and bringing archival voices into proximity with students’ embodied presence on the land. One example is below – an extract from an Aboriginal man¹, Steve Johnson, who was interviewed for the project given that he was a member of the Stolen Generation who spent his adolescence on the same Country as the students:

I would escape from the boy’s home and go to various places. In as far as Maribyrnong is concerned I remember I would go to the Pipeworks and spend time with others in the area. The people that I meet there were travellers, other Aboriginal people and under-privileged people. I use to sleep in the pipes with others to escape the rain or the cold. (Maribyrnong City Council, 1999, 103)

Sitting on the bank of the river in a circle, the students and I discussed the excerpts from the heritage study, noticing the overlap and dissonance of the connections to Country with their own. One limitation of the excursion was the absence of consultation with the local Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong community in its planning or facilitation, an absence that was shaped by institutional structures such as timetabling, budget, and limited opportunity to build community relationships. While the archival documentation of voices is understood as having ongoing storied presence with/in Country, there was a risk that students would perceive such voices as remaining archived. While structural forces do not inhibit such community consultation, they condition the thinking, prioritisation and practicality of everyday schooling. The unit’s subsequent study of the poetry of Samuel Wagan Watson, a contemporary Munanjali poet, was therefore a crucial but partial follow up. Nonetheless, my Country-responsive literacy must encompass a reckoning with the limitations that can arise from individual efforts. The partiality of this encounter is not resolved or absolved here, but I hope that it will resonate with readers in their own contexts, as it continues to in mine.

After reading the excerpts, the students had time to move through the Country on their own terms as they processed, bodily, what had been discussed. They were informed that this experience would be drawn upon to later write and perform their own Acknowledgement of Country. This was a slow pedagogy (Payne & Wattchow, 2008) that deliberately resisted the neoliberal push to cover content quickly. The introduction to the unit, which could have otherwise been covered in a five minute teacher explanation, was instead expanded to a half-day excursion. Moreover, its pedagogy was experience rather than delivery. Certainly, the valuing of such slow pedagogies could pave the way for future First Nations consultation and therefore strengthening of relationships with community and Country. As it was, one outcome of the excursion was discomfort. Time was constrained by the school bell schedule and the walk to and from the park, and students were disoriented by the change in style; I could see some of them walking through the park and wondering what exactly they were supposed to be *doing*. To move students outside of the classroom and into dialogue with Country does not automatically dissolve dominant understandings of literacy, but it does unsettle the assumption that literacy unfolds independently of where it is taught. Country-responsive-literacy in this story was not an excursion. It was an

¹No further details of Johnson’s Country were provided in the report.

altering of relations, emerging under constraint and lingering as a question of how to read and listen differently.

(In)conclusions

Rather than reporting on conclusions, this article maps future possibilities, inviting both storyteller and reader to grapple with ways of knowing and living alongside Country as ongoing commitments of care and reciprocity. Given that such possibilities are open-ended, I follow Riley et al. (2023) in naming this paper's section "(in)conclusions": a consideration of the implications that reside in the stories' thresholds, and those that may continue beyond them. Massumi (2002) positions the work of such postqualitative research as leaving the reader with a provocation: "what in the world to do with it all . . . That's when the experimentation begins. Then the openness of the system will spread" (p. 19). In this sense, the text, like all stories, remains open to interpretation, continuing a conversation that exceeds any single author or reading.

The stories in this article make visible the ways in which non-mob educators such as myself are implicated in the status quo, accounting for the impacts of colonial education for humans and more-than-humans (Poelina et al., 2023). It is important to reflect on such stories as they not only describe, but produce identities for teachers, students and communities (Somerville, 2015). By moving from reflection to action in supporting young people to become attuned to their literacy practices with/in Country, educators can empower young people to become fully literate individuals. The importance of reflexive practice as a starting point for educators is not an abstract ideal; it is a way of orienting one's teaching: asking whose voices are present, whose are absent, and how Country shapes what counts as knowledge. Following Bellingham (2025, 371) "an ethics of care and accountability regarding place and history" emerges from the modelling of practitioners who examine the origins and erasures contained within their own stories. Such examination is warranted for all educators in reckoning with the way they are shaped by literacy frameworks and enact literacy practices, and has particular relevance for teacher-education and professional development.

The Gay'wu Group of Women (Burarrwanga et al., 2019) explain that "we don't have an identity without Country. We are all connected. Every contour on the land, every rock, every water, is connected to us" (p. 149). Understanding literacy through this relational ontology shifts its meaning from a set of discrete skills and knowledge toward attentiveness to response-ability. This article thus dwells with the persistence of social and ecological disconnection in contemporary society, despite such First Nations knowledges, and reckons with colonial education's culpability in reinforcing such disconnectedness. Attending to Country as a literacy practice highlights teacher practice as relational, and requiring ongoing ethical work.

While postqualitative inquiry aims to de-centre the human subject in research (St. Pierre, 2021), this work nonetheless has implications for educators who will carry these stories and their provocations into their own contexts. Such attentiveness aligns with calls for culturally responsive teaching and culturally nourishing curricula (Delphine et al., 2024), but also requires the structural support of curriculum endorsement, time, autonomy and trust if teachers are to slow down and engage with Country as curriculum and practise ways of reading, writing, speaking and listening with/in it. This is not a matter of sweeping reform. As this paper has demonstrated, it can begin with small shifts: situating texts in relationship with Country, making connections with local histories and contemporary voices, dwelling with discomfort, and broadening the scope of whose stories are told and how.

This paper re-situates dominant understandings of literacy within environmental education by reading it alongside Country-centred ways of knowing. It responds to Fricker's (2025) assertion that "by considering and engaging with First Nations voices and perspectives in the environmental education space, we all open the opportunity to re-evaluate our view of Country and our

relationship with it” (p. 3). It is guided by Fricker’s line of thinking by centring a commitment to be Country-literate, and provokes educators to ask of themselves: Does my understanding of literacy encompass First Nations ways of being and knowing? Does my teaching, enacted through literacy pedagogies, guide students to connect to Country, and therefore community?

To encounter literacy with/in Country is to re-evaluate what and who literacy is for, how it can be practised, and to read and listen alongside First Nations voices and perspectives. Through tracing literacy assemblages with/in stories of Country-based teaching and learning, this article has mapped some of the tensions and possibilities that arise when conventional, outcomes-driven models of literacy encounter Country-centred ways of knowing. Across these stories, literacy emerges not as a neutral construct, but as an entanglement of curriculum, pedagogy, place, and history. This is not a call to abandon existing models of literacy, but to re-situate them within environmental education in ways that render their limits, and their possibilities, visible.

Encountering literacy with/in Country may best be understood as invitation. While the research began as a question of belonging it concludes with reciprocity. Belonging is not only about feeling welcomed, but recognising what is asked of us in return. While conventional literacy practices enable expression and understanding, their value is diminished if they do not cultivate response-ability: an attentiveness to how we are implicated with/in the places we learn. To be Country literate then, is a disposition. It is a commitment to practising literacy as an assemblage of human, Country and story. In making this assertion, I offer a contribution to a continuing story – one that remains open to discomfort, revision and possibility for future schooling and stewardship. It is a call to read, write, speak and listen with care with/in the Country that sustains us.

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