Finding Common Ground:
Narratives, Provocations and Reflections from the 40 Year Celebration of Batchelor Institute

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Foreword

Batchelor Institute, in its many iterations over the last forty years, remains an iconic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander provider on the Australian educational landscape.

From its humble beginnings in 1964 as an annex of Kormilda College, Batchelor Institute has risen to become Australia’s only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dual sector tertiary education and research provider. As such it holds a unique place in the university and vocational education and training space. More so, it holds a special place in the hearts and minds of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have either studied or been connected to Batchelor.

The Australian educational scene would not be complete without a tertiary institution that is founded upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beliefs and cultural understandings and is able to interpret a western education system in a manner such that both are ultimately so intertwined that neither loses creditability. Rather the strengths of both result in a unique learning environment that is not only culturally safe but results in real outcomes: this is what we at Batchelor define as ‘both-ways’.

The stories, personal commentary and scholarly writings contained in this book provide a context for Batchelor’s future by defining and describing our past and articulating the dreams for the future. They also provide a challenge to the Institute as it moves into a future where tertiary education can be accessed wherever you are able to connect your laptop to the internet. Consequently, ensuring that language and culture are kept ‘front and center’ will be of paramount importance.

Batchelor Institute has provided training and education that has resulted in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gaining the skills, knowledge and understandings that have improved and enriched their lives and livelihoods. The work Batchelor has undertaken over its forty years existence is nation building and changed the lives of people.

The next forty years will, in my view, see Batchelor Institute become firmly bedded into the Australian university scene as its next university. The Institute is already a ‘Table A’ higher education provider, our research capability continues to be enhanced and our further education provision grounded in capacity building training. Batchelor now is well positioned, well-funded and capable of providing educational provision from foundation skills through to a Doctor of Philosophy. Batchelor is already providing a planned learning pathway from training through to higher degrees. Batchelor has the expertise and the experience that will not only enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander opportunity but also that of other Australians working with our communities.

Batchelor Institute is proudly Territorian, established in 1964 to provide training and upskilling to the Territory’s Aboriginal para-professional workforce. While Batchelor will remain grounded in the Territory and continue to provide quality training and learning to Territorians, its future is to reach out across Australia and internationally. Batchelor’s aim is to become Australia’s preferred dual sector Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary provider.

The logo of Batchelor Institute represents a place of learning (central motive) where knowledge is gathered (coolamon) and culture and language protected (shield). It symbolises not only the foundations of this wonderful Institute but also its unique place in the educational landscape of Australia.

I commend this book to you as it represents a comprehensive ‘glimpse’ into the history of Batchelor Institute.

Robert Somerville AM, Chief Executive Officer
Batchelor Institute
Finding the common ground: looking at the next 40 years of Batchelor Institute

Robyn Ober, Sandy O’Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, Henk Huijser, & Noressa Bulsey

Introduction

Looking back over the last forty years of Batchelor Institute, the title for the conference that inspired this book is about as apt as one can get. Finding common ground has been a key theme over the last 40 years, finding expression in Batchelor Institute’s continuing both-ways approach and philosophy. Importantly, the emphasis on finding common ground, both as part of past discourse and captured in the following chapters, suggests a continuing process, rather than a final destination that has been, or will be, reached. This relative fluidity of ‘finding common ground’ should not be seen as a weakness; on the contrary, it should be seen as a strength that occurs in a productive space of continuous reflection and engagement with diversity and difference. This space at Batchelor Institute is where the ‘burden of representation’ should be absent, and where people are valued, based on their particular strengths, without the need to explain or defend their Aboriginality. This space should be one of respect and it should be owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the sense of having agency over how things operate and function at Batchelor Institute. In fact, this sense of ownership was a central theme during the 40 year celebrations and conference in 2014. When reflecting on the past 40 years, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and visitors stressed that Batchelor Institute (or Batchelor College, as many still call it) was ‘our place’. While this may imply a space of cultural safety, and while that is definitely a key aspect of it, it is important to stress again that it is also a space in constant flux as well as a constantly contested space. What the past 40 years have shown, and what is reflected in some of the chapters in this book, is that the space that Batchelor Institute provides, a productive common ground, can never be taken for granted but needs to be continuously claimed, fought for, reinforced, and reasserted.

As the history of Batchelor Institute is widely discussed in the chapters that follow, illustrated with passionate narratives and analyses, it becomes clear that finding the common ground has been a continuous struggle, and continues to be so. Of course this struggle is not limited to Batchelor Institute, but is part of the wider Australian context. In other words, while Batchelor Institute can lead the way in terms of tertiary education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it does not exist in a vacuum, and is to an important extent dependent on external forces. These forces do not only relate to where education and research funding come from, but also to what others in the tertiary education sector are doing to open up new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. However, what becomes clear as well from these narratives and discussions is that when the stars align, the end result can be enormously powerful and potentially life changing, as indeed it has been for many Batchelor Institute students and staff. As history is thus widely told and reflected on in the pages that follow, we focus in this chapter on the future, and where the next 40 years may, or should, take Batchelor Institute. The key ingredient, as it has been during the last 40 years, is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency and a sense of ownership. This is worth fighting for, as without it, there can be no common ground.
Both-ways into the future
The metaphor used to capture ‘finding common ground’ at the 40th year celebrations shows pairs of feet in a circular shape making connection to each other and the red dirt on which they are standing.

This visual metaphor is significant in that it displays the various shades of colours, shapes, forms and positioning of the bare feet on red dirt. In relation to both-ways it makes a strong statement that our learning starts with us - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people grounded in their own knowledge/s, ways of doing, ways of making meaning and ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Grass roots people who possess deep, intrinsic and complex knowledge of their own worlds and who are encouraged to draw on their knowledge systems within the both-ways teaching and learning space at Batchelor Institute.

However over the past 40 years this space has moved back and forth, expanded and detracted, from a limited, narrow, uneasy, uncomfortable way of thinking about both-ways, to a radical, emancipatory, unlimited force where students and staff felt empowered to bring about change. In terms of the future of both-ways at Batchelor Institute, the space is changing, with multi-ways, many voices, new ideas, technologies and theories, but still connecting us to who we are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The new fresh feet joining the circle force the expansion of the circle, ensuring there is movement, there is development, there is growth. The red dirt in the middle of the circle represents ‘common ground’, sharing, respect, reciprocity, responsibility but also roughness of the ground, capturing the tensions, struggles, conflicts, as we work together to move forward in the various discipline areas of academia and vocational education. As an Indigenous tertiary institution, the circle is expected to incorporate the feet of people in areas of governance, administration, student services and operations. As new discipline areas are introduced, so too our thinking about curriculum development, delivery and assessment should be guided by a both-ways approach to teaching and learning. Both-ways should never be a limited, restricted circle, but there should always be room for growth, open-mindedness, and a search for new ways of doing things in the area of teaching and learning and beyond. However with growth, there are also growing pains, indicating resistance against new ideas, concepts and ways of doing things.

As Batchelor Institute develops and grows its business, so too the common ground extends and expands new ways of operating in a both-ways learning and research environment. The common ground is continually changing to accommodate students’ ways of being, doing and making meaning in a tertiary educational context. It is a continuous learning journey that is unique to Batchelor Institute because it emerges from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have strong connections to country, language, and culture. These connections are acknowledged and celebrated as the fundamental base to draw on and move forward into the professional academic domain. Just like the visual metaphor ‘bare feet on red dirt’, a both-ways learning journey is ongoing, never ending, without restrictions, but continually guided by the expanding circle of feet on common ground. Research is a crucial element in this process.

Growing the research space
The role of research and the relationships forged between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers for the benefit of our communities and communities of practice remain at the centre of the Batchelor Institute ethos. The concept of ‘common ground’ is not used unproblematically in our approach to research. In forging robust research networks and opportunities for further research in our Indigenous-centred space, dissonance can provide an important mechanism for how we grow in collaboration.
In 2015, and following on from the 40 years Batchelor Institute conference, the research area at the Institute has formed a new approach that focuses on collaboration and networked research. With the emergence of the Centre for Indigenous Research Collaboration (CIRC), the act of bringing together wide-ranging perspectives, views and ideas to forge meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, is front and centre. The notion of the personality-driven research approach is minimized to rather focus on what really matters in conducting research that supports engagement, including the complex variety and unique requirements of our communities. The Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Linguistics (CALL), a well-respected institution that takes language-development and support direction from communities, is an exemplar of this approach and CIRC will use their model of engagement and reciprocity to form a robust approach. CALL continues, with the support of community linguists and researchers, to be at the forefront of language maintenance and revitalization across the country, which is the focus of Part II of this book.

Being part of a 40-year history of engagement means that the Institute has seen a great deal of change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and in particular the research that is carried out by, and for, Indigenous peoples. Batchelor Institute has also led some of this change. 40 years ago there were few Indigenous researchers working within higher education institutions. Today, the Institute has more than a dozen PhD and Masters candidates completing the highest level of education in the research area, led by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers with national and international profiles. These candidates are a part of the newly developed Batchelor Institute Graduate School, an environment that is uniquely formed to provide support, encouragement and a space for innovation in research.

In 2014 - the year Batchelor Institute turned 40 - two Aboriginal research candidates enrolled in the higher degrees programs were awarded the Institute’s inaugural PhDs. The first was Dr Kathryn Gilbey, whose focus was education, and in particular the importance of understanding and reviewing the history of programs that support success in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students (see also Chapter 3 in this book). The second was Dr David Hardy who focused on identity, sexuality and ‘coming out’ within the structures of a creative writing submission and exegesis. This included writing a novel, a play, and a broader body of work, as well as a theoretical research framing.

These candidates, our research staff and academics, our centres and our support staff all work towards empowering Indigenous communities and communities of practice. The focus as we move towards our next forty years of research is on ensuring that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are front and centre in all levels of research practice and that the work we do is edifying, supportive and provides genuine agency. To accomplish this, the next part of the research journey of Batchelor Institute will take us into the international space, with programs that will bring Indigenous researchers here from overseas, and will send our own researchers into these spaces to create meaningful discussions across communities where we share some of the same ideas and ideals.

The digital future
Of course working in an international space is increasingly enabled by digital technology, digital media, and the internet. Corn (2013) has called this digital future ‘the Indigital revolution’, as it has created huge opportunities on the one hand, and it has been taken up in a big way in Indigenous contexts in recent years, especially in the social media space. Of course this then has an impact on educational and research spaces such as Batchelor Institute, and it raises questions about the extent to which Batchelor Institute responds to the opportunities the digital future provides. With specific reference to the context of the Northern territory, Heron (cited in Nadarajah, 2012, p. 6) points out for example that, “for the first time we have the opportunity to do away with the ‘remote’. Indigenous communities no longer have to be isolated - they can be connected. Limitations of time and space no longer need to apply”. In other words, while teachers may still ‘fly in and fly out’ of ‘remote’ communities across the NT, there
are now increasing opportunities to maintain and develop relationships on an ongoing basis over time. Interestingly, if teachers learn how to leverage existing social media use, it would in many ways be highly learner-centred, because Indigenous people in general, and particularly young Indigenous people, appear to have taken to social media use, and technology in general, in a big way (Hall & Maugham, 2015).

The digital future provides opportunities for Batchelor Institute to connect people across Australia and internationally in constantly evolving learning and research communities, and to thereby break through some longstanding preconceptions and boundaries that have informed Indigenous learning and research spaces in the past. In particular, digital technologies in general, and social media in particular, have huge potential to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’, and with specific reference to Indigenous contexts in Australia, the ‘tyranny of remoteness’. Even though remote communities are increasingly becoming ‘connected’, “currently online learning is not available for most remote living Indigenous people in the Northern Territory (NT)” (Vodic, Senior, Dwyer, & Szybiak, 2012, p. 34). This means that for many Indigenous people in remote communities, learning still follows a well-trodden path of (mostly) non-Indigenous trainers and teachers flying in and out to ‘deliver’ self-contained learning modules largely in isolation, without necessarily being linked together, nor necessarily being linked to a local context. In other words, despite all good intentions, this is essentially a ‘tick-box’ kind of approach where the emphasis is on the teacher being able to sign off on the delivery being achieved, or the learning being ‘delivered on time’.

Batchelor Institute is a dual-sector learning and research institution, and of course there are huge differences between VET courses, higher education programs, and postgraduate studies and research training. Moreover, there is huge diversity amongst Batchelor students in terms of cultural backgrounds and locations. However, what the digital future promises is the potential to develop linkages and pathways and thereby cross some of these boundaries. In many ways, this process is well underway in the learning and research spaces, and digital technology is of course also increasingly an integral part of employment.

Is a focus on employment too narrow?

The VET – Higher Education nexus

Through policies to recruit, retain and advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the Institute to the main business of providing learning experiences and qualifications of market value to its students, the Institute has remained committed to supporting pathways into and through employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet it is the nature and form of ‘supportive pathways’ and the assumptions and values that might be attached to various real and imagined destinations that must continue to be discussed and explored as the Institute moves forward.

The Institute does not exist in a vacuum and is situated in a larger context where the purpose and value of ‘education’ is heavily influenced by economic directions and labour-market policies and priorities. Getting individuals ready for economic participation through either developing competency in work-related skills, or broadening the skills of those already in the work-force, is the underlying aim of most educational and training programs, including those developed and delivered by the Institute. Engineering and supporting pathways into and through employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is seen as the key response to addressing not only financial inequities but also improving indicators of individual and community wellbeing (McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2012). The responsibility for engineering and supporting pathways into employment is firmly positioned within the Vocational Education and Training sector, as well as to a large extent, the higher education sector.

Following linear and causal pathways through formal education into work, achieving (economic) independence and accumulating wealth have become the most virtuous and legitimate aspirations and representations of success in this dominant cultural frame (McRae-Williams, 2014). At the same time increasingly the role of education systems in enacting such pathways are understood through the
standardisation of approaches to testing, professional standards and curriculum (Guenther, Bat, & Osborne, 2013). Pathway engineering in such a frame, can hardly avoid privileging a certain kind of individual and conferring legitimacy to only a limited number of journeys with predefined destinations (McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2014).

Robinson (2011) has highlighted the risks of such education reforms, based as they are on linear assumptions of market supply and demand. He argues that such reforms approach pathways through education and employment and into the future as mechanistic and a process of creating standardised products. It is a process, he argues, which dangerously inhibits creativity through ignoring diversity among learners and subsequently constraining economic innovation and potential. For Batchelor Institute to continue to provide a space that privileges and respects Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and identities with the ultimately goal of empowerment, it cannot simply focus on and direct its activities to the production of ‘standardised’ or ‘normalised’ workers for labour-market engagement. Rather an exciting future for the Institute will involve an openness and active engagement with established, but also creative and innovative, pathways to economic participation that amplify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples’ strengths. By developing and nurturing common ground where new economic potentialities can germinate and evolve, the Institute will not simply contribute to increasing employment outcomes but may work to disrupt regimes of power that continue to inhibit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander empowerment and the associated respect for difference and diversity.

Conclusion
Looking into the future of Batchelor Institute from various angles, as we have done in this chapter, it becomes clear that the role of the Institute continues to evolve, and so it should be. As many of the chapters in this book show, Batchelor Institute has always been a contested space, and again, this is how it should be, as contested spaces can be very productive spaces. The key element that makes it a productive space is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over the agenda of the Institute, for this is the element that makes it ‘our place’. The biggest threat to the Institute would be a lack of control over the agenda, and indeed this threat has surfaced at various times during the past 40 years, and it requires continuous vigilance to keep it at bay. None of this is to suggest that the Institute should have a narrow or inward-looking focus; quite the opposite, it benefits from a very inclusive approach to education and research, and the future directions as outlined in this chapter, are testament to that, as the Institute look internationally and in cyberspace to broaden its scope. However, Batchelor Institute is unique because its agenda is controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and this defines its unique position to grow and strengthen into the future and to serve the communities it knows best.

References


PART I – INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE
Finding the common ground with Indigenous and western knowledge systems and seeking the common good for all present and future Australians - Where is the common ground if we are going to find it?

Leon White

Introduction

In acknowledging past contributions that have helped shaped thinking that should be considered in conversations of the theme ‘Finding the Common Ground with Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems’ it is important to recall the contribution of Wali Wunungmurra in his paper entitled Dhawurpunaramirri: Finding the Common Ground (1989). Wunungmurra wrote about his aspirations for an appropriate education:

What we need now is education, which can teach a high level of skills but without the destruction to culture. In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the Balanda side. But Yolŋu [cultures based in North East Arnhem Land] and Balanda [white people] knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and then implement them.

In other words Yolŋu1 must own the … program. Without this we will feel crushed and lose our self-respect and self-identity – we will be living on other people’s programs like it was in the past …

... negotiation between Yolŋu and Balanda cultures to find the common ground that makes up the two way curriculum (1989, pp. 12-13, emphasis added).

Wali uses the term ‘two way’ where others use the term ‘both ways’. Robyn Ober (n.d.), on the Batchelor Institute website provides details of the current use of the term at the Institute (see also Ober & Bat, 2007). In this chapter, I will pursue the notion of ‘both ways’ as a reflection of Batchelor Institute’s 40 year celebration theme as well as an area of significant concern for planning and theorizing future moves. Wali foresaw the need to develop an approach that recognised the ‘common ground’.

The story of the emergence of a discourse about ‘both ways’ education illustrates sets of productive relationships that nurtured and facilitated this discourse, originally in a few places, and then spread it elsewhere. From my perspective the story of the use of a series of metaphors and analogies that enabled community based dialogue about the ideas behind the term “both ways” started far away from Batchelor. One of the earlier places where the term was used was Yirrkala, where the term was embedded in both the

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1 It is important at this point to recognise that the ‘both ways’ concept at Batchelor Institute has a very strong Yolŋu influence and sense of ownership. While many at Batchelor Institute have embraced the concept as central to the Institute, it is still a contested concept and not everyone necessarily recognises it as a valid for the Batchelor context, including some of the Kungarakan custodians who work at Batchelor today.
struggle over education decision-making and in the research of teacher education students in both the DBATE\textsuperscript{2} and RATE\textsuperscript{3} programs.

However the idea of ‘both ways’ was only one of several complementary ideas that were of crucial importance to the development of the curriculum and pedagogy of then Batchelor College\textsuperscript{4} Teacher Education program and of the schools at Yirrkala. Place is a crucial component of describing the context for the contribution from Yolŋu Dilak\textsuperscript{5} at Yirrkala.

Discussion about ‘both ways’ in isolation only examines a small part of our historical developments and achievements at Batchelor Institute with regard to Indigenous education, appropriate curriculum and pedagogy.

In discussing ideas about ‘common ground’ a starting point would be to share some of the ideas and events that led to the development of the ideas about ‘both ways’. It is possible to link these developments to the teacher education programs that Yolŋu educators have participated in and a range of productive outcomes can be seen to have resulted from these educators having undertaken teacher education studies in their own communities.

Community based teacher education tends to involve linkages between a number of agencies and stakeholders at both the community level and externally. Batchelor Institute has a unique position historically through its work in addressing the training and tertiary education needs of Aboriginal people in remote Northern Territory communities. An extremely important aspect of the development of any Aboriginal Teacher Education program relates to the way that such a program assists Aboriginal communities to grapple with the problems associated with the inclusion and active respect for their culture in their communities’ schools, which is explained in detail in the Return to Country Report (Blanchard, 1987). This is important as in many aspects Aboriginal community schools remain fundamentally Western institutions and mono-cultural. As such they remain active participants in the cultural invasion and imperialism that has marked Australia’s occupation and colonisation and continues to do so (see Kemmis, 1988; Marika-Munungiritj, 1991; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012).

At Batchelor in the early 80’s staff were working collaboratively to develop an integrated approach to working with students that was informed largely by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970; 1973; 1998). Freire’s writings informed attempts to understand our work in a political context with our power as non-Indigenous educators to potentially continue the process of colonization that education is part and parcel of. Thus,

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2 In 1986 then Batchelor College entered into a partnership with Deakin University (Melbourne) to deliver the Deakin’s Bachelor of Arts (Education), the main teaching qualification at the time, through a community based program called the Deakin Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education Program – DBATE (Den Hollander, 2013).

3 In 1973 bilingual education was initiated by the Commonwealth government, which at that time, still administered the Northern Territory. The bilingual program provided the first real opportunity for Indigenous people to determine the type and style of education they wanted for their children. In 1976, a community based teacher education program commenced in Yirrkala. This later became known as the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program based at Batchelor College (About ‘both ways’ education, n.d.).

4 Batchelor Institute began in the late 1960s as a small annexe of Kormilda College, providing programs for Aboriginal teacher aides and assistants in community schools. In 1974 Batchelor Institute moved to the Batchelor township. In 1982 the Institute commenced as a dual sector tertiary provider and since the 1980s has continuously built a focus on learning that is supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. A second campus was established in 1990 in Alice Springs. Between 1988 and 1999 the Institute was known as Batchelor College. In 1999 the current Batchelor Institute was established with an emphasis on Indigenous Australian ownership and governance of the Batchelor Institute Council. Since the Australian government higher education reforms of 2003 Batchelor Institute has been recognised and funded as a ‘National Institute’ (History, n.d.).

5 The Dilak Authority (comprising 13 Yolŋu clan nations) has long operated as the system of governance in North East Arnhem Land, but is not recognised outside the Yolŋu traditional world (North-East Arnhem Land, n.d.).
our work included exploring new ways to construct teaching/learning events around intensive workshops both at Batchelor and in off-campus settings. Experiments with ways to develop reflective practice in the multi-lingual contexts in which we worked grew out of our exploration of Freire’s writings. Exploring ways to develop a “problem posing” approach (as opposed to a solely problem based approach) to our work laid the foundation for some very significant developments. Staff at Batchelor developed a proposal for ‘Self Evaluation’, which attracted funding, and facilitated the commencement of a very fruitful partnership with Deakin University (Kemmis & Henry, 1985).

John Henry was the first member of the Deakin team to visit the Northern Territory (NT) as part of this project. At Batchelor, John introduced the notion of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to staff, which is an approach to research in communities and aims for participation of community members in addressing “questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.1). PAR was the start of a very energetic engagement that took up the challenge of adapting the formal research process to suit the context and circumstances at Batchelor Institute and many other places in the NT. Explicit links were made to the evolving ideas already in place at the Institute with input from community representatives, educators, and other interested parties. Of particular importance here is that the PAR process provoked questions related to Indigenous aspirations and hope for the education of their children and their own community members as teachers of those future generations. The following vignettes illustrate some of these aspirations:

- At Willowra: John was told by a community elder – “Warlpiri people (Yapa) want their children to be educated ‘both ways. This means that the children learn Whiteman’s (Kardiya) knowledge while maintaining and developing their Aboriginality.”
- At Yirrkala: “We are interested in bringing more Yolŋu Way into the program at Yirrkala Community School. ... as we talk to more community people about the Yolŋu Knowledge that is appropriate and suitable for school work. We will be able to move forward on this issue of making our community school a ‘both ways’ place when we have the structure of communication linking the classrooms in our school with interested community people.”
- At Yuendumu: discussions occurred with Jeanie Egan about ‘both ways’ schooling and Yapa involvement in leadership in the school.

As indicated earlier intensive workshops had previously been used as a strategy at Batchelor College and valuable ideas from this experience were incorporated into our evolving practice in the Batchelor teacher education program. Some of these ideas included:

- Negotiation of tasks – inclusive practice of learner’s perspective and knowledges
- Working in teams and small groups – Yaka Gana/Always Together
- Problem posing – How will this contribute to our community’s development?
- Considering the possibility of things going wrong i.e. consequences of teaching – caution and prudent action
- Starting points – Where are we? Where are we going? Where should we be going?
- Teacher research-based development – We are all learners: school teachers, Batchelor lecturers, Batchelor students
- Context – crucial importance of place in providing content and process

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6 When I refer to ‘we’ or ‘our’ throughout this chapter, I refer to everyone involved in the Teacher Education Program at Batchelor College/Batchelor Institute.
7 Statement by SJM at Willowra on 24/08/84 from John Henry’s field notes.
8 Letter from Mandawuy Yunupingu to Chairperson of Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Council Association dated 10/10/84.
9 From John Henry’s field notes 13/10/85.
Conversations around ideas such as these informed our reflective practice and this provided an important basis for the development of the following key principles:

1. Teacher preparation should assist community development.
2. Teacher development should assist the development of Aboriginal perspectives on contemporary issues.
3. Teacher preparation within cultural contexts should retain the graduates’ social standing within their communities.
4. Teacher preparation involves development of knowledge of ‘both ways’ (that is, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of life).
5. Teacher education should reflect community expectations and aspirations (Batchelor College, 1985, pp. 3-5).

This may be the first ‘sanctioned’ use of the term ‘both ways’ within the College. This highlights a concern that a focus solely on ‘both ways’ is too limited if other important elements of the collective five principles are disregarded or ignored, at a time when they should possibly receive even more emphasis. The outcome of community development, contemporary perspectives and social standing may be in danger of falling by the wayside in the implementation of current programs, both in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education. However, they might provide good starting points for a review of practice across the Institute as a way of locating and revisiting the foundations of Batchelor Institutes teaching and learning philosophy and practice.

Given that Batchelor Institute is now offering a swag of courses with ideological traditions that are generally even more teacher-centred and culturally dogmatic than the ones we sought to change in the 1980s, it seems timely to again explore more inclusive and appropriate practices. The ideas mentioned above all grew out of collaborative action research amongst Batchelor staff and students.

There are two further important exemplars that strongly relate to the ‘common ground’ theme: Dr Yunupingu’s (1987) research whilst studying at Deakin University (DBATE) student and Dr Marika-Munungiritj’s (1991) research whilst studying at the University of Melbourne. Neither of these institutions were then, or are now, committed to ‘both ways’ learning and teaching programs but they were able to provide the space for these Indigenous students to negotiate a customized program of study that met both the expectations of the university and the individuals involved. Neither of these educators had participated in Batchelor courses that were informed by any mention of ‘both ways’ at the time of their research and early writings. This points to the importance of richer themes than the ones offered by a simplistic interpretation of ‘both ways’. Rather, it suggests the importance of a problem-posing negotiated approach mentioned above.

Furthermore, we were also exploring ideas that informed collective endeavor through exploration of the ways that Guku (wild honey bees) (a highly significant high knowledge metaphor in Yolŋu culture) might guide our work. This was a response to the issues that emerged through individuals taking, or at least claiming, ownership over certain places, other people, ideas and programs. In the East Arnhem region at the time we were inundated with the use of possessive pronouns by non-Indigenous people that claimed space, and that claimed ownership of people through what might appear to be simple statements at first sight, such as my classroom, my assistant teacher, my program and my school.

Bees, it was pointed out, cannot make these specific claims and don’t! Moreover, it was pointed out that bees’ whole orientation is concern for future generations, which is why they work so assiduously to provide the best start for that generation’s struggle. Thus, the bees have to get the balance right of the nectar that they gather from the two estates – the
Yirritja and the Dhuwa\textsuperscript{10}. Two is the operative term here! While they need to get the balance right, there is more.

Not only does the land sustain a range of trees and flowers that the bees would range over, it also nurtures the Ngathu, Dingu or cycad palm that provided us with another important metaphorical concept. The analogy provides a link between the making of bread from the cycad and the construction of knowledge and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Unless made with the deepest care, this bread can kill and harm. Knowledge, it was suggested, can be equally dangerous if it is taken up in the wrong way and without care in following the right process and caution about its nature. For example, it can potentially lead to assimilation, self-centredness, and selfishness.

This Dingu process was written up by RATE students in 1988 and used to develop an analogy with a curriculum development process to in fact critique a Batchelor proposal.

The important connection for us now in revisiting the Guku and the Dingu conversations is the emphasis on collective action. The Guku – the bees example of seeking to make the best honey ever made – signifies a search for excellence that would always be an unrealized quest. That the quality of the honey according to this story could always be improved was important to us, and informed the adoption of a reflective participatory research-based approach to our learning. In the 1980s, this introduced us to the use of terminology and culturally-based metaphors that describe ideas and approaches, for example the introduction of the lipalipa or canoe. When the lipalipa is moving through the water it makes waves that point ahead of the canoe – indicating the direction to be traveled, i.e. to the intended navigation point. This was important because it is actually a place that you are always traveling to – because in heading there – it (there) becomes ‘here’ on arrival and so the next ‘there’ is always ahead of you on your journey.

The quest moves on. Where to next on our journey? Again, this emphasized collective effort and reflection on the journey travelled. The central question was always: are we heading in the right direction?

Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun’s father\textsuperscript{11} recorded some epic stories of his canoe trips that illustrated these discussions. We saw our work as educators like the lipalipa paddlers of older times. This got us talking about new paddlers needing to be trained and the need for the older paddlers to help train and instruct the new paddlers in the skills needed in the process of this learning journey.

In part it also required us to explore the role of metaphor in social reproduction as presented by Tilley (1999), who argues that the interrelationships between culture, individuals and groups are dependent on understanding the metaphors used within the cultural group. In his words, “learning metaphor becomes part and parcel of the process of the acquisition of cultural knowledges and the authority residing in their acquisition” (Tilley, 1999, p. 9).

In exploring the notion of ‘common ground’ as a metaphor, the question we need to address is whether this is the best metaphor to meet our needs. In other words, how do, or will, the various parts of Batchelor Institute find the ‘common ground’?

The discussions we had in past times explored the important philosophical ideas that underpinned Yolŋu epistemology and ontology. A range of “temporary” thematic headings emerged for clusters of central ideas – some of which are captured in the Aboriginal pedagogy: Aboriginal teachers speak out report (Nayan et. al, 1991).

The ABC discussion program Q & A (2014) was a feature of the 2014 Garma Festival and included a number of Batchelor graduates. Many years earlier,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Everything in the Yolŋu world view is made up of two moieties. One is Yirritja and the other one is Dhuwa. Dhuwa and Yirritja make up the Yolŋu world view. They are two halves of our holistic world view. Yirritja and Dhuwa fit together perfectly. Everything in Yirritja and Dhuwa is connected. Yirritja and Dhuwa people intermarry and everything in the land is either Yirritja or Dhuwa (Yolŋu Sea Country: Dhuwa and Yirritja, n.d.)
\item Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun was one of the Indigenous teacher trainees who developed and articulated the ‘both ways’ approach, along with for example Dr M. Yunupiŋu (About ‘both ways’ education, n.d.).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the first of these festivals were using the word Garma on advice of a senior Rirratjingu leader to guide us around some of the arguments that occurred through the use of other words. The image he gave us was of a place where young and old come together, men and women, Yirritja and Dhuwa. The activities at such places were accessible to diverse groups. They were open to all and not classified as only open to one group or only belonging to one group. The Rirratjingu leader was cleverly indicating a way to access knowledge that would not belong exclusively to one group: the place for the ceremony would be a neutral place, characterised by the following:

- there was a clear purpose for the activity that would influence its agreed location
- people of all ages could safely come together; both genders, both moieties would be able to participate
- the location of the activity would indicate who would have organisational responsibilities and what knowledge would be shared at the activity (coming together-ness)

Is this the type of common ground we envisaged?

In returning to the learning journey, the questions arose because the curriculum task posed a problem. The solution was the appropriate response to the problem posed in trying to find a name for our learning journey.

Discussions about the bees also assisted us in thinking about research tasks – like the bees - individuals travelling out to the wider community to seek answers to questions of importance to community issues and then bringing the information gained back to the collective – to the hive. Like the knowledgeable women who make the cycad bread for others to check so too would we have times to present our ideas and findings to check them out with each other, other students, and elders in the community. We would question upfront whose interests should be served by our study. The stories that we were studying, examining and attempting to use to guide our work had an emphasis on working for our collective good – for our collective community interests. This work built on the work (research) of others and ourselves in many cases.

In the story so far I have chosen examples of ways that the teacher education program at Batchelor has nurtured the development of very important ideas. Initially this might have been through bringing in outside facilitators to establish conversations about community aspirations, research approaches and professional development for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators based in schools and at the College. However, as time went on we saw these initial ideas becoming generative and foundational for further research and discussion by Batchelor students, staff or others. We also saw the ways in which Batchelor students used the opportunities that research-based assessment processes allowed them to undertake ground breaking studies that would better inform the practice of both schools and Batchelor itself. This is the most important aspect as the learning went both ways: out of schools and communities and into Batchelor, and into schools and communities and out of Batchelor. However, an educational Institution that only sees ‘empty vessels’ to be filled instead of rich possibilities of collaborative learning will not deliver, and it is important to keep this fundamental recognition always in focus. Our work, like that of the bees, was generative and drew on revisiting past writings/research in the quest for appropriate knowledge and guidance.

At the graduation ceremony at Batchelor for the first cohort of DBATE students in 1987, my waku12, Mr Dhurrkay (Lanhupuy, 1988), then MLA13 for Arnhem, said:

The decolonisation of schools in Aboriginal schools is the challenge for Aborigines now.

The challenge for Tertiary and TAFE Institutions ... is to develop courses that begin with the knowledge and skills that the students bring with them from their communities and then develop the students’ study programs through continual reference to their society, their culture and their communities’ needs.

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12 Yolnu Matha term for ‘son’ (Yolnu Matha Dictionary, n.d.)
13 Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly (MLA)
He warned that:

Exposure to Tertiary study for Aborigines could mean that one’s Aboriginality is weakened and devalued.

He nominated a solution that fits neatly with the themes of this book:

Tertiary education programs ... must themselves be experiments in bi-cultural education.

This will be achieved through programs that are based on bi-culturalism, through ongoing consultation by staff and students with Aboriginal communities and educational organisations, by giving students a more active role in their own learning, and by a policy of rapidly increasing the proportion of Aboriginal lecturers on academic staff.

In 2006, Kathy McMahon, a long term Northern Territory educator and Batchelor Institute staff member, reminded us of Stephen Kemmis’ advice:

‘Both ways’ education is essentially problematic. It is not the description of a solution to the curriculum problem (the problem of what to teach students about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of life). It does not describe or prescribe the content and processes of a curriculum suitable for Aboriginal students. On the contrary, the term ‘both ways education’ is a name for the problem itself. Both ways education is something to be defined and redefined through history and across different locations and circumstances by Aboriginal people themselves (Kemmis, 1988, p. 22).

Kemmis and Henry (1985) in their report on the assisted evaluation at Batchelor ask a range of important questions that are pertinent to our discussions here: “Was the College adopting an unexamined credentialist view that might be antithetical to good Aboriginal Teacher Education?” (p. 25) and is “there an assimilationist version of ‘both ways’ schooling?” (p. 55)

There is an important connection between these two ideas. It is relatively easy to slip into the practice of using the demands of credentials to impose a ‘one way’ approach. The concern is that too much of the focus of our dialogue about ‘both ways’ is on addressing the what of ‘both ways’ without due regard to ‘what we might do’ on the how, and the why, and on how we might appropriately demonstrate arrival at our destination in a way that is not a ‘concealed’ assimilationist, ethno-centric and an unduly academically orientated one.

This is not to suggest that the idea of ‘both ways’ should not be used, but rather that we need much more in our search for an empowering approach to developing a useful ‘common ground’.

In their 1993 presentation to the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Wollongong, Brabham, Ferguson, Henry & Saunders (1993) warned:

When we use the term both ways schooling we must be careful that we are not coopted into supporting a form of schooling that reproduces the old assimilationist form into the future. ... Our people are talking about schools that keep our cultures and identities strong in our children while equipping them with the skills from the contemporary world necessary for self-determination of our nations. ... But we are not calling this form of education, and the schools that will deliver it, both ways. We see that this form of education is one-way, the Koorie way (pp. 8-9).

With that in mind, I return to Wali’s ideas about appropriate education programs. While he talks specifically about secondary education there is a key idea here that relates to our quest:

At this level it is up to teachers and students to learn with each other about the way in which both sides can come together. The role of the teacher is to provide the framework for the comparison of cultures which students then complete. But teachers would also be students of culture, the relationship between teacher and student would be different ... This partnership
between teachers and students is of great importance because without it there can be no exchange of knowledge and we cannot learn from each other (Wunungmurra, 1989, p. 14).

Mr Dhurrkay put the challenge more bluntly: “The challenge for Tertiary institutions .... is not to repeat the assimilationist practices of primary and secondary schools” (Lanhupuy, 1988, p. 2). The issues are the same. Tertiary institutions in Australia derive their meaning from the traditions and culture of Europe.

With these challenges in mind and the developments that have occurred at Batchelor as increasingly a VET \(^{14}\) provider/RTO\(^ {15}\) we could include my waku’s concerns about tertiary institutions to apply to training providers as well.

**Implications: the road ahead**

In moving forward in working towards both the common ground and the common good, thought needs to be given to some salient points from our history so far:

First, we all need to have ways to support personal academic growth in issues related to levels of academic skills in English as an Additional Language. We seem to have lost our connection with previous work undertaken by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope (1993) here at Batchelor who shaped a language framework to guide everyone’s work. There is a need to question how it relates to the Australian Core Skills Framework\(^ {16}\).

Second, Indigenous knowledge and local development aspirations must be a central component of teachers’ practice and their pedagogic design (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). This, and knowledge of the students’ literacy levels, along with an awareness of their capacity to produce their own creative literacies recognises that “Indigenous people in the very remote regions of Australia have made the transition from an oral culture to a literate culture only relatively recently ... without the prior and parallel development of many socially or culturally meaningful textual practices” (Krol, 2009, p. 41). Many students have benefitted from the significant work undertaken not only by RMIT and Deakin University, but from the challenges and insights gained by working with University of Melbourne staff members Marilyn Woolley, Keith Pigdon and Dennis Claringbold (Claringbold et al., 1984; Pigdon & Woolley, 1990). Their work provides the necessary scaffolding and creative flair to engage, and offers many examples that would serve contemporary course design well.

Third, we also need approaches that allow, in Allan Luke’s (1993) terms, an understanding of how forms of language have shaped the organisation and values of social life, and how texts influence one’s identity and authority. This recognition allows us to provide, as the Batchelor RATE students have repeatedly demonstrated, a context to develop powerful forms of literate practice relevant to their in-school and out-of-school lives (Luke, 2003; Beavis, 2004, 2007; Culican, Milburn, & Oakley 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Gee 2010). In other words, informed, holistic, and relationally responsive practices that are mindful of people, land, culture, language roles and responsibilities, spirit and the relationships between them. We need well-informed educators/trainers at the coal face forming the common ground!

Fourth, an anticipated response to implementing some aspects of the suggested approaches will come at a cost. However, the anticipated outcomes will more than provide a return on investment.

Fifth, we should not stop searching for better models that better fit local contexts, rather than accepting a one-size-fits-all approach. This should include engagement with, and potential adoption of, international examples of good practice.

Sixth, any partnership project requires a consideration of place-based pedagogy, and consciousness of

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14 Vocational Education and Training
15 Registered Training Organisation
16 The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) is a tool which assists both specialist and non-specialist English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners describe an individual’s performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. It is also the key quality measure for the Australian Government’s Skills for Education and Employment Programme (Australian Government Department of Industry and Science, n.d.).
relationships between places (Gruenewald, 2008; Kalantzis and Cope, 2008). It needs to embrace a pedagogy of responsibility (Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005), for the positioning and presentation of knowledge, and the engagement with questions of diversity, democracy and sustainability, and aim for a decolonizing partnership process of recovery, knowing, analysis, and struggle (Tuck, 2007). We need to have health and well-being as part and parcel of every focus on the common ground as we work in a context fraught with the suffering of unnecessary death and sickness.

Seventh, consider the lesson of the Wilson Review (2014) where no Indigenous writing was researched or proper Indigenous consultation process undertaken, despite a long list of people who were apparently ‘consulted’ (Wilson 2014, pp. 283-300). Isn’t this an example of concealed assimilation? As Clark (2014) notes in response to the review:

What has never been attempted in the NT is the transparent and accountable implementation of long-term needs-based core funding in remote Indigenous schools. This was an opportunity to put this urgent priority squarely on the table – an opportunity lost (Clark 2014, n.p).

While the review identifies an “almost total systemic failure to support over two generations of people living in remote Indigenous communities to a level of basic literacy required for even an unskilled job” (Clark, 2014, n.p), it fails to recognise that remote Indigenous education has never been funded to a level required to reach the projected outcomes. This leads Clark (2014) to the following important question: “Do we need to wait another 14 years – nearly a generation more of systemic and racist policy failure for the next review to pick this up?” (n.p). The likely poisonous outcome of this review will resonate for Batchelor Institute for decades. Remember the Cycad Bread metaphor!

Eighth, we need to highlight and recognise the important role of the workplace, and workers in the workplace, as the site of ongoing training and professional development, and the crucial role of all co-workers in the development of Batchelor students in that workplace. This is about learning and teaching in context, the importance of which should not be underestimated.

Ninth, we need to recognise that investing in the learning and professional development of staff is crucial as long as it is tied to long-term sustainability, in the form of a long-term commitment to students and communities, rather than a short-term ‘project’ approach.

Tenth, we need to rethink the undervaluing of the study of linguistics in all courses. We face another decade with more Indigenous languages being put at risk and potentially lost. We need to provide a necessary skill base to future intergenerational knowledge transfer. Sadly, Batchelor used to be much stronger in this regard, with the Aboriginal Languages Fortnight17 and regular access to internationally renowned linguists, which provided a much richer, mainly community-based, environment than that available today. It is crucial and urgent to revisit this, as time is running out fast for many languages, including local languages (National Indigenous Languages Survey Report, 2005).

In recognising that the ten points above suggest a clear need for improvement, it is also important to recognise valuable achievements. Batchelor Institute can be proud of the outcomes of the professional development for its staff and students as there have been some very important outcomes from this in a range of ways. Firstly, our past, present and continuing contribution by former staff and students in important (some might argue crucial) roles inside Batchelor Institute itself, Department of Education schools and system, Catholic Education and Charles Darwin University (CDU). Secondly, the significant curriculum contribution that Batchelor,

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17 Every year students from the Batchelor College Teacher Education Program used to devote two special weeks to working on literature and literacy in their own languages. During this time, known as Aboriginal Languages Fortnight (ALF), most students developed a research project with their own community elders, and through the research process they learned more of the depths of their own culture, and developed ways of communicating some of these ideas to other people through writing (Christie, 1994).
and in particular former RATE students and their former lecturers, have made to the development of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework - particularly Essential Learnings, Mathematics, and the Indigenous Languages and Culture strands.

As Kathy McMahon\(^\text{18}\) explains:

We (the NT) were the first (and still the only) in Australia to do such work. That work spilled over into other learning areas but we were making the space for Indigenous knowledge systems and languages first and foremost. And every single Batchelor graduate I worked with understood the task immediately. Problem posing - how do we get what is important to us in here? From Yuendumu, Papunya, Areyonga, Ganalaki, Yipirinya, Titjikala, Willowra, Lajamanu, Wadeye, Bathurst, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Galiwin’ku, Milingimbi and Yirrkala...Batchelor graduates all.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we need to look to the future but in doing so it is relevant that we know the foundation of the history for that future, so we can fearlessly confront the ignorant colonising and normalising forces that are present today as we plan and prepare for the future we face.

As a result of Batchelor staff initiatives, such as regular articles in journals, we can now celebrate a wide and influential body of Indigenous publications and Indigenous voices within the academic literature. Batchelor Press has contributed to their development and distribution with good inclusive design and a stress on the visual to tell the story and engage the reader. We need to continue these. We need to build on Strong Teachers (Murphy et al., 2013), a recent collaborative 'both ways' project, which involved gathering stories and reflections of ex-Batchelor lecturers and former students. If strong, relevant and transformative community-based education and training is to be achieved, we need to take collective control, learn from the past, and begin to explore some of the recommendations and suggestions in this chapter. This is not a blueprint or template, but rather a set of recommendations to provoke questions. The quest moves on: are we heading in the right direction?

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Rhetoric, recognition and rights: the common units 1999-2011

Kathryn Gilbey & Evelyn Schaber

I will tell you something about stories.
They aren’t just entertainment.
Don’t be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
All we have to fight off
illness and death.
You don’t have anything
if you don’t have the stories.
Their evil is so mighty
But it can’t stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories,
Let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that,
they would be happy
because we would be defenceless then.
(Silko, 1977, p. 2)

The power of stories to transform, inform and remove the polite veil of ignorance is what this paper will ultimately be about. This will be done through the telling of a series of stories and moments at Batchelor Institute, the teaching of the Common Units. The stories about stories will show Indigenous pedagogies in practice, both-ways enacted, and the power of stories to undermine the subtle positioning of Aboriginal students by non-Aboriginal lecturers. This paper will be an exploration around the teaching and learning process that was the Common Units at Batchelor Institute 1999 – 2011. The units themselves were transformative and experiential, you came out changed after having experienced them. This is our aim with this paper also, we invite you on a journey to come and explore from our perspectives the tensions and celebrations that were the Common Units.

The context
In 1999 Batchelor College had emerged as a fully fledged self accrediting independent tertiary institution with the passing in the NT parliament of the Batchelor Institute Act 1999. The College had morphed into the Institute. The then Director, John Ingram, on the day of independence stood down as Director and Veronica Arbon, the new Director, emerged as the first Aboriginal and the first female Director of the newly formed Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. The Council was given accreditation powers that meant that Batchelor Institute was one of the very few self-accrediting Indigenous controlled and run educational organisations in the world.

This time, and the importance of these changes, cannot be underestimated. The metamorphosis from a small annexe in 1974 to an independent tertiary institution was enormous; the world was Batchelor Institute’s oyster. The Institute had emerged as a real force within Indigenous Education, and it was within this heady context that the Common Units were conceived and implemented. These Units were part of the plan of the new Director to ensure the vision statement of strengthening identity whilst achieving educational success. This was part of a larger strategy that envisaged Batchelor Institute as the leading Indigenous educational facility in the country. And it had achieved that status in legislation.

The Common Units
The two Units, Public Communication and Telling Histories were core Common Units to all the undergraduate Higher Education courses within the Institute from 1999 to 2011. This meant that the classes were large, heterogeneous, dynamic and exciting and, for the students, often the first time that they had come together as a large student group rather than in small groups in discrete discipline areas.

Overview
The Common Units were written in 1999 by Dr. Rob McCormack and a team of Indigenous academics at the Institute including, but not limited to, John Reid, Tom Ober, George Pascoe, Dana Ober, Ochre
Doyle, Veronica Arbon, Aunty Mai Katona, Evelyn Schaber and many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics present at the Institute at the time. Over the years they continued to contribute to these Units. It must be said that these Units were initially conceived in response to student demands to have a say, to have a voice, to be recognised in a fundamental way within their own educational experience, as part of a broader plan of inclusive Indigenous education. Veronica Arbon, in her book *Arlathirnda Ngurkarnda Ityirnda*, explains why they were developed and explains some of the initial resistance to the Units.

There was no coherent story of the disruptive and oppressive aspects of Australia’s colonial history or the important aspects of our knowledge to be carried into tomorrow (Arbon, 2008, p 122).

She goes on to say:

Opposition arose as staff argued that the curriculum did not have the space, that Indigenous knowledge was addressed in other ways and that such an approach was not necessary. The most powerful arguments swirled around a belief that the inclusion of the Common Units would undermine and downgrade the professional intent of the awards. Despite these arguments, the Academic Committee of the Institute endorsed these Units in 2000 (Arbon 2008 p. 122).

However, the negative arguments would prove to be ongoing and unrelenting, constantly undermining Indigenous knowledge and practices as expressed through these Units. Perhaps it was a sign of the changing priorities of the Institute or a fundamental disbelief in the way that the Units were put together, but it seemed for most of the eleven years that they ran they were contentious and despised, lauded and celebrated.

So the quandary around these Units was that whilst they were embraced and celebrated by the students and Aboriginal staff at the Institute they were also vilified and despised by many non-Indigenous lecturing and executive staff. The contributors to these successes were not acknowledged by our critics in terms of recognition of our inclusive Aboriginal knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum activities. There was no acknowledgement of the academic rigour required for the long term academic application of the text patterns of the students’ work in Public Communication across writing genres, the oracy development applicable across many other units, or the analysis of history applicable to all disciplines and theories. It was not that we were academically less capable, but rather that we were equal and so much more.

When they began as transitional units into higher education they were designed to not privilege students with an English-as-first-language background. The student body had changed quite radically from a majority of students from remote communities to a vast majority being from an urban background. The newly developed degree programs also attracted a lot of interstate students. Students were old and young from all over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We were varied and different, but the same, and our commonality was what became celebrated. This was one of the key defining successes of the Common Units, designed to be transition units into higher education. Students from all over got to meet, share and work together. The students’ diversity was the Units’ strength as we learnt from each other’s strengths and weaknesses, but we did it together. The sense of accomplishment at the end of these Units was enormous and was shared by all students. The nature of the Units was that while one student may have one set of obstacles to overcome, another had a complete other set and together and collectively we could achieve our shared common goals.

So while an older student, may struggle with the computer it was very common to see a younger student typing their speech up for them whilst they told them their stories. These stories often then came back in the form of telling histories and the cycle became complete, synergised by the collective work. This often happened with individual speeches for students who had less English language vocabulary
as these students often had the strongest cultural traditions and stories, which then in turn strengthened the whole group.

One of the key reasons that the Units were so successful in terms of student results was that students were assessed by how well they worked together not by how much they knew in comparison to each other. Academia is typically very cut-throat and competitive but we as Lecturers explained early on that the focus in these Units was cooperative and collaborative learning.

The aims of these Units were to:
1. Encourage students to tell their truths and realities, through speeches, banners, performance, shared public values, public protests, action as communication and through sharing and acknowledging our shared Indigenous histories and commonalities, as well as celebrating the uniqueness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians;
2. Provide a safe environment that privileges Indigenous ways of being and knowing;
3. Explore, through critical analysis, the construction of history and the development of western education systems;
4. Offer experiential learning journeys that are student focused and driven; and
5. Provide an environment where amazing and moving workshops are possible and students tell their stories and histories and as a result everyone in the room is in one way or another, changed.

(Batchelor Institute Common Units Study Guide 2009, p. 4)

Together these five points then work to engage students in a way that no other units can, nor do. They create excitement about learning itself, rather than narrowly defined learning outcomes. To have specific units that do this explicitly makes Batchelor Institute unique, and had a big impact on factors such as retention and progression.

Public Communication

Public Communication was based on the classical western educational philosophy of rhetoric. As a team we taught text patterns and building blocks for effective Public Communication. We encouraged students to use the text patterns of rhetoric to tell their stories. These text patterns then formed the structure for an individual speech to an audience. We provided the foundational blocks through rhetorical text patterns and structure of the speech and the students provided the content. There was no prescription on content so students were asked to find what they were passionate about; this was the first time for some students that their knowledges were being privileged and that their voices were being heard. This meant that we had interesting, well-structured speeches on topics as varied and diverse as the student body itself.

It is hard to describe the electricity of those moments when the speeches were being read. This became the transformative part because when one sits and listens to a room full of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders speaking their truths in a five minute speech, utilising really effective text patterns designed to get to your heart, it was amazing. Every topic you can imagine came up, from the stolen generation to brown rice, from otitis media to sexual abuse and overcoming it. This became a roller coaster of a journey that we all shared. One woman spoke about being removed from her family and put in a home; she spoke about it in the third person and then at the end she said, “I know because I am that little girl”. I had hung my head because I was crying because she had moved me that much, and I looked up and around because there was a quiet in the room. She had transported me to another place but I was embarrassed by the tears rolling down my cheeks; then I saw Tom and he was crying, and John was crying too. The whole room was silent and I didn’t know what to do. John got up and made a joke to break the silence. By the end of the day everyone was utterly exhausted and excited in equal measure, and everyone was changed.

The Unit also used multi-literacy forms of communication. Students were expected to create a banner and compile a group speech that expressed a collective public value. They were then expected to take to the streets and as a group express a
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public value or concern as a student body in a public demonstration. In addition, Public Communication introduced students to the classical Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, the ancestors of western education. The Unit outlined the two very different western educational traditions that arose from the thinking of these two men. These were the disciplined factual type of schooling of Plato that has at its basis a single truth and the leadership rhetorical style of Aristotle that saw Doxa and opinion as more important.

Loud classroom discussions about Socrates’ choice of hemlock over banishment were broken down into the importance of country and the pain of dispossession. If these were the ancestors of western education and the choices that surrounded them then we accorded them the respect that they deserved. By knowing the conflict between Aristotle and his teacher Plato, by knowing that they differed in their approach, we could break down and understand the current western model and, in so doing, removed the omniscient power of western education to that of simply a winning model. This insight opened the door to alternatives.

Aristotle, Plato and power

By looking at the history of western education we see the influence on its structure of political ideologies over this same history. In this way we used the coloniser’s educative tools for integration and assimilation to our own benefit, for our self-determination. We moved from being mere subjects of power and became agents of power. We managed to move our position on the power continuum from being passive recipients of the consequences derived from others’ positions of power through their benevolent goodwill to becoming speakers of our truths. Just being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in this country is political, our very survival is political, so when we get up and speak our truths it becomes a revolutionary moment that changes all of us.

The transition from being individuals beholden to the power of non-Indigenous others to individuals holding power and with space to speak was a transformative educational moment. The holding of space and agency is important on many levels. Not only is it about sharing something that has never been shared outside of the family, or something that you are passionate about, it is also a personal achievement. So the act of speaking one’s truths has dual meaning. It is important for the public sphere, adding to the knowledge of the room, the town, the country, but it is also important on a personal level. The public/private sphere is transformed into a collective space imbued with all the strength and power of stories never before told, or needing to be re-told with the hopes and expectations and community mindedness of the whole classroom. In this moment, the subjugation of the past is removed, the feelings of inadequacy gone, as we, in that moment, feel empowered. Speaking the truth of our lives, telling a story of a grandfather banned from the islands and the effects on him, three generations of one family in care because of the stolen generations, a story of survival from a massacre in NSW, stories of triumph against adversity, stories of survival, recollections of idyllic childhoods on the river, at the beach or in the desert, manifestos on hunting and bush food, and native title claims, for each student this was a moment of embodying the power of an ancient culture and sharing that with an audience.

Knowledge is power and in the Public Communication classroom, as we discussed knowledge production, as we discussed the wisdom of our Elders, as we learnt about differing styles of education, we did so from our own uniquely varied but First Nations people’s position. We felt ourselves growing more powerful through the knowledge of the Other (western education). By removing the invisibility of the current western education system we could discuss from our own First Nations’ perspective the value of our own education system as well as the pros and cons of the various western systems.

This synthesis of knowledge came from two sources: one a non-Indigenous academic’s detailed knowledge of Greek educators and modern philosophers, the other the First Nations students’ detailed knowledge of their own educational practices (some call this their home education) and their own educational journeys, often characterised by a disconnect between what they knew and had been taught by family and community, and what they had been taught in schools. By applying this knowledge to our real world,
a whole new level of understanding about the role and purpose of knowledge sharing through generations was revealed.

Public Communication aimed to show the two types of schooling arising from ancient Greece and considered how these types are applied in an Australian context. In concert with this aim, the Unit aimed to highlight our own Indigenous knowledge systems and teaching and learning strategies. Dr Rob McCormack described the approach within Public Communication as:

...one, a positive affirmation and deepening commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the other, a critically respectful study of non-Indigenous ways of being and knowing (McCormack, 2003, p. 6).

One core component of Public Communication, and one of the underlying strengths of the Unit, was that the students’ own knowledge was not only acknowledged but was crucial to the unfolding of the content and success of the Unit. The Unit provided the building blocks and contexts for strong powerful speeches to be constructed, speeches in which the students provided all the content. There was no wrong content; it was an opportunity for students to speak powerfully about whatever they wanted to express. Throughout the history of the Units students have relished this moment and readily took the chance to speak their truths.

Ruth Van Dyck in her paper ‘Redefined Rhetorics: Academic Discourse and Aboriginal Students’ says:

To Aboriginal peoples, essay writing has symbolized the loss of languages, cultures, and people groups. However, the paradigms of classic Aristotelian rhetoric, as taught in introductory composition courses at university, are being reshaped, especially by theories such as new rhetorical genre theory that emphasize the socio-political contexts of knowledge. This shift creates greater opportunity for traditional, Aboriginal discourse conventions to be welcomed as frameworks for new knowledge (Van Dyck, 2005, p. 36).

It is this new knowledge, built on old and modern stories, that was created and celebrated within every workshop.

**Telling Histories**

Histories are contested terrain in educational practice. Many sites of public education and schooling serve to provide information on history and represent dominant histories which subjugate Indigenous peoples (Barnes, 2005, p. 150).

Telling Histories focused less on rhetoric and was based more within a critical pedagogies theoretical framework that viewed history as a concept, a discipline and a tool of the oppressor.

Australian history by its nature, name and definition is not inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders’ stories or lived realities. Australian history is based around settlement and not invasion. It does not represent through public holidays, war memorials, curricula and the collective psyche the ongoing struggle continuum that constitutes Aboriginal peoples’ realities since invasion. There have been constant and ongoing sites of resistance, freedom fighters, warriors, wars, activism and resistance to colonisation. This is rarely represented in the history books taught in schools and universities. When on the odd occasion it is, it has been hotly contested by some non-Indigenous historians and politicians (e.g. Windshuttle, 2002).

Telling Histories began with a look at what History is. Was Herodotus (the father of History) biased when he wrote ‘The Histories’ to show the glory of Greece against the Barbarians in the Greco Persian wars? If this is the foundation upon which the modern ‘History’ discipline is based, then the question of bias emerged in class discussions and questions were raised about who benefits from any agreed upon versions of ‘History’, and what Australian history tells us about who wrote it.

We spent a lot of time looking at Aboriginal resistance history largely through Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus’s book *The struggle for Aboriginal rights* (1999). We began with the first written acts of resistance in the late 1830s on Flinders Island in Bass Strait. We would then move through time to the ongoing
struggle for land rights, citizenship and recognition up to today. This detailed examination of resistance history was often confronting and eye-opening for students. Students local to the areas included in the written historical accounts knew the histories through their own peoples’ oral traditions. But as a whole, as a cross-sectional snapshot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ resistance, very few knew of the complete, recurring and undying struggle continuum. We started to see how much of our history had been left out of the dominant versions of history. We did this as a large group where we all participated in the process of reading about sites of resistance and sharing that back as a group.

It was also important that we had the space to tell our stories and histories in an Aboriginal only place as in this way the journey of telling and retelling history could happen without fear; we raged, we cried, we celebrated, we laughed and we shared.

The History Wars and who controlled the representation and arguments around Australian history was analysed. The differing versions of the Mistake Creek massacre of Peggy Patrick and Keith Windshuttle formed a robust discussion. Also we celebrated our warriors of resistance in the struggle by looking at Gary Foley’s Koori History website.

What we did alongside this process was to provide the building blocks to communicate our own versions of history, a re-telling from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. It helped us define what was important to us. Then we prepared ten to twenty minute performances in groups of five to ten. The groups chose a moment in history or a story and then conducted an intense character analysis from their physical and emotional depths for their historical roles in the performances. The groups then scripted and performed a story, a show; it may have been one moment, it may have been many. These performances were created for a large and varied audience of community members, staff and students and, when appropriate, we would invite years 5-7 from the local Batchelor Area School.

These performances were an act of breaking down some of the barriers that typically exclude First Nations people from succeeding within Western higher education frameworks. They were both an act, and therefore a site, of empowerment for the participants and a gift to the audience to witness a different perspective, to participate and be drawn into a journey that may be one they didn’t know, a journey which could open a door to conversations, to meaningful exchanges.

Dion (2009) speaks of these moments in terms of “compelling invitations”:

...within Aboriginal traditions the power of the story resides partly in the telling, our approach is to (re) tell the stories in such a way that listeners hear a “compelling invitation” that claims their attention and initiates unsettling questions that require working through... the hope for accomplishing an alternative way of knowing lies partly in our ability to share with our readers what the stories mean to us (Dion, 2009, p. 1).

Sharing our histories and stories in a way that was accessible and that could be heard was one of the aims of Telling Histories. If the moments in history that we find important, moments that shape who we are, are the very moments that white Australia wants to forget, then telling histories from an Indigenous perspective provided forums from which more authentic discussions could begin. Again Dion supports this point from her Canadian perspective:

If justice for Aboriginal people lies in remembering, but forgetting serves the needs of the Canadian nation, where are the possibilities for accomplishing justice found? (Dion 2009 p. 1)

Scripts were written and re-written, props and costumes made, the story rehearsed and re-rehearsed, all the formal requirements of creating a performance were done on a large scale, often with four or five groups of eight to ten people, with at least three or four re-workings and rehearsals. This was a crazy, exciting time and we did it all within two weeks. The classroom would be left open with students rehearsing into the night, with at least two direction rehearsals with lecturers.
The day before we would rehearse the bump in and out of all props, cement the order, practice all that at least two or three times, rearrange the classroom so it became a makeshift theatre, cordon off our entrances and exits, and get all our sound effects and cues on the laptop and any power point or images to be projected. We practised and then did a complete run through of all the shows. All the time we were aware of the energy growing, the excitement building, people panicking. The electricity in the air was palpable and then just when you felt ready to explode, it all came together with the room packed out and the performances perfect. The resulting sense of shared achievement was hard to describe, the crowd going crazy and everyone elated.

We called these workshops transformative and experiential. We all, student, lecturer and audience members, came out different at the other end, partly because of the powerful experience of listening to a room full of stories. The workshops were transformative also because of the personal journey that each student went on and the collegial support that everyone in the classroom shared.

These were the best-scaffolded units I have ever taught. Dr. McCormack, in initially writing them, had incorporated the rhetorical text patterns we were teaching into their delivery. Literally while we were speaking into the microphone we were role modelling the text patterns in use.

Speaking our truths and the possessive investment in ignorance
This analysis of the Common Units is all about the celebration of speaking and enacting the power of our ancestors through the students telling their stories, talking their histories into existence.

Butler (2010) speaks of this transition from subjugation to agency:

It seemed that if you were subjugated, there were also forms of agency that were available to you, and you were not just a victim, or you were not only oppressed, but oppression could become the condition of your agency” (Butler, 2010).

It was this act of speaking up and out to an audience that was one of the key strengths of and the greatest threats to the Common Units. The presentations were all informative, entertaining and strong, and they all held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders’ views, worldviews, stories, and realities. This often had a profound effect on the audience but also, I believe, was the underlying aggravant behind the mistrust and dislike of these units. Every speech and every performance challenged ignorance. That was the very point of doing them, to communicate our histories to an audience. This is not problematic unless it happens in an environment were there is a possessive investment in ignorance. The possessive investment means that anything that tells a counter-truth to dominant Australian narratives must be questioned, that the investment in ignorance must be possessively guarded.

The Common Units, with their open storytelling style, not only confronted that ignorance but actively dismantled it. When the audience is sitting through a performance based around massacres on cattle stations in the Northern Territory, there is a profound impact on, if not eradication of ignorance. Or when audience members watch a ‘smash the Act’ performance with a black Joh Bjelke Peterson and screaming protestors at the Commonwealth games, screaming students being dragged out of the classroom/stage by other students wearing police costumes, when students stage that right and all disbelief is suspended, the audience is emotionally engaged, the action happening right there. We can add to this the enactments of the histories of Pemulwuy, Jandamarra and the Freedom Rides, a life story of Sir Douglas Nicholls or William Cooper, a Broome half caste girls’ home and so many stories of the stolen generations, of mothers losing their children or being in detention centres called homes. We learnt so much from these stories.

All of these stories, communicated powerfully through performance, song and dance, changed those that heard them, taught those who engaged with them, and confronted those who didn’t want to hear them. The Common Units, Public Communication and Telling Histories, had eleven years of pushing the boundaries of ignorance possession. Whilst the Units
may well have been dismissed as being trivial, not academic, not serving a real academic function, the stories and speeches told within the Units were less easily dismissed. Many staff just didn’t attend the presentations, tried to boycott them so to speak. In fact we knew in advance who from the staff were going to come or not. However, even though they tried through avoidance to maintain their investment in ignorance, this also did not fully protect them, as the students in their classes would talk of the performances, as would other staff over lunch the next day. The word got around what the content of the performances or speeches were. These truths told at these times were inescapable. Momentarily within the Institute the central story being told was one of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement, history, strength and survival. The classrooms and the offices had been hijacked and, whether it was one speech or story in particular that grabbed the audience’s attention, the focus was briefly not on curriculum content or discipline specific knowledges that maintain the accustomed binary power relationships within the Institute, but all about First Nations peoples’ strength, knowledge, stories and capacity. Conversations about the amazing props, or the Islander dancing or the realistic spears, spoke to a greater truth and it was all about the students’ capacities and competence.

This ran contrary to other narratives that surround First Nations people. The gaze had shifted. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strength and competency were being displayed and this sat at odds with the hegemonic narrative. As such, it was mistrusted, denigrated and needing to be contained. The form of containment, and ultimately the Units’ demise, was enacted through the strategic use of Western standards. The possessive investment in ignorance was displayed every time my colleagues and I had to justify and defend the Units at all the forums described in the narrative chapter, with my senior lecturer telling me these Units were universally despised.

These Units were the flagship of Batchelor Institute for so many people and the bane and thorn in the ‘hegemonic side’ for so many more. The arguments that surrounded them were bigger than content, outcomes, and standards. The animosity was larger than those lecturers seeking to protect their own disciplines by seeking to regain the ‘loss’ of 20 credit points in their degree taken up by these Units.

These Units and their outcomes ran contrary to white privilege and its pathologising narratives (Moreton-Robinson, 2009). The celebratory analysis and presentation that happened within these Units stood as a direct challenge to white privileging and notions of Aboriginal mimicry through assimilation. These Units demonstrated and celebrated First Nation competency, not only in the high pass rates of students but in the very outcomes and challenges that the Units achieved. They ran counter to the ideology of whiteness. The Common Units questioned the validity of the stereotypes that the dominant narratives had been constructed against. They were too successful.

So the Common Units, through their expressed intent, impacted upon the levels of ignorance that significant ‘others’ employed at the Institute had an investment in. The Units also undermined the hegemonic power imported into the Institute by saying, ‘you may think this but you quite simply cannot deny the power of these stories and the work put in to the display of them’. Two weeks is all we had to change the world around us a little bit, but that’s OK, that’s all we needed, we were that good!

The narrative that exists around Aboriginal people (students and staff) is born of deep seated prejudice and a supposed knowing that Aboriginal society is at its core dysfunctional. These prejudices were played out around the Common Units for eleven years, that they were not academic enough, that the students were inherently lazy, that the lecturers were radicals with an agenda outside education. These narratives, though deeply felt, needed to be re-thought when faced with the strength of stories, when faced with a different version of truth around history and most importantly when faced with the sheer hard work that was needed to actualise the stories. Each speech and performance worked as a counter narrative, slowly chipping away at the drunk, desperate, needy narrative and replacing it with strength, survival and resistance. The possessive investment in ignorance which sees a deliberate not knowing just couldn’t exist in the same space as powerful stories. The
Common Units stopped being offered as Batchelor’s undergraduate program amalgamated with Charles Darwin University through the Australian Centre of Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) in 2012.

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Looking for a new common ground: a reflection on Batchelor Institute’s teacher education training programs for remote Aboriginal education professionals in the Northern Territory

Sue Reaburn, Melodie Bat, & Claire Kilgariff

Introduction
Batchelor’s history in Aboriginal teacher education reflects and is reflected by a small institution’s ability to navigate through forty years of politics and practice surrounding both Indigenous affairs and teacher education. This chapter considers the long engagement of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in meeting the needs of Aboriginal students enrolled in its teacher education program and makes a call for a renewal of purpose in teacher education.

For the purposes of this chapter, the term ‘teacher education’ is used to include education and training programs for all Aboriginal Educators: the university Higher Education (HE) programs which prepare fully qualified ‘teachers’ as well as the Vocational, Education and Training (VET) programs which ‘train’ in-classroom paraprofessional. The chapter presents a brief chronological overview of BIITE’s various programs and considers them in terms of what a ‘quality’ program looks like, importantly noting that where common ground was found among the issues, tensions, contradictions and paradoxes, lived some of the best quality teacher education programs for remote Aboriginal Australians.

What is a quality teacher education program?
Bat’s research findings into BIITE’s teacher education program proposed the following:

A quality Indigenous teacher education program has equity of inputs as well as outputs

a) An equity of inputs is evident when:
   i. Self-determination is a key purpose of the course
   ii. Indigenous knowledges and cultures are embedded throughout the course
   iii. Delivery of the course strengthens identity through relationship-based learning.

b) An equity of outputs is evident when:
   i. Graduates attain professional standards
   ii. Graduation rates are commensurate with all other students
   iii. Social capital is created through community capacity building. (Bat, 2010, pp. 338-339)

Essentially, these findings were distilled by examining ‘quality’ from two key perspectives. Firstly from the Aboriginal learners and their communities, for whom the how (which incorporates the who and the where) and the why were the most important.

Such a program has self-determination at the foundation, embeds Indigenous knowledges in content and delivery and makes use of relationship-based learning in its delivery (Bat, 2011, p. 9).
And secondly from the perspective of the profession and the employers, where the what of the programs were key, this being essentially the attainment of a set of universally acceptable regulated standards (Bat, 2011).

This tension between what, how and why is evident throughout the five decades of BIITE’s teacher education programs (and twenty years of its predecessors), in all their various forms.

Decade 1: the 1960s: the beginnings of formal programs
In these earliest days of teacher education, Aboriginal Educators, (also known as Assistant Teachers, Teacher Aides and Teacher Assistants (all of whom were Aboriginal and drawn from the local community) were seen as a link between teacher and parent: the “… bulwark for the child during his transition from the vernacular to English”. Equally important was the development of the individual, for each Teaching Assistant is regarded as “potential youth and community leader” (Kormilda College, 1969).

Most early ‘training’ was on the job and early records and anecdotal evidence indicate that more formal ‘training’ commenced after the first two Aboriginal Educators were employed in NT government schools in 1953 as Assistant Teachers. In the early 1960s, short courses were held in a variety of locations in Darwin including the Welfare Branch Training Centre (later renamed Kormilda College) and Carpentaria House. Held over Christmas school holiday breaks, student numbers and gender varied as did participant skills and experience. The seminal Watts and Gallacher Report recommended that the course be extended (1964, p. 104) and by 1968 a one-year specialised course had begun in Darwin. The Assistant Teachers and their families lived on site at the newly opened Kormilda College in Berrimah and the staff of two taught “the rudiments of teaching and academic study” (Northern Territory Administration, 1967, p. 25).

As expected of the national policy of Assimilation at the time, the course itself provided no evidence of relational learning or the embedding of Aboriginal knowledges. Review of the destinations of these students reveals that of the 23 students from 17 Northern Territory communities studying the 1968 year-long program, four later became Principals of their community schools, evidence that the outputs of the program were significant for that era.

The not negotiable how was one year away from home with family uprooted, one year back working as an educator and then onto the second year, a pattern which was to continue for some years to come. From the small amount of documentation available it appears that the what of these programs—the curriculum content and the training outcome—was dominant and the focus was on bringing people into the profession as it then existed, rather than the journey to get there.

Decade 2: the 1970s: New beginnings: bilingual education and RATE
In 1970, a second year of study was added to the offering at Kormilda. Successful completion of the first and second year courses enabled Assistant Teachers to some career progression as they became TA1 (Teacher Aide 1) and TA2 (Teacher Aide 2). There were seven second year students, many being experienced educators; some had managed their own class for years (Benjamin, 2014). As with other ‘vocations’, the pattern of the first two years being vocational training continued through the early 1970s.

From mid December 1972, the newly formed Whitlam government commenced a new era in policy, that of Self-Determination, a shift from the paternalistic Assimilation policy to one where decision making by Aboriginal peoples would be supported. Responsibility for all education in the NT was allocated to the new Commonwealth Department of Health and Education and bilingual programs were announced for commencement in February 1973 (Edmonds, 2014). The role of the Assistant Teachers required reimagining as in addition to their existing duties, in identified bilingual schools, they were now expected to be teachers of language (McGrath, 1974, p. 9).

Concurrently, decisions about what to do with the town of Batchelor after the closure of the Rum Jungle Uranium Mine saw, among other things, the beginnings of Aboriginal teacher education located there in early 1974. Similar efforts were occurring.
in Western Australia with the beginnings of their Aboriginal Teacher Education Program and the program in Batchelor became known as the Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre (ATEC). In 1974, a third year of training for the Aboriginal Educators was negotiated to be taught at and by Darwin Community College (DCC) (Charles Darwin University’s forerunner). Students and their families were expected to again uproot from community and relocate to Darwin for a period of twelve months. The effect was a large dropout rate. As a result of the devastation caused by Cyclone Tracey in December 1974, although still taught by DCC staff, DCC’s third year teacher education course was moved to Batchelor. This dropout rate led to the trial of community-based teacher education program at Yirrkala in 1976 (White, 2005) and began what is heralded as BIITE’s, indeed the NT’s, most successful Aboriginal teacher education program, the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATE). The success of the early RATE programs inspired the establishment of other onsite programs and by the late 1970s programs had commenced in eight other communities. In its initial stages, RATE was a first year, tertiary enabling type program, and the campus-based residential program continued (Uibo, 1993). Another impact of the off-campus nature of the RATE programs was the need to strengthen curriculum and the development of a range of resources to assist the lecturers based in communities with quality assurance and delivery of a course with common content and methodology.

The programs themselves were developed in an era when tertiary institutions self-regulated and there is a sense (Kluken 2013; Pitman, 2013), that the what was becoming to be driven now by the how and why, giving space for Aboriginal languages and knowledges to be to be included as curriculum. By 1978 there were fourteen trained Aboriginal teachers in the NT. Much of this development was informed by the experience of educators working in New Guinea and relocating back to Australia post its independence in 1975 (Pitman, 2013).

Decade 3: the 1980s: teacher education as bicultural education

RATE fulfilled three primary functions:

1. the first years of pre-service Teacher Education for Aboriginal educators who for a range of social, cultural and political reasons needed to remain in and of their community
2. in-service training where professional development with a pedagogical focus was aligned to accredited training requirements
3. a forum to create curriculum as pedagogical exchange (Reaburn, 2012, p. 2).

As the RATE course content was designed around real and immediate classroom and community issues, students thought and spoke in their own language. In addition tutors were part of the school staff enabling the relationships between the students, the school and teacher education staff to be very strong creating optimal conditions for and immediate and easy transfer between theory and practice. In this environment students succeeded and RATE programs proliferated.

RATE Stage 1 Lecturers usually worked with four part-time programs at one time – running a community based workshop in each community each term and bringing all four programs into a central place (Batchelor, Alice Springs or a large community) for a combined workshop once a term. Between these workshops the Tutor was responsible for ensuring the students completed post-workshop tasks (research, academic and teaching) and prepared tasks for the next workshop. Lecturers met at Batchelor College once a term for planning and curriculum development. All workshops were recorded in book form and kept at Batchelor College as resources for other Lecturers (Priestley, 2013).

Although BIITE became a College of Technical and Further Education in 1979, it was still under the control of the Northern Territory Department of Education. In 1980, proposals were made to deliver a teacher education course leading to an Associate Diploma of Teaching after three years of training and a Diploma
of Teaching after four years. Despite being approved by the Council for Advanced Awards and the Northern Territory Teaching Service Commissioner, the Diploma was rejected by the Minister for Education on the basis that there would be only one Teacher Education provider (DCC) and that Aboriginal people who wanted a teaching qualification had to be ‘equal and the same’ (Stanton, 1992). Tentative moves for Batchelor to diversify its offerings were met with the same resistance. In 1983, Bachelor’s Principal, with experience supporting self-determination in Papua New Guinea, facilitated the establishment of first Council of Batchelor College (advisory to the Secretary of the Department of Education) and a Board of Studies to advise the Council on academic matters. Apart from two students, the Council had only one Aboriginal member (the Chair of the NT Indigenous Advisory Committee Feppi) and initially there was no appetite to increase the proportion of Aboriginal members (Ingram, 2014).

To assist navigate a course of action, assistance was sought from Deakin University to evaluate the teacher education program in preparation for its reaccreditation in 1985. It was an ‘assisted self-evaluation’ which engaged the staff in thinking about what a quality teacher education program would look like.

1983 saw Batchelor’s move to offer a fourth year of training to diploma level rejected and three-year Aboriginal Schools Teaching Certificate was replaced with a three-year Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools). The qualification was restricted, meaning successful graduates could teach Aboriginal children only and there was no opportunity for promotion.

By 1985, there were around 80 students in the campus-based residential program, with three or four graduates a year, and 75 students in eleven RATE programs. Given the lack of prior student access to secondary schooling and that the Assistant Teachers who were students of the RATE programs worked full time, it continued to be the equivalent of pre-tertiary enabling program (Baumgart et al., 1995; Ingram, 2004; White, 2005). The attrition rate reduced from over 50 percent to 35 percent. Concurrently the teacher education program itself continued to be developed. Later RATE expanded to include what was then called Stage 2, the equivalent of a first year course. In addition, the campus-based program shifted to a mixed-mode approach, where students lived on community and travelled to a BIITE campus or centrally located communities for workshops. This shift in program delivery was an important educational (as well as social and cultural) development.

The immediate applicability in their community schools of what the students were studying was central to the training provided (as it was in the other areas of training and education that we took on). All students were required to do at least 10 hours per week in the classroom in addition to the off-the-job training provided for an hour or two a day in the community through co-operation with school staff. But more than this, “both ways” education requires that the student be able to draw on both western orientated academic knowledge and the knowledge and educational practices of their community and cultural heritage (Ingram, 2014).

However despite its success (compared to the high failure rate at DCC) the homesickness being experienced by the Batchelor campus-based students (Ober, 2001) meant a growing attrition rate (Uibo, 1993). In 1986 RATE included a program for Assistant Teachers working in very remote Homeland Centres in North East Arnhem Land and by 1987 enrolments in the teacher education program had reached 150.

The same Deakin University staff who had done the earlier evaluation conducted an evaluation of the RATE program in 1985 and 1986 (Kemmis, 1988). The combination of DCC refusing to hand over delivery of Stage 4 (it was then the third and last year of teacher education qualification), and mounting pressure coming from Batchelor’s Associate Diploma graduates growing frustration at their inability to complete their ‘equal but same’ study at DCC, (renamed at this stage Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT), now CDU) meant that students could not break through the promotional ceiling imposed by their restricted qualification. What resulted was a partnership between Batchelor and Deakin University.
to deliver Deakin’s primary teacher education degree. The course became known as the Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education (DBATE) program.

In securing this alternative partnership, the desire was to have a program that was “…respectful of Aboriginal peoples’ right to self-determination” (McTaggart, 1987, p. 10). It was designed on the principles and practices established through the RATE program and strengthened by the assisted self-evaluation which engaged Batchelor staff and students (Kemmis, 1988) in reflecting on the what and how a ‘both ways’ course methodology and content could be like. From 1986 -1988 the partnership between Batchelor and Deakin University enabled 25 Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) graduates to complete their final year of teacher training. They were awarded a Batchelor of Arts (Education) by Deakin University.

Despite receiving strong criticism from quarters in the Northern Territory (Henry, 2014; Ingram, 2014) the course could, using an approach which reflected and respected the linguistic and cultural knowledge brought to the course by the students, legitimately claim to be at the same standard of the mainstream teacher education courses. It did much to ameliorate the constant challenges regarding the quality of the BIITS teacher education program offering. Importantly it also modelled to other teacher education institutions the what and how of a highly successful approach to teacher education for Aboriginal educators.

Nine graduates of DBATE went on to become principals of the schools in their communities and the influence these educators had on Aboriginal education in their communities as role models and locating the place of Aboriginal pedagogy as an integral part of the curriculum left a remarkable legacy. Other graduates met with resistance back in their community schools as their aspirations to leadership positions met with resistance and they left education. Many went on to be successful in other careers.

They were our role models for our communities someone that we can look up to. They played a very important role in political times but they went through this, they have survived. This because they had hope and vision, bridge builders, they devoted their lives as much as possible. They are passionate teachers all in the name of EDUCATION (Yunupingu, 2014).

By 1988, Batchelor had achieved its own nationally registered course, the Diploma of Teaching, an unrestricted award built on the principles and practices of both RATE and DBATE with short intensive workshops on campus where students developed action research projects to be done within the community (Roche & White, 1990a).

Internal regulation of courses led to much internal contestation around what constituted a quality teacher education program and who decided, with Batchelor’s teacher education staff falling on one side or the other of debate between academic requirements, or ‘standards’—the what; and the need for self-determination—the why (Stewart, 1989). The debate was at times fierce and personal. They had a consistent theme:

Both ways ... is almost (some would say undoubtedly) a contradiction in terms to have an apparent ‘Aboriginalised’ course of instruction in a centralised western-style institution. It is this apparent contradiction that is the central dilemma faced by all those black and white, who are part of Batchelor Institute, be they staff, student, or administrator. And yet is this dilemma that is the dynamic of the College that continually throws up the questions that have to be faced and answered, that challenge all preconceptions about teaching styles, content, and philosophy (Morgan, 1988, cited in Ingram, 2004, p. 136).

This was the decade where Batchelor Institute worked to embed Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning in its programs, actively working to shape the what of programs. The problem-posing approach used in the RATE and DBATE curriculum allowed the program to draw on student Aboriginal knowledges and on the western academic traditions and address real issues that were current and relevant in the experiences of the students. From this, students were able to develop their own educational philosophy and praxis (Ingram,
2014). It was also an approach which gave more flexibility for community-based education and an approach to Aboriginal teacher education strongly supported by Aboriginal educators who understood and articulated clearly what they wanted and why. For example, one Homeland Centre Assistant Teacher / RATE participant noted:

Through RATE, we Yolŋu see our chance of getting loose and getting rid of the harness and the bridle that the Balanda has long used to steer us in the direction that they wanted us to go and that is the way of Balanda. Through this type of training we have a chance of getting educational skills so that we can work in our communities and put our qualifications and what we’ve learnt into use in our Homeland communities. We Yolŋu would like to gather enough understanding and knowledge about Balanda law and system so as to understand and live with both laws and worlds ….. This will also make communications better between Yolŋu and Balanda (Ngurruwuthun, cited in Roche & White, 1990b).

In response to the national push for 1000 Aboriginal teachers in Australian schools by 1990 The Northern Territory committed to having 100 Indigenous teachers in classrooms (Northern Territory Government, 1987).

Decade 4: the 1990s: the beginning of the change: funding cuts bring changes

Despite challenges, the 1990s saw a period of strong support through the NT Department of Education and close collaboration between lecturers and departmental staff. From 1990 - 1992 the Northern Territory Department provided Batchelor with Commonwealth funding, and housing for 20 classroom teachers to act as tutors to Assistant Teachers who were also teacher education students in identified communities (Northern Territory Government, 1992, p. 8). Teacher education courses led to the awards of Diploma of Teaching and the Associate Diploma of Teaching and the accreditation of a Diploma (and Associate Diploma) of Education (Early Childhood). Batchelor, in partnership with Catholic Education in WA extended its teacher training reach across to three communities in WA.

The year 1990 had almost 40 students graduate from the Associate Diploma of Teaching.

Central to this challenge is the provision of courses which attempt to engage students in the task of developing appropriate responses to issues of cultural survival, maintenance, renewal and transformation. At the same time the courses seek to facilitate access, equity and social justice within the context of the Australian and international social, political and economic order (Batchelor College, 1993, p. 11).

Curriculum development was informed by this, taking a negotiated approach that embedded action research problem posing problem solving approaches to achieve a program that was:

- student centred
- build on experiences of the learners
- balance content and process
- real life problems and issues used (Batchelor College, 1991b, p. 18).

In 1993, 250 new applications for enrolment in Batchelor’s teacher education courses could not be accepted due to funding constraints (Batchelor College, 1992, p.11).

In 1995, a one year Graduate Certificate and a two year Graduate Diploma of Educational Administration were developed. They were “… designed primarily to meet the needs of Batchelor graduates seeking to advance their careers through attaining senior teaching positions …” (Batchelor College, 1995, p. 29).

The programs of the 1990s had with them perhaps the most promise of all the eras. The what contained strategies to ensure that Aboriginal knowledges were embedded within them and the how was negotiated in collaboration with communities. Many students
were able to study on country. Not surprisingly such approaches gave space and Aboriginal voices were strong in relation to teacher education.

RATE community-based study helps us explore and strengthen our knowledge and understanding of our Djalkiri (foundation), our community, our languages and learning and education in our community: by sharing and discussing our educational research with Mala leader students... tutors and lecturers; by developing our confidence as Yolŋu teachers and our knowledge and skills as Yolŋu teachers; by practicing ideas from local people about children and learning/teaching in the classroom ...

Batchelor College has to make sure that the Teacher Education Program works to support us in achieving these goals. It must make sure that the interests that this reaccreditation process serve are our Yolŋu interests and not Balanda interests (Batchelor College, 1991a, p. i).

To me Batchelor College is a tertiary institution where Yolŋu people meet and learn together for the development of our own communities, promoting self-management and self-determination (Garnggulkpuy, 1991).

This high level of collaboration between agencies, communities and Batchelor, combined with an appropriate curriculum approach and the implementation of community-based learning make this decade with the strongest evidence of quality.

Pressure from a number of quarters meant that programs become centralised in the late 1990s, changing their very nature and impacting on their relevance. The federal government was adding pressure to reduce the travel budget and the schools were increasingly reluctant to make teachers available to work with Batchelor students. It was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit sufficient quality staff who were willing to be based in communities and it was easier to recruit and base staff in regional centres where their families could attend school, find work and have them travel out to communities. Further funding cuts in the TAFE sector in the late 1990s brought about the end of the community-based tutors fundamental to the success of the RATE programs (Ingram, 2014).

As the programs became more rigorously framed by the newly developing Higher Education rules, changes in funding to support the geographical and sociocultural tyrannies of distance, and Teacher professional standards became more explicit, so remote enrolments and completions declined and the progression rates faltered.

Decade 5: the 2000s: the rise of VET
One of the impacts of a more regulated higher education system has been the development of graduate attributes within each higher education organisation. At BIITE, these graduate attributes encompass both-ways as an approach to lifelong learning, a strong sense of identity, and a sense of community responsibility (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2007). These attributes, and their previous iterations, have guided the curriculum development at BIITE, including the degree program that was reaccredited in 2001 for implementation in 2002.

The degree programs were each separated into two courses: a three-year Bachelor of Teaching, which was the professional requirement in the Northern Territory at the time of accreditation, and a fourth-year standalone Bachelor of Education to meet the anticipated professional shift to the requirement of a four-year qualification for teaching. The Bachelor of Teaching was a three-year degree with exit points at first year (Diploma) and second year (Advanced Diploma) providing Assistant Teachers with pay progression points. It was intended that “students should be competent classroom practitioners by the end of year 3” (Batchelor Institute Education Course Development Committee, 2001, p. 1).

These exit points were complemented by the development in 2002 of a new VET course – the Certificate III in Indigenous Education Work designed specifically for Assistant Teachers and developed and accredited by Batchelor and the Northern Territory Government. Up until this point, the Teacher Education journey had been framed as a continuous journey
from Assistant Teacher to Teacher. The split between VET and Higher Education saw the rise of an era of external regulation and standards. The following table presents an overview of the programs from 1985 to 2002, illustrating this shift.

**Table 2.2** The Primary degree programs 1985–2002
(sourced from Batchelor Institute documentation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQF Levels</th>
<th>AT career structure level</th>
<th>Stage of course</th>
<th>Year value of qualification</th>
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<th>1991</th>
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<td>Statement of Attainment Stage 1 (Primary)</td>
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<td>Statement of Attainment Stage 2 (Primary)</td>
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<td>Statement of Attainment Stage 1 (Primary)</td>
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<td>Stage 3</td>
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<td>Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools)</td>
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<td>Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools)</td>
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<td>Stage 4</td>
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<td>Diploma of Teaching (Primary)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Graduate Diploma in Management and Administration</td>
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(Source: Batchelor Institute records 1985–2002)

In her research into the framework for considering the quality of Higher Education programs of this, Bat (2010) noted that the role of learning on country was pivotal in the formation of a learning identity, particularly for students living in remote NT. Many shifted to VET which supported on-the-job and on-country learning and there is a marked decrease in HE enrolments (Bat, 2010) a trend which continues to the present day. In VET, the Indigenous Education Work (IEW) programs continued to expand with programs being run as a combination of workshop and on-the-job learning. The partnership between BIITE, schools and education jurisdictions saw a rise in enrolments and a shared expectation that all Aboriginal paraprofessional and classroom support staff would engage in these programs.
From 2008-2010, a partnership between Batchelor and the NT Department of Education, gave rise to a higher education collaboration designed to upgrade the existing teaching qualification of twenty-two remote Aboriginal teachers to a full four years of qualification. Following a successful approach from the past, the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Programme (ITUP) was run as an in-service program with most of the teachers continuing their full time jobs as teachers and studying part time. The program was highly successful, with fourteen completing the upgrade. Two are now co-principals in their respective community schools.

BIITE gives us opportunity to learn and enrich our learning, to educate us and build our understanding in education and what lies underneath the history of colonisation, so that we may teach our children to raise their voice, to stand tall and proud and have the knowledge to debate the system that, exits today (Whitehead, 2011).

Clearly, the shift away from community-based teacher education programs in the HE programs was having an impact. Graduate attributes were now the norm, as were professional standards for teachers; accreditation of teaching degrees became regulated by the teacher registration authority and the ‘what’ of the higher education programs was tightly controlled.

In the later years of the decade this high level of regulation shifted to the VET space. Up until 2008, Batchelor held the VET course accreditation for the Assistant Teachers, and worked to the ever increasing regulation of the VET system. However with control over the content, Batchelor was still able to respond effectively to the needs of the remote school paraprofessionals. In 2008, the first Education Support course was released in the National Training Package for Community Services and Batchelor was forced into delivering a program that was developed for the national Indigenous Education Worker. This nationalisation, combined with the expansion of regulation in the VET jurisdiction a new tension developed in the VET space, with the ‘what’ now taking precedence.

Decade 6: the 2010s: Back to the future?
This decade continues to present complex challenges for the delivery of a quality teacher education for Aboriginal educators. The increased regulation of the teaching education, the teaching profession and VET means all programs exist in a tightly regulated environment with little time, space or encouragement for innovation. The consequence was that Batchelor found itself unable to continue with HE programs on its own. In 2011, BIITE entered a collaborative partnership with Charles Darwin University to establish the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) based in Darwin. Batchelor continues to deliver HE programs through the ACIKE partnership but no longer has any accreditation authority for the degree programs themselves. The BIITE ACIKE teacher education program is a campus-based workshop model with students engaging in a blended learning approach with online learning supplemented by workshops.

The establishment by the NT Department of Education in 2011 of employer Professional Standards for Assistant Teachers has brought its own challenges and combined with their and Batchelor’s ongoing ‘stop start trickle of funds’ (Ingram, 2004), collaborative approaches to professional development/accredited training are under constant pressure. The result is that despite knowing ‘what’ is required for quality education programs to be delivered (Ingram, 1987) Batchelor’s capacity to deliver appropriate (community-based) and relevant (both-ways) HE and Education Support VET courses is severely compromised. In an increasingly regulated, fiscally tight environment, the co-operation, mutual support between agencies and co-ordination of efforts required to properly serve remote Aboriginal educators, the common ground, has all but disappeared. The net effect is a decrease in VET and HE enrolments from remote communities. Everyone loses.

Looking back looking forward
Teacher education at Batchelor Institute has been a rich, contested journey of development and delivery that began with the early training courses
for Aboriginal school paraprofessionals in the 1960s in Darwin. The why and the how of the teacher education program over time has responded to the twists and turns in politics, policies and programs of (and between) Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments; difficult relationships between Batchelor with the other public provider of teacher education based in the Northern Territory (Charles Darwin University and its forerunners); variable relationships with the Northern Territory Department of Education and all the associated vagaries of allocation and distribution of resources; conflicts within and between individuals based on their philosophical differences in perspective; and the changes and developments to the higher education and vocational education sectors.

It is a journey of persistence and resistance. It has been a hard fought struggle for Batchelor to keep its unique identity and guard the space for Aboriginal languages and cultures to be counted. With strength of voice deep rooted in relationships with Aboriginal people across remote Australian communities, BIITE has been able to stand and fight for programs that are responsive and relevant to the needs of Aboriginal educators.

However, it is the view of the authors that, in its efforts to meet external demands and requirements and be able to keep the teacher education programs going, BIITE has moved away from the very strengths that drew Aboriginal people to enrol in its courses. There is a need to reengage with the interface of the two radically different social and cultural systems in geographically diverse and often difficult remote environments, paying attention to the consistent Aboriginal voice of the Northern Territory by pushing the boundaries of the political and mainstream education regulatory systems and finding the balance.

Our job as educators is to convince the people who control mainstream education that we wish to be included. Until this happens, reconciliation is an empty word and an intellectual terra nullius (Marika-Mununggiritj, 1998, p. 9).

This chapter concludes with a call for Batchelor Institute (and other stakeholders) to recommence the conversation with the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory; to find the courage to lead the repositioning of teacher education in both the VET and HE spaces back to a place of true negotiation and collaboration; back to a strength base of knowledge, skills and experience and in doing so create a new common ground from which to continue the journey.

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Critical Race Theory and Indigenous higher education: towards a remaking of the university

Steven Larkin

Introduction
This chapter will focus on a potential future direction for Indigenous higher education in Australia. The promotion of these ideas is contextualised within themes of leadership, capacity building and innovation and what the next forty years might look like for Indigenous Australia and the Australian academy if these ideals are realised. There are certain strategic considerations that will structure the terrain upon which such ideas will materialise. These include: how do we encourage Indigenous primary and secondary students to aspire to university study? How do we maximise the learning outcomes for Indigenous students undertaking studies in higher education? How can we provide an optimal learning environment for these students? How can we ensure the fulfilment of their potential as students, professionals, and as future leaders? How can we position Indigenous staff, students and graduates as leaders in their fields? How can we work together to achieve higher education outcomes in Indigenous higher education? And how do we support staff, in particular, Indigenous staff in these endeavours?

The struggle of all Indigenous leaders in higher education is to position these challenges as core business within the university in which they work. Acknowledging that respective approaches to addressing the issues of Indigenous higher education will differ from one institution to the next, overall they continue to be the necessary activities, and one hopes all university Senior Executives would strive to achieve break-through results as part of their performance. Institutional efforts to address these challenges must take account of the prospect of sector de-regulation and accompanying increased competition in the broader policy-political higher education environment. This requires inter alia, that university brand quality becomes paramount in the higher education market, and that the quality of these brands as perceived by Indigenous Australia will be largely determined on how well universities respond to the specific issues outlined above.

Consequently, the significance of the Indigenous student experience at universities will become more influential given the positioning of students as primary consumers in the higher education market. Student choice in the market will determine – and be determined by – what constitutes ‘best buys’ in terms of quality and cost benefit. These issues present a particular level of non-commercial complexity for Indigenous students and staff who both study and work in Australian universities. This complexity arises from the racialised nature of Australian universities, as characterised by the asymmetrical race relations manifested in the white dominance of the institution.

This chapter firstly provides a brief overview of the nature of Indigenous participation in Australian higher education. I then discuss the nature of how this data profile is generally understood by the broader academy in ways that undermine Indigenous aspirations and perpetuate sub-optimal outcomes for Indigenous scholars. I then introduce Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an alternative framework for generating different explanations for Indigenous educational disadvantage, and outline the elements of a conceptual approach informed by CRT that could guide and direct professional practice, core activities and program delivery at higher education institutions across Australia.

The current profile of Indigenous Australian participation in higher education provides the evidence Indigenous of disadvantage as a consequence of asymmetrical race relations. The Behrendt Report (2012) summarised the following in schools:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ retention rates are lower than non-Indigenous students
- They are less likely to finish grade 12 (half the rate of non-Indigenous students)
• They are less likely to gain a university entrance score

In higher education as students, the report showed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:

• Are less likely to participate in university
• Are less likely to be admitted to university on the basis of their prior educational attainment
• Have lower retention rates
• Have lower completion rates

Further, as staff in higher education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

• Are more likely to be in non-academic positions
• Are less likely to be in higher-classification academic positions
• Are less likely to be employed in a research-only function

In higher education research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

• Make up 1.1% of HDR students at university
• Are 0.8% of all HDR completions (in 2010)
• Have slightly lower HDR retention rates

In accounting for these disparities, it is argued that mainstream explanations of the Indigenous experience of disadvantage reference master narratives created, maintained and justified by ideologies of racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27; Espino, 2012; Abrams & Moio, 2009; Hylton, 2005). Racism provides the context and content for the perpetuity of these master narratives that seek to explain low educational achievement and lack of success by Indigenous students through primarily non-racial ways that are however structured by the application of racist logics (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Espino, 2012).

The 2011 Report by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) confirmed the existence of racism in the Australian academy based on testimony from Indigenous staff that they continued to experience racist incidents within the Australian universities (2011, p. 3). The report specifically noted that “Australian universities are recognized as the bastion of teaching, learning and research”, and it also concluded that “racial discrimination can and does infiltrate the higher education sector”.

Unsurprisingly, the NTEU study reported the existence of negative Indigenous stereotypes in Australian universities. For example, one respondent said:

[I’m] often thought to be stupid or of low intelligence due to Aboriginality. [I’m] thought to have somehow cheated in gaining certificates or degrees because [I’m] Aboriginal (2011, p. 26).

Relatedly, Essed (1991) reported the dominance of eurocentrism in her research in the United States and The Netherlands, which dictated that the normative values of the dominant white culture operate to ensure cultural difference was overemphasized and then conceptualized hierarchically. For example, Essed found that attributed white values such as reason were assigned a superior status to those of emotion or passion which are racially attributed as characteristic of blackness and of gender. This implies that Indigenous students and staff are required to adapt to ‘superior’ white values if they want to progress in the mainstream academy.

Another NTEU survey respondent recounted their experience with racism as:

Bullying by non-Indigenous academics, information withheld regularly because ‘we’ don’t need to know details or it is considered too difficult for us to understand. Very racist comments about activities such as having the building smoked – it was dismissed as superstitious nonsense (2011, p. 29).

Contextualising Essed’s conclusions in an Australian context, white staff are often incapable of understanding the world from an Indigenous point of view, instead relying on and/or bringing in a non-Indigenous perspective. This prevents non-Indigenous people from being systematically confronted with
Indigenous perceptions of reality (Essed, 1991). This is demonstrated in the following account from another Indigenous respondent:

Many non-Indigenous people don’t recognize or respect Indigenous knowledges, culture, protocols or people. This occurs on a continuing basis at work. It may be overt or covert institutional systemic racism that permeates in different forms or methods (2011, p. 27).

This can create a cognitive barrier for Indigenous people when they want to communicate important messages to non-Indigenous people - the common experience being one of having to repeat oneself time and time again in order to be acknowledged and understood (Essed, 1991). It generates an Indigenous perception of being ‘passively tolerated’ and a perceived indifference by non-Indigenous academics to the intellectual contributions of Indigenous scholars (Essed, 1991). This neglect can be non-verbal at times so it becomes difficult to address. As one respondent in the NTEU (2011) study recounted

It has been assumed in some forums that I cannot have anything significant to contribute unless it is Aboriginal or cultural. My standing as an academic...and numerous scholarly outputs is continually ignored, I am assumed to have no expertise except Indigenous ‘cultural’ and then I am assumed to know everything (NTEU, 2011, 28).

According to Essed, the management of cultural difference can take several forms. Essed (1991) found that black issues were rarely tabled or problematized, largely because black issues were understood as only being relevant to black people. This was reiterated by another respondent in the NTEU study who reported:

[I have] been ignored when Aboriginal affairs are discussed. Issues relating to Aboriginal affairs are deliberately left off meeting agendas (2011, p. 32).

In terms of pursuing Indigenous interests, the tendency has been for Indigenous people to not be taken seriously within the university. Plans and/or suggestions generated by Indigenous people are not heard, understood, or not acted upon. This occurs through what Essed (1991) refers to as a practice of repressive tolerance exercised by the white majority, so that an Indigenous view is not considered to be of any consequence.

Whilst these instances and examples are not exhaustive, they reflect a university culture that does not augur well for, or instil, confidence that Indigenous interests, issues and aspirations will be recognised, prioritised, understood or acted upon. However, the perpetuation of both an exclusion and subordination agenda means that non-Indigenous institutions like universities have not essentially changed the nature or structure of the asymmetrical race relations that occur within them. Although there have been some isolated examples of positive change, Indigenous people have generally not been included or represented in the normal fabric of university life at levels or in areas of responsibility consistent with their aspirations or interests. Consequently for Indigenous staff and students who access universities, nothing is to be taken for granted.

As stated earlier, a range of master narratives exist to account for white racial privilege in institutions such as universities, in ways that render such privilege as part of the natural order in the face of the breadth and depth – and indeed continuity - of Indigenous disadvantage (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Consequentially, the master narrative is one that justifies and rationalises the privileges of white, middle to upper class, heterosexual men and it achieves this by endorsing these subject positions as the “normative points of reference” on reality (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28; Yosso et al., 2001). These master narratives largely go unchallenged by most people in the white mainstream (with few exceptions) and only seem to face opposition by those who suffer as a consequence, i.e. Indigenous people. These stories are popularly received by dominant race group members as the most plausible accounts of racial inequality and represent the ‘so-called’ natural order of the everyday (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The raced experiences of Indigenous people are erased and the experiences of white middle-upper class men are transposed as
the de facto standard of identifying, prioritising and addressing all forms of subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

As an example in the Australian context, Larkin (2013) demonstrated how mainstream explanations for low Indigenous unemployment participation rates in the Australian public service largely ignored any consideration of race and racism, and instead relied on Indigenous labour supply characteristics targeting Indigenous deficit and cultural liability as the dominant explanatory factors. Similarly the 2013 Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (NT) made little reference to the impact and effects of race and racism in its analysis and subsequent recommendations, despite acknowledging that the situation for many Indigenous children in the NT education system had worsened since the last major review in 1999 (Wilson, 2013).

These (master) narratives are usually presented in ways that infer a neutrality and objectivity of perspective while simultaneously making implicit racial assumptions shaped by negative stereotypes about Indigenous people. Moreover, the standard majoritarian methodology is dependent on these stereotypes that directly and indirectly link Indigenous people with all that is ‘bad’ while reinforcing that white, middle-upper class people embody all that is ‘good’ (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29). Essentially, in these master narratives, Indigenous people are described as less intelligent and irresponsible, while the white middle class are positioned as the converse.

Predictably, master narratives promote the idea of cultural assimilation as the answer for Indigenous ‘failure’. Assimilation here means that Indigenous students must adopt the ways of the dominant white culture if they are to succeed in education and life more generally. These narratives therefore define a successful Indigenous student as an ‘assimilated’ Indigenous student (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this sense, reducing or rejecting the significance of race and racism in the discourse of Indigenous education provides the basis for master narratives to promote the insignificance of race as a factor in explaining Indigenous educational disparities. Culture becomes the new proxy for race and white privilege is maintained through notions of cultural inferiority.

An alternative model – Critical Race Theory

The Australian academy requires systemic transformation in order to better understand the effects of racism within its institutions. I propose that Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a constructive framework from which to respond to the myriad of challenges posed by race and racism in Australian higher education. CRT provides a conceptual framework along with practical tools to approach these serious challenges. This call for CRT is not without precedent; a number of Australian scholars have similarly promoted CRT in education as well, such as McDonald (2003), Rudolph (2011), and McLaughlin and Whatman (2011).

What exactly is CRT? CRT draws on disciplines including sociology, history, feminist and post-colonial studies, economics, ethnic and cultural studies, “to analyse, deconstruct and transform for the better the relationship between race, racism and power” (Abrams & Moio, 2009, p. 250; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, 2005). In this sense, CRT is characterised “by a readiness to cross epistemological boundaries” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 10). CRT therefore represents “a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing and eliminating other forms of subordination” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

It provides a framework to explore and examine racism in society “that privileges whiteness as it disadvantages the (racial) other because of their blackness” (Hylton, 2008, p. 6) and provides a place of resistance to racism(s), “challenge[s] orthodoxies, canons and dogma” thereby demonstrating the potential “to interrupt and transform social structures and racial power” to achieve “racial emancipation” (ibid, p. 6).

CRT has a number of main tenets to which its academics, researchers, practitioners and scholars ascribe:

1. The centralisation of race and racism
2. Commitment to challenging the dominant ideology
3. Commitment to social justice

4. Centrality of marginalised voices or the centrality of experiential knowledge

5. Transdisciplinarity

6. Interest convergence

1. Centralisation of race and racism

CRT has as its foundation that race and racism are “central, endemic, permanent and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how society functions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 73, Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Within this tenet, the interlocutory nature of oppressions is recognised, i.e. race cannot be theorised separate to class and vice versa (Hylton, 2008; Yosso, 2005; Ledesma & Calderon 2014; Gillborn 2006). The shift sought by educational theorists who engage with CRT is from a focus on questions of methodology to greater awareness of epistemologies as the means of better understanding the experiences of Indigenous Australians in society (Hylton, 2008; Gillborn, 2006), allowing exploration of forms of inclusion and exclusion, which “operate through the interplay of overt racist practice and implicit racialised coding” (Hylton, 2008; Yosso, 2005; Espino, 2012).

2. Challenging the dominant ideology

CRT refutes claims made by educational institutions toward objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity, and rejects notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ researchers to reveal the nature of deficit-informed research that ignores, distorts or silences Indigenous epistemologies (Yosso, 2005; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Espino, 2012). The focus on colour-blindness is concerned with issues of liberalism, especially its ambivalence to matters of racism (Harper, 2012). The CRT perspective argues that such claims provide a subterfuge for the self-interest, power and privilege of the racially dominant group.

3. Commitment to social justice

CRT pursues an agenda of liberation and transformation of racial, gendered and classist oppressions. If it is to be valued as a politics of social change, the praxis of CRT must achieve social transformation and empower those who are oppressed to reform, among others, contemporary employment practices so that they value Indigenous people in academic leadership. There may be a discernible shift in policy discourses that would centre racism as the primary lever for the redistribution and/or reallocation of resources. In any case, historical notions of resource provision and the concept of a level playing field must be rejected and displaced by alternative paradigms that think through how the material differences between those disadvantaged in society can be balanced to ensure underlying ideologies of colour-blindness and associated institutional arrangements are made highly visible.

Accompanying this should be a critical ontology that ensures researchers, academic staff, managers and other leaders have an awareness of their racialised positionality and how their worlds have been structured accordingly. They must use this awareness as a starting point to apply ideas to how issues of racism and the distribution of power and resources marginalise the racial other and their position in major social structures such as universities. This would position these issues in the centre of their investigations, where they should be, rather than at the periphery.

4. Centrality of marginalised voices or the centrality of experiential knowledge

CRT privileges voices of colour (Abrams, 2009). It responds to how the dominant group’s accounts of history routinely exclude racial and other minority perspectives to justify and legitimise its power (Abrams, 2009). The silencing of alternative experiences minimises and obscures the dynamic of power and oppression (Abrams, 2009). CRT seeks to empower those normally excluded from the dominant perspectives to put forward views based on lived realities that have not been heard before (Hylton, 2008). These can involve counter-storytelling methodologies that centre black/racialised voices that present different and competing versions of reality to those that are often the prerogative of white social scientists and established epistemologies (Hylton, 2008).

If we are to target racism, a CRT viewpoint facilitates a clear understanding of major structures in
management and administration of higher education. The counter narrative focuses on established power structures that underpin and maintain racism where liberal claims to neutrality, colour-blindness and universal truths are consistently ignored by mainstream theorists and analysts.

5. Transdisciplinarity

CRT eschews a mono-disciplinary, ahistorical approach to the analysis of race and racism and draws on scholarship from a range of disciplines such as ethnic studies, feminist studies, sociology, history etc. CRT affirms both the complexity and inter-sectionalitv of various oppressions and understands a singular focus on race can mask other forms of exclusion (Abrams, 2009).

6. Interest convergence

CRT recognises that racism provides material and psychic advantage to the majority white race so the potential for change increases exponentially when the interests of the powerful (i.e. the white majority) happen to converge with those of the racially oppressed (Abrams, 2009). So how can CRT improve the futures of Indigenous people and their experiences of higher education and help us to better understand racialised, gendered and classed structures, processes, and discourses in Australian higher education?

There are specific areas of intervention provided by a CRT framework that are available to us in our efforts to better understand the impact of race and racism in universities and how we might respond to these challenges:

1. Critical race epistemology
2. Critical race methodology
3. Critical race pedagogy
4. Critical race curriculum
5. Critical race policy

I will briefly discuss these in turn.

1. Critical race epistemology

Where epistemology is the study of knowledge, CRT scholars in education are concerned with what counts as knowledge and explore how ways of knowing are privileged in the academy (Ladson-Billings, 2008; Yosso et al, 2001). In this field of activity, Indigenous people, students and staff are not seen as empty vessels but are recognised as knowledge holders.

A CR epistemology emphasises the inter-sectionalitv of the various forms of subordination and in doing so, further credentials the multiple knowledges held by Indigenous peoples (Ladson-Billings, 2008). In effect, a CR epistemology challenges research paradigms such as positivism that rely on the limited social, cultural and historical experiences of white people (Ladson-Billings, 2008; Gillborn, 2006). The use of counter story telling in activities such as research promotes stories of Indigenous people - whose experiences are often not told - and provides utility for exposing, analysing and challenging the prevailing master narratives of race privilege (Espino, 2012). Counter story telling facilitates an articulation of previously unheard stories of Indigenous people and their experiences of higher education and society, and this act in and of itself helps Indigenous peoples to resist acts of ongoing discrimination and oppression (Yosso et al, 2001; Gillborn, 2006; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

2. Critical race methodology

If methodology is the synthesis of theory and method (Yosso et al, 2001, p. 96), a CR methodology supplants traditional methodologies with a transformative agenda where knowledge production is directed at the determinants and conditions of human oppression, domination, suffering and deprivation and the addressing of these states of being (Ladson-Billings, 2008). Accordingly, a CR methodology seeks to “humanise quantitative data and to recognise the silenced voices in qualitative data” (Yosso et al, 2000, p. 96).

3. Critical race pedagogy

Within ‘critical race pedagogy’, pedagogy is the approach to teaching practice (Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Yosso, “traditional pedagogies often marginalise students based on race and gender” amongst other forms of oppressions (2001, p. 96). CR pedagogy therefore recognises that power and privilege underpins all teaching and learning and
therefore challenges the dominant white middle-class masculine privilege embedded in traditional pedagogical practices.

Current instructional strategies often presume that Indigenous students are deficient. This has led to ongoing efforts to control the risks associated with Indigenous deficit and failure to achieve some form of remediation. Embedded within a race-neutral perspective, deficiency is understood as an individual phenomenon so mainstream approaches to pedagogy manifest as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all students. When these instructional strategies fail to achieve desired results, the pathology is inevitably located with the students, not the pedagogical techniques (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The objective of CR pedagogy is to create inclusive approaches that recognise and support spaces where Indigenous students can learn from culturally relevant pedagogies. CR pedagogy believes in the educability of all students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, Villapanda, Bernal & Solorzano, 2001).

4. Critical race curriculum

Given that curriculum refers to the formal and/or informal methods of presenting knowledge, it usually takes the form of textbooks, courses and programs of study (Yosso, 2001, p. 97).

Unfortunately traditional curriculum can function not just to distort, omit and stereotype Indigenous knowledges and experiences, but also works to rationalise racial and gender inequality. CRT curriculum treats official curriculum as a non-Indigenous master script that silences multiple voices and perspectives whilst positioning white, middle to upper class male ideas as the standard knowledge required by students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, Villapanda, Bernal & Solorzano, 2001).

Master scripts work to ignore, silence or erase Indigenous stories that provide an alternative account of reality to that of the dominant cultural authority (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18).

Colour-blindness has also impacted on curricula to present Indigenous people as a homogenised ‘we’ in an attempt to promote diversity (ibid). This can have the effect of - on the one hand - inculcating a common belief that ‘we are all Australian’, while reinforcing the colonialist logic that produces guilt in Indigenous students for failing to rise above their Indigenous status like most other groups (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18).

5. Critical race policy

Where policies can be defined as a rule and guideline that is used to organise and regulate the functions of institutions, CRT policies steer away from historical approaches that emphasise Indigenous inferiority and instead construct policy from a position that regards Indigenous experiences as strengths from which to learn rather than as deficits that require correction (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, Villapanda, Bernal & Solorzano, 2001).

Conclusion

It has not been my intent in this chapter to promote the idea that every racial disparity or negative experience an Indigenous person has on Australian campuses is attributable to racism. However, it would seem that nearly all higher education scholars and policy analysts rely on everything but racism when explaining, theorising and discussing the failure to achieve outcomes for Indigenous students at universities (Harper, 2012, p. 24). CRT offers both opportunities and challenges for those of us who work in higher education to make a difference for Indigenous students and staff. This chapter recognises that the call for a new direction through CRT does not occur in a context where there has been a paucity of effort but that many of us are and/or have been working in a number of these key areas for quite some time.

In my mind, CRT provides an exciting opportunity for the Indigenous academy to develop theoretical and practice orientated frameworks to not only critique existing Institutions in their management of dysfunctional race dynamics, but also presents a field of potential to instigate academic and corporate culture change within the academy. In doing so, it provides a foundation to challenge firstly, the standard common sense assumptions which underpin both non-racial explanations of racism in the academy, which consequently remains the site of
much racism, and secondly, the mechanisms by which such explanations are legitimised (Gillborn, 2006). It allows each of us to develop our own particular approaches to dealing with the effects of race and racism in our respective universities providing we adhere to the underlying principles.

Finally, applying a CRT perspective to Indigenous higher education in Australia requires that such an approach maintains what Gillborn refers to as “a radical critical edge” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 7). The risk for CRT scholars in this field is the trap of placing their emphasis on system reform “while taking for granted the essential shape and character of the system itself” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 6). Pursuing a reform agenda is not without utility when it involves mapping the scale of inequality and the generation of local level approaches to improve the situation, but I echo Gillborn’s counsel that CRT must also concern itself with “the most powerful forces operating at the societal level to sustain and extend these inequalities” or otherwise risk “tinkering with the system to make its outputs slightly less awful, but leaving untouched the fundamental shape, scale and purpose of the system itself” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 7). Our failure to seriously investigate and study racism and racist institutional norms will consign us to a trajectory where we will only study the ‘symptom’ (racial disparities) without understanding the ‘disease’ (racism and white supremacy).

References


Being non-Indigenous in an Indigenous education space: Two perspectives on white privilege and the desire to move beyond mimicry

Eva McRae-Williams & Henk Huijser

Introduction

At the AIATSIS Conference in March of 2014, a key discussion emerged around Indigenous Studies and its position in the academy. Two of the keynote speakers at that conference (Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Martin Nakata) took up rather different positions in relation to this. Moreton-Robinson stressed the point that all knowledge is racialised, and that this needs to be acknowledged, and needs to be an integral part of the discussion and of Indigenous Studies itself. By contrast, Nakata seemed to suggest that there is a need to move beyond this discussion, and appeared to imply that this discussion prevents ‘us’ from moving forward. However, he was not entirely clear on how this could be achieved. Both Moreton-Robinson and Nakata work in mainstream universities where Indigenous Studies and Indigenous knowledges have a long history of being marginalised and/or ‘tokenised’. Indigenous Studies academics in these settings are usually engaged in teaching a predominantly non-Indigenous student body and are often located or connected to peripheral university schools or Indigenous student support centres. Batchelor Institute presents a rather different context in this respect, with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students representing the whole of the student body. In contrast to the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academics in mainstream settings, here is a situation where predominantly (but not exclusively) non-Indigenous teaching and administration staff cater to a wholly Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cohort. In this context, what are the possibilities for learning, and what makes this space different from more mainstream institutions?

In this paper, we, as two non-Indigenous authors explore what the implications might be of engaging with diverse knowledges as racialised within the context of Batchelor Institute. In order to tease this out we have been inspired by, and will be drawing from, recent work by our colleague Kathryn Gilbey (2014). Of course we work on a daily basis with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at Batchelor Institute, and indeed we have regular discussions with those colleagues about the context in which we all work, including discussions about the meaning of ‘both ways’ and where the Institute (and Indigenous education more broadly) should be heading. However, rarely do we have in-depth conversations about white privilege and how it operates, even though it clearly permeates much of what we do, and it informs many of the organisational structures, processes and discourses within the Institute. Through engagement with Kathryn Gilbey’s work, we will be sharing our own personal reflections on white privilege and Bhabha’s (1994) concept of mimicry in order to raise questions and ideally open a new space for discussions on Batchelor Institute’s espoused ‘both ways’ philosophy, whilst confronting the challenge of moving beyond the Institute as a site of interdiction.

Position 1: ‘All knowledge is racialized’ – Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s position

As part of a Batchelor Institute cohort we had the privilege of attending the AIATSIS 50 year’s celebration and Conference in Canberra. The experience provided us and our colleagues with fertile ground for reflecting on the unique position of Batchelor Institute in the Indigenous education landscape. Two of the keynote speeches particularly stimulated our critical reflections on the Institute’s ‘both-ways’ philosophy and particularly our engagement in this space as non-Indigenous academics. The first was by Aileen Moreton-Robinson who argued that ‘all knowledge is racialised’, and that that recognition should not be avoided within any Indigenous Studies agenda. This argument could be interpreted as an overstatement, as a position that overwhelms by locking us into an essentialised state
of being with no way out. Indeed, Martin Nakata, in his own keynote address raised Moreton-Robinson’s position as problematic, questioning where such a critical focus on the racialised nature of knowledge production ultimately leads to.

Yet as two non-Indigenous academics who have been involved in the Indigenous Studies space for some time, Moreton-Robinson’s position continues to hold our interest. Rather than the acknowledgement that ‘all knowledge is racialised’ being essentially a dead end, we see it as a theoretical tool for understanding that can provide a productive challenge through continuing to force us to engage with the implications of racialised systems of thought and their structural accompaniments. Moreton-Robinson’s (2011, p. 414) argument goes as follows:

Patriarchal whiteness operates possessively as a raced and gendered epistemological *a priori* within knowledge production as universals, dominant norms, values and beliefs. Patriarchal whiteness is thus epistemologically and ontologically privileged but invisible within its socio-discursive regime capillarising through Australian disciplinary knowledges and modern colonial practices. [...] [Within this context] the social construction of Aboriginality violates our subjectivity by obliterating any trace of our different ontological and epistemological existences. [...] ‘Aboriginal’ signifies a commonality of shared conditions of colonisation but cannot fully capture our respective ontological, epistemological, axiological and cultural subjectivities.

The implication then is that even within the field of Indigenous Studies itself patriarchal whiteness is the underlying discursive regime that is always already privileged. Such an argument raises significant challenges for some of our conceptualisations and metaphors for describing ‘both-ways’ at the Institute. For example, if ‘both-ways’ is metaphorically represented as the meeting of two distinctly separate ways of knowing - the salt water and the fresh water for example, which entwine but maintain their own integrity to create new knowledge, the foam that sits on the surface (Wunungmurra, 1989; Marika-Munungiritj, 1991; Ober & Bat, 2007; Ober, 2009) – an assumption has already been made around the neutrality, impartiality or insignificance of the specific place of meeting. Moreton-Robinson’s argument suggests that such an assumption of neutrality is naive and that, in terms of the theme of this book the ‘ground’ is always already racialised and therefore must be the starting point of any discussion, whichever way it goes. This fundamentally questions some of our common binary interpretations including assumptions regarding equivalence in power of ‘both-ways’ at the Institute. It raises questions about the nature of the ‘common ground’ and suggests that any attempt to look for it must first begin with an acknowledgement and exploration of the racialised nature of all knowledge within this space. It is not the common elements between equal knowledge systems but rather the racialised ground on which we are standing that becomes the focus of attention. Importantly, this racialised nature of all knowledge applies to ‘both’ in the ‘both ways’ context.

Yet this raises important questions regarding where such a focus would lead us, and how we could move beyond the identification and exploration of this highly racialised ground to see possibilities for, fundamentally dislodging this discursive regime to the point where Indigenous Studies becomes a new productive space, which is captured by the original ‘both ways’ Yolŋu metaphor of gamma, referring to the fertile potency of the place where fresh water and salt water come together (Christie, 2008; Stubbington & Dunbar-Hall, 1994).

1 It is important at this point to recognise that the ‘both ways’ concept at Batchelor Institute has a very strong Yolŋu influence and sense of ownership. While many at Batchelor Institute have embraced the concept as central to the Institute, it is still a contested concept and not everyone necessarily recognises it as a valid for the Batchelor context, including some of the Kungarakan custodians who work at Batchelor today.
Position 2: The Cultural Interface –
Martin Nakata

At the AIATSIS Conference Martin Nakata challenged the usefulness of the racialised nature of knowledge being positioned as a primary place of exploration and a fundamental focus for Indigenous Studies agendas. Throughout his academic career, Nakata continues to develop and argue for an alternative paradigm through his articulation of the concept of the Cultural Interface (Nakata, 2002; 2007; 2011). He explores ways to work through or around Moreton-Robinson’s identified discursive regime in a productive way, with a specific focus on education and pedagogy. In his latest joined paper (Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2014), Nakata et al. focus on the complex entanglements that result from the convergences of Indigenous and Western knowledge and practice. There are two key parts to their argument, both of which are very relevant for our discussion here. Firstly, 

Teaching and learning that reinforces the binary oppositions of Indigenous-Western or coloniser-colonised or dominant-subordinated relies on and reproduces the simplification of Western knowledge influences and simplified explanations of Indigenous epistemologies that do not explore the complexities of either system or the historically layered interface between them with sufficient focus or rigour (Nakata et al., 2014, p. 13).

This is further developed through the second point, which is about the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous students tend to be positioned in Indigenous Studies courses.

Indigenous students are positioned as empowered by Indigenous worldviews, resistant to Western positions, and victims to be healed and affirmed through ‘culturally safe’ educational practices. Non-Indigenous students are positioned as neo-colonial identities, resistant to critical self-examination and Indigenous standpoints, and who need to undertake a journey of self-discovery and transition (Nakata et al., 2014, p. 13).

This leads to the crux of their argument, which is that teaching and learning environments should neither be so safe nor so threatening that students’ subjectivities are reduced to little more than that of victims or agents of ongoing colonialism on the basis of their ‘raced’ origins. In other words, Nakata et al. (2014) argue for a recognition of complexity and provide somewhat of a call to arms to engage with this complexity, which in essence is the complexity of the deeply entrenched discursive regime that Moreton-Robinson identifies. This is a crucial argument because it does not take any knowledge, nor knowledge systems, for granted, but rather urges everyone to continuously problematise all knowledges, and indeed to provide all students with the tools for such critical enquiry. This is not the same as ignoring historical legacies, nor the same as ignoring race as fundamental to the way knowledge is constructed in the Australian context. Quite the opposite, it is actually about confronting the recognition that ‘all knowledge is racialised’ through critical engagement yet with the aim of moving away beyond the trap of setting up binaries between knowledge systems.

Discussion

Both Moreton-Robinson and Nakata work in mainstream institutions where students are predominantly non-Indigenous. At Batchelor Institute, the context is rather different, as all students are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, while a majority of teachers are non-Indigenous, including us. This makes it an interesting case study, as the impact of Moreton-Robinson’s discursive regime of patriarchal whiteness plays out in specific ways, but is nevertheless palpable. The more complex versions of the ‘both-ways’ philosophy espoused at Batchelor Institute are in principle closely aligned with Nakata’s Cultural Interface. However, having been participants in numerous formal and informal staff workshops and discussions about ‘both-ways’ (that reflect current staff ratios with the majority of participants being non-Indigenous) there appears to be a continuous struggle to define what ‘both-ways’ means in theory and practice.

While it is the ‘both-ways’ philosophy which is the common ground on which we are to stand together at the Institute, once we find ourselves there, the ground...
becomes noticeably shaky, common approaches and interpretations are hard to identify, and challenges, confrontations and frustrations pervade. This in itself may not be problematic, and indeed it may be precisely the point, yet we often witness that these discussions and debates easily slip into frameworks founded on the binary oppositions that Nakata et al. (2014) warn against, which may be due to the term ‘both-ways’ implying always already a binary (‘both’ as opposed to ‘multiple’). For example, differences between largely generalised Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems, incompatibilities between them and compromises that could be made become a focus. This is not actually what the philosophy around ‘both-ways’ is about (Ober, 2009; Ober & Bat, 2007), but the term itself leaves it potentially open to such narrow interpretations in a way that the Cultural Interface may not. While the concept Cultural Interface may better capture the essence of the Institute’s ‘both-ways’ philosophy, of strengthening students’ (Indigenous) identities and exploring multiple ways of knowing, it is still to some extent just a tool for naming a space. Where this space is located, how it is experienced, who sits within or outside of it and when, what critical practices it embraces and what approaches may evade it, seems to remain much harder to articulate. In addition, and to complicate matters even further, there are questions around those who engage in Indigenous Studies and their impact.

Judd (2014, p. 146) for example, points to an inherent paradox in Indigenous Studies: on the one hand “the interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary nature of contemporary Australian Indigenous studies makes this area of studies highly dynamic and innovative in a way that academic disciplines often are not”. However, despite this interdisciplinary dynamism, he also argues that Indigenous Studies is “not the product of Indigenous traditions of knowledge, but rather those of Europe” (Judd, 2014, p. 148). In short, Judd worries about the theorising and ‘writing back to empire’, and how far removed this can sometimes be from everyday realities of many Indigenous people themselves. He usefully reminds us of the need for an “open-mindedness, a willingness to listen to, and be directed by the agendas of Indigenous peoples themselves, a commitment to commence a long-term relationship, and, above all, an honesty to admit that we don’t know, [which] counts for just as much” (Judd, 2014, p. 158). As Judd argues, if we don’t heed this warning, Indigenous studies runs the risk of becoming the new anthropology.

To illustrate the complexity of some of the arguments in this debate, we have chosen to engage with it through our own personal narratives and experiences. To help us extend our thinking and articulate our ideas we have engaged with Kathryn Gilbey’s recently completed PhD thesis, *Privileging First Nations education: looking back to move forward* (2014).

Gilbey (2014) through critical narrative and theoretical enquiry uses the concept of ‘interdiction’, along with other key concepts, to unpack how power operates and knowledges conflict within an Indigenous educational Institution. Her use of the concept of interdiction is an extension of Homi Bhabha’s conceptualisation of the term as a “form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which, though known, must be concealed” (1994, p. 128). Gilbey provides a compelling argument that illustrates how whiteness centres itself within interdictory sites and how white privilege operates in practice and in everyday encounters. Gilbey (2014) argues that Batchelor Institute is a site of interdiction, where a battle to provide western education while affirming Indigenous identities is being fought. She uses the term interdiction in two related senses, both of which are relevant to our arguments:

One pertaining to the contestation over the sacred sites of acceptable knowledge to be taught in educational institutions whether schools or tertiary institutes, the other pertaining to the denial of communications and materials for sustained effort leading to successful beachheads (Gilbey, 2014, p. 82).

Sometimes hidden from view, but powerfully operating within this institutional battle field, is a force that desires and subtly employs tactics to support the maintenance of white privilege and ignorance. Aligning with Moreton-Robinson’s arguments, Gilbey highlights that the institutional field, the ground on which the battle is being fought, is not neutral
Gilbey, through looking back to move forward, concludes her thesis with 12 principles to challenge and guide further productive work in the field of First Nations education where Indigenous cultures, traditions, knowledges and ontologies remain at the core. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two principles which most grabbed our attention were two principles that directly related to our non-Indigenous experience and positioning:

Principle 3: White privilege and all its structural accompaniments must be made obvious, discussed and rectified as appropriate.

Principle 5: Introduce the concept of mimicry as an outcome of the assimilative intent of western education for Indigenous students and debate this concept with students and staff (Gilbey 2014, p. 279).

The following two narratives engage with the above principles and explore from our positions of white privilege the challenges associated with moving beyond the battles playing out in this ‘site of interdiction’. The narratives, and this paper more generally, are also a practical and direct response to principle seven, which recommends that, “staff [should] collectively talk honestly about their cultural conditioning, their need for cultural competency learning and how their cultural conditionings influence their roles within the organisation” (Gilbey 2014, p. 280).

Eva’s Narrative
As a 5th generation white Australian, with Scottish heritage, a farming background and a predominantly middleclass upbringing, what would it take for me to acknowledge, challenge and change a regime of patriarchal whiteness that privileges some and disenfranchises/disempowers others? Having two university educated parents, a somewhat uninterrupted journey through formal western education to well-paying work, a house mortgage and an unquestioned right to citizenship, what does it mean for me to participate at the cultural interface with integrity?

Gilbey (2014) has proposed that in Indigenous education spaces “white privilege and all its structural accompaniments must be made obvious, discussed and rectified as appropriate.” Surrounded (and influenced) by dominant cultural regimes that define and structure accountability, standards and expectations, the Institute itself does not sit outside a highly racialised space, but is firmly embedded within one. If we were to embrace Gilbey’s principle such an obviousness would have to be at the forefront and could not be blurred by a simple reference to doing things ‘both-ways’ with an assumption of power equalities. Similarly, the fact that the majority of teaching and other staff at the Institute are of non-Indigenous heritage, many of whom have historically benefited and continue to derive privileges from established racialised systems, would have to be acknowledged and likewise discussed as a starting point.

Yet what does this mean in practice? As one of these non-Indigenous majority who has been privileged to maintain a position at the Institute for some time, I have been and continue to be on this journey of acknowledgement and discussion. This has involved a slow awakening to how racialised regimes influence structures that we engage with every day, both the public institutions we work in and the private institutions that influence how we think and behave. Personally, this process, of the increasing visibility of white privilege and its structural accompaniments, has involved a willingness on my part to acknowledge this huge wall of ignorance. This is a wall that I am both unconsciously and consciously invested in; it is a wall that seems to rebuild itself every time I look away. This solid structure hides the horizon, safeguarding my comfortable position of power. By providing me with protection it enables me to embrace inherent beliefs around the superiority of my own ways of being, knowing and doing. This is a wall that naturalises a certain form of cultural dominance, hiding the racialised nature of societal structures. Structures that when not made obvious, I can comfortably benefit from, not simply through my
‘white skin’ but through the educational and wealth advantages a racialised system has provided to some and not to others.

It is widely acknowledged, that this critical opening of eyes to ‘white privilege’ has a valuable purpose (Jensen, 2005). Helms (1990) has argued it is only when whiteness and its privileges are fully examined by white people that they are able to recognise their position in the racial order, and in my words, look beyond walls of assumed superiority. Personally this awakening has enabled me to more deeply question the assumptions that uphold certain values, rules, benchmarks and standards. I can at times now see room for having high standards and quality processes that are different, that foster diversity, rather than simply normalise and conform to a dominant cultural regime. After these moments, I go back to my desk feeling my white privilege and worrying about how I am imposing and reinforcing this privilege.

But the moments pass, the wall begins to re-build itself, and before I know it I am back in a place of ignorance and arrogance and often even being rewarded for it. At these times, whether I am wearing the hat of program coordinator, lecturer or researcher I can become all about rules, standards and “progress” i.e. why can’t those Others just be more like ‘us’? Or - how can I, as the benevolent good person that I am, support them to become more like me? This nicely draws attention to another of Gilbey’s (2014) principles, “introducing the concept of mimicry as an outcome of the assimilative intent of western education for Indigenous students and debate this concept with students and staff” (p. 279), as it is mimicry that underlies my above reflection. Homi Bhabha (1997) has described the discourse of mimicry as stemming from the coloniser’s desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of comfortable difference that is almost the same but not quite. So we reach again, another moment, a small hole in the wall. I want to ‘help’ them to get ‘there’, but this ‘there’ is really always at least one step behind me. Because if real power was on the table, really valuing difference or diversity was embraced, what would this mean for me? And here is the crux of my privileged position: at the end of the day I can choose to walk away from this space with little, if any, damage to my economic or social position.

What I am pointing to here is that by embracing Gilbey’s principles, it isn’t as Lampert (2003, p. 25) suggests “the ‘world’ or some vague thing called ‘society’ that needs to be changed,” rather the change that needs to be embraced is embodied in our non-Indigenous selves. Without even attempting to unpack how such a process of awakening could be supported for non-Indigenous staff at the Institute, there is also the question of how such a journey would influence our non-Indigenous educators’ capacity, particularly their capacity to support students in the privileging and critical exploration of Indigenous knowledges and identities beyond a focus on the injuries caused by the continuing regimes of power embodied in the ignorance of white identities and systems of privilege.

So then I move towards Nakata’s concept of the Cultural Interface. But again, this does not prove to be the silver bullet. It is easy as a non-Indigenous person to fall into imagining this space as about finding the common ground, a place and space where we are all equal, where I can comfortably forget about racialised privilege and regimes of dominance. Or alternatively, as I have often seen emerge, the dualism and associated essentialisations of the both-ways notion again begin to reinforce themselves. Here we are, all looking at a white board with Western ways of knowing dot pointed on one side of the board and Indigenous ways on the other; we are all trying to look and add things into this middle space and no one is finding it easy. This is not what Nakata means by the Cultural Interface, but it points to the difficulties or complexities of understanding, let alone inhabiting, such a space. Similarly, discussing such a process as one of finding common ground, as opposed to one of shifting the lens to possibilities of new ground, also compounds these difficulties.

Henk’s Narrative

My position is somewhat different from Eva’s, as I am not from here. However, as a white, middle class male, I still very much benefit from patriarchal white privilege, and I feel this in both explicit and more subtle ways on a day to day basis. I too grew up
with well-educated white middle class parents where opportunities were a given, rather than recognised as a privilege. Furthermore, I grew up being Dutch in The Netherlands, so there was never any question about where I belonged. The racial ‘others’ were migrants from the former colonies (Indonesians, Surinamers, people from the Caribbean) or ‘guest workers’ from Turkey and Morocco. My patriarchal white privilege was never questioned in this context, or at least not that I was aware of; why would I need to be aware?

Having left The Netherlands more than half a lifetime ago, my position has shifted somewhat, as it has become that of a migrant, an outsider of sorts, albeit without relinquishing the privilege outlined above. As an outsider (or perhaps this is partly my other identity as an academic), you question things and you pay attention to how power operates in context, in an attempt to ‘blend in’ as soon as possible. In the process however, you begin to notice very quickly who else is positioned as ‘other’, what the norms are, and how power relations operate in context. Living in different national contexts over the years (Israel, Scotland, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Australia, Bahrain) has thus positioned me as an outsider, but one who nevertheless benefits from patriarchal white privilege. In other words, I am in the privileged position of being able to choose my outsider status, rather than it being imposed on me.

So what does this mean in the Australian context, and in particular in the context of Batchelor Institute? For one, it means that I have a very keen sense of historical injustice, and a keen awareness of ongoing colonial legacies and power struggles, but in a way I am doubly privileged, because I can engage with this historical legacy without the burden of colonial anxiety it appears to invoke for many white Australians. In other words, I do not have the emotional investment that leads to the twin responses of anger and resentment on the one hand (as a follow on from ‘why can’t they be more like us’), or patronising benevolence of the missionary variety on the other. Both are a result of the impact of rigid binaries, without a recognition of the historical complexities. But I see both these attitudes on a daily basis at Batchelor Institute.

So how does patriarchal white privilege operate in this context? It is structurally embedded in everything we do. Yes, on the face of it, Batchelor Institute is an ‘Indigenous’ Institute, but ultimately the power (and the funding) are elsewhere, and there is very little real opportunity for Indigenous perspectives, in the sense of Indigenous control over the educational and the knowledge agendas. And, to refer back to Judd’s point, we rarely go and find out what Indigenous agendas might actually be; they are usually already defined and predetermined. Patriarchal white privilege is woven through funding structures, bureaucratic structures, employment structures, and educational structures. In other words, bureaucracies around employment opportunities at the Institute, as well as the actual recruitment practices, are such that Indigenous employees are often restricted in their career progression. This is not deliberate; it is rather an inevitable outcome of the structures that are put in place, in an unquestioned way, and the only people who benefit from this are those who have perfected mimicry, but there are no real winners in that game. Of course expressing this argument leaves me wide open for accusations of racism, and indeed as potentially aligned with what a good colleague of mine calls the ‘bigotry of low expectations’. However, that accusation would actually miss the point in this case, as my expectations are in fact the opposite of ‘low’. The expectation is that the structure is culturally appropriate for everyone involved, and that there is thus a certain amount of flexibility around practices in each of the areas outlined above. In short, my expectation is that both strategic decisions and especially everyday practices are continuously questioned and adjusted to fit individual contexts: that would be working in a ‘both-ways’ spirit and working at the Cultural Interface. And it would mean that patriarchal white privilege is both identified and challenged, both structurally and in everyday practices.

But alas, this is an ongoing struggle that sometimes feels like a losing battle...and like Eva, it is at those moments for me that my own patriarchal white privilege surfaces very clearly, for I can simply walk away...
Concluding remarks
The personal narratives above illustrate the complexity of the debate that we outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Is all knowledge racialised? Yes, it definitely is. However, the notion of Cultural Interface potentially allows us to confront the complexity, but this will only be possible if that process of critical reflection is structurally embedded in everything we do. Finding common ground, while simultaneously avoiding slipping into a ‘both-ways’ dualism, is inherently challenging. For non-Indigenous educators this is particularly true, for our privileged positions within the space can weaken the strength of our commitments; walking away, or working at simplifying the space to avoid confrontation can be an appealing position.

Yet the alternative of continuing to engage in both personal and larger critical reflections on the continuing struggle for Indigenous existence and the racialised societal structures that inhibit such survival are paramount if Batchelor Institute is to truly embrace and enact its vision. This is worth fighting for even if from within a patriarchal white privileged position. While we have focused on the raising of questions rather than the provision of ‘answers’, we believe that this is in fact the point of this paper. We hope that our narratives and questioning can open a space for discussion at the Institute where, as staff, we can talk collectively and honestly about our cultural conditioning, our continued need for cultural competency learning, and where we can further build our capacity to understand how our own positioning influences our roles within the organisation and how we as individuals could adapt to and be better utilized for supporting the Institute’s Indigenous empowerment agendas. This would be a first step towards building on the Institute’s past in moving beyond a ‘site of interdiction’ to a genuine Cultural Interface, based on unapologetically privileging First Nations education (Gilbey, 2014), and exposing the full extent of white privilege. It is in this site that we may find a common ground, not as finalised space that can be reached, but rather as a process of continuous negotiation of culture, power and knowledge.

References


Red Ochre Women: sisters in the struggle for educational reform

Jacqueline Amagula & Helen CD McCarthy

Introduction
At the beginning of the new millennium ameliorating Indigenous educational disadvantage was presented as a national priority. For many, this priority heralded great optimism in the hope that the educational disparity that existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian students was to be remedied. Yet despite significant fiscal intervention by the Department of Education, Science and Technology in supplementary funding across all sectors, the discrepancy in school level Standard Australian English literacy and numeracy achievement between the two groups remains. William Jonas in his role as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner wrote, “The failure of Aboriginal students to complete basic levels of education amounts to a crisis for future generations. There must be a change to the way Indigenous children and young people are schooled so that the education system can function as a vehicle for cultural and economic renewal” (Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012, p. 36). Advocates of Indigenous education have endorsed this view and believe that it is in fact the system’s lack of relevance that is the problem, since it has the propensity to neglect to understand the cultural needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples (Harris, 1990; Malin, 1989; Durnam & Boughton, 1999; Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, Konigberg, & Collard, 2004; Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012).

For over thirty years educators Jacqueline Amagula and Helen McCarthy have observed and listened, as parents and teachers frequently express dissatisfaction with the way mainstream non-Indigenous education is delivered in their schools. Jacqueline as the past-Chairperson of the Ngakwurralangwa College Advisory Board has made it her life’s work to challenge existing Anglo-centric paradigms for learning, urging that Aboriginal children must be taught in culturally sensitive ways. Helen has shared Jacqueline’s agitation documenting this long-term commitment to crafting alternate ways of learning, different to many of those espoused by mainstream Departments of Education. This chapter presents the impact of these interventions, documenting what occurred in communities when government-directed programs were abolished, or when highly effective learning centres were shut down. They share some of many stories since Jacqueline Amagula believes that “we can’t go forward if we don’t learn from the past”.

Jacqueline’s story
My name is Jacqueline Amagula. I am a Warnindilyakwa woman and my language is Anindilyakwa. I come from Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. Firstly I will share my journey; my pathway to teaching as a young student teacher who wanted to achieve literacy and numeracy in my community. Growing up I was humble and a shy student teacher, but I really wanted to make a difference especially through education in my community. In those days life was tough, as we had the church missionary running the community, which meant every child had to be at school. We had a strong Village Council and they would round kids up and take them to school every day and on time. We would talk to Elders, parents and community in big community meetings about how they wanted their children to learn. The people would say that they wanted their kids to learn Two-way, both Western and Indigenous learning.

I became a little stronger as I attended staff meetings, conferences, workshops and in-services. But I wasn’t a strong leader. Not strong enough to stand and fight for the rights of my people. My life continued on the journey for this struggle. Then I met a new teacher to the island, Helen McCarthy, who became my diyabarrka (sister). We have worked together since the 1980s and Helen kept on talking to me to go on to do further teacher training. As the years passed I became stronger in dealing with conflict and issues in education. It was not long after that when I met...
Jean Illingworth who was a lecturer and teacher. Jean came to my Community Education Centre and was a lecturer for 10 Indigenous students who were becoming teachers in their community. A lot of these students graduated with their degree: Associate Diploma in Teaching in Aboriginal Schools from Batchelor College.

Jean then became a teacher for senior secondary girls, where me and another Indigenous lady were her assistants. Having a big number of students was very tough and without her care and dignity these girls wouldn’t have got out with a Certificate nor graduated from Year 12. A lot of these students Jean taught were from the local Angurugu community and parents and community members were very proud. These girls continued to seek proper jobs in the community and with the mining company on Groote Eylandt, and still today continue to have good jobs.

Jean Illingworth, like Helen, in traditional way is my sister. My father Numaljawarma gave her the name Dangmalgayukwa - the raindrops that come with the Eastern Mamarika winds. She is a special woman from the Amagula Clan and her name also contains a message; for example, it could be a forewarning of a death or a newborn baby coming into the world. Jean and Helen have been painted up, attended mortuary ceremonies and have kinship family connections right across from East to South Arnhem Land. They have taught Two-ways culture with respect and always believed our kids can get to the level like every other child in Australia.

In 2005 things were not going as well in our schools as they had done in the past. I thought we could make a change to see if things worked in our community on Groote Eylandt. This began with the establishment of the Ngakwurralangwa College, making the story right for us, to have control, our ownership. Ngakwurralangwa means ‘Our Way’: we own it and we lead it, we have our say and we have the voice. The story for setting up this college is likened to when we go hunting for wild yams. When we find the vines of the yam we follow the stem to the ground and dig a hole going down as long as it is long. If we break it half way, this means it is not good, the message will break, but if we keep on digging until we get to the end, that means a strong powerful message is going to happen. I had an opportunity to step in and have that power to lead and we had the needed change happen for five years. We had control of the four schools on Groote Eylandt and we reached out and established ‘Partnerships with Innovation’ with key stakeholders and service providers across the Eylandt. As allies all parties shared the responsibility of helping make sure kids went to school. School was a place where they wanted to be because it was culturally relevant with real opportunities to learn skills that would lead to a future. As an Indigenous Director I made sure all new staff coming to our schools would understand or do cultural awareness before entering our schools. Local Aboriginal people ran the cultural competency induction training. Last year in July the Government said that there was no more funding for the Director’s position. Yet Ngakwurralangwa College performed very well in the Smart Schools Awards because of our ‘Partnerships with Innovation’. We were recognised for running our own College through community leadership and we had our own structures developed, we ran workshops for Indigenous teachers and their tutors and mentors. We need to educate our kids by having community control and I am fighting to make an improvement in the lives of my people because education leads to better lifestyles, and is the key to a pathway towards a career. This is what my family wanted and it’s been a struggle. Helen will follow on and share the story about other good things that we built up but were ended or had the funding taken away.

Helen’s story

When Jacqueline told me that funding had been cut for the Director’s position at Ngakwurralangwa College she was very angry. She asked why it is, whenever we are achieving results and getting students through, the government shuts down the programs or withdraws funding? She was right. I can recall instances where schools had been operating successfully only to find that there was government intervention at some level and very soon the place or program was mothballed. The following section of this chapter provides a brief historical snapshot of that lived reality. As Leon White, Principal of Yirrkala School said at the 2004 Remote Schools Conference,
“we have to re-examine and revisit the past and draw out of it lessons we can use to drive the way forward” (2004).

The strong message that Jacqueline and I heard as we listened to parents’ concerns was that the mainstream ways of schooling were prejudiced against Aboriginal ways of knowing, unfairly eroding their cultural uniqueness by undermining their language and thereby their identity. We observed many students become disengaged, their compulsory education ended at 14 or 15 years of age, leaving school with underdeveloped literacy, numeracy and life skills, and thus being greatly limited in their options for the world of work or for participating as a valuable member within their own community. We witnessed young people reject what school offered, and systemic truancy inevitably “… leads into boredom, despair, substance abuse and criminal activity. The retention of Aboriginal students at this stage in their education seems one of the milestones in breaking the cycle of disadvantage” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005, p. 7). Research by Ah Chee, Beetson and Boughton (1997), Gordon, Hallahan, and Henry, (2002), and Wild and Anderson (2007) point to one finding: retention of students at this stage of their education is critical in breaking the cycle of a future life of deprivation, incarceration, domestic violence and suicide. A report produced by the United Nations Children’s Fund has described “Australia’s Indigenous children were among the most vulnerable to abuse and early death” (United Nations International Children’s Education Fund, 2004, p. 3). The same report stated “an improved understanding of Indigenous culture improves the spiritual health of Indigenous students which leads to better outcomes in areas such as health, family and community cohesion, education and employment” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005).

Schools were not always places where students encountered irrelevance or became disengaged. In our personal experiences we worked in schools that were the heartbeat of the community. They were the one place that everyone in the community wanted to be a part of, be involved in; most were keen to work in the literacy centre, the canteen, on the sports programs, or as liaison officers. Schools were staffed with qualified local Aboriginal teachers working side by side with non-Aboriginal teachers, who lived in the communities they taught in, sharing teaching practice and sharing language. Once the day time classes were finished the afternoon and night classes would start. Living and learning were words that were interchangeable, equally proper in outside spaces, in the jungle, on the sea, near the ground, in short, in “environments considered the third educator” (Gandini, 2012, p. 339), valued places creating traditionally appropriate experiential engagement. In true Indigenous teaching and learning ways, nature was nurtured.

**Dhupuma College**

In the eighties in the Northern Territory there had been a growing preference amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators towards the Two Way Learning Model, an endeavour to respect each other’s cultural tenets in an undertaking to find a common ground. At the time Yirrkal Principal, Dr M. Yunipingu articulated:

> What we want is BOTH WAYS education – Balanda and Yolŋu ways – but we want the Yolŋu to have control over both sides of the curriculum. We want our children to learn Yolŋu culture and history from the Yolŋu point of view. We do not want to keep the Balanda content out of the school, but we want control over the Balanda content. We want to decide for ourselves what our children learn about the Balanda world. We all, Balanda and Yolŋu are trapped by our past experiences of school the Balanda way (as cited in Marginson, 2002, p. 197).

The Gumatj speaking Yolngu School, Dhupuma College, established at Nhulunbuy, incubated an entire cohort of both Yolngu and Balanda educators and students in Two Way education. Dhupuma, meaning ‘looking up and ahead’, and opened in 1972 by Prime Minister William McMahon, was largely unknown by the wider Australian community, but the success of the bicultural/bilingual Dhupuma College was unprecedented in the Northern Territory. With highly innovative programs designed and carefully implemented, the College developed qualities of both academic accomplishment and leadership success. A
significant number of graduates went on to become influential leaders in both the mainstream and in their own communities; Jacqueline Amagula is testament to that. However, with promised intentions to rebuild the campus in two phases, the Government closed the college abruptly on the 21st of August 1980 without any prior notice. Dhupuma College alumni speak highly of what it did for them in terms of enabling them to acquire an education, a place in both worlds. The first Indigenous Australian school principal, and 1992 Australian of the Year, Dr M Yunipingu, when asked why the college was shut down replied, “Well I think the Northern Territory Government didn’t want black people to be smart” (Corn, 2009).

**Northern Territory bilingual program**

Although discussions had first been undertaken in the sixties regarding bilingual education, it was not until 1972, on the eve of the Whitlam Government coming into power, that bilingual school programs were introduced. In 1973 five schools were established and by 1996 thirty-one bi-literacy programs had been rolled out across the Territory. The bilingual learning program was intricately linked with the community language, the community members, the seasons and ceremonial cycles. Parents and guardians would sit under the bough shelters in the soft-river or beach sand close to where the classes were taking place, and observe what was happening. If students weren’t behaving in a way deemed appropriate, a custodian would casually walk over, sit down and work with them until they settled into the task. Further, the vast corpus of literature and the rich productions of bilingual audio and visual resources generated by literacy centres was extensive, stimulating community members to read and write in their own languages and establishing a depository for future generations. Despite this apparent success, the Minister for Education Peter Adamson directed the Department of Education to close down all bilingual programs and centres, and bilingual education was abolished in the Northern Territory on the 1st of December 1998.

According to Nicholls (2005) the axing of the bilingual programs, “ran counter to the oft-articulated wishes of the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal community members” (Nicholls, 2005, p. 161). She argued that no hard evidence was ever provided to prove that bilingual education was failing students, “the government’s lack of endorsement of Indigenous language programmes ultimately discredits the status of Indigenous languages by undermining their legitimacy in Australian classrooms, and by extension, in other social settings as well” (Nicholls, 2005, p. 162). Nothing filled the void that had once connected culture, language and cognition.

**The Groote Eylandt Affair**

The ongoing level of government interference in community processes was causing communities to feel increasingly disenfranchised by what they considered as undemocratic practices of a government not listening. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the Department of Education for failing to address claims of harassment and discriminatory practices occurring in several schools across the Northern Territory. As the Groote Eylandt Regional Council representative on the Northern Territory Teachers Federation Executive, I was hearing regional councillors reporting incidences occurring in their regions. These incidents ranged from unsafe accommodation, unsustainable working conditions, and unfair dismissal claims to issues of nepotistic promotional processes. On Groote Eylandt a meeting was called with the sole purpose to ascertain the extent of local concerns raised by community members and teachers, and if necessary, form an affirmative action group to identify and resolve the issues. The Minutes of this initial meeting with an explanatory covering letter were sent to the Acting Regional Superintendent in East Arnhem Land.

Concurrent to this, a set of these Minutes, addressed to the Acting Regional Superintendent, were widely distributed and viewed by some to be a slur. Declining to retract or apologise for the documented claims Jean Illingworth and I were served Deformation Writs. As a consequence of this, a protracted court case ensued for five years and due to sub judice prevented three Aboriginal communities’ educational issues from being addressed or resolved. The Northern Territory Teachers Federation (NTTF) Executive was of the opinion the significant allegations required investigation. This action was endorsed by rank
and file membership across the Territory who voted unanimously to support the call for an independent inquiry into the claims.

The claims evolved from 20 Statutory Declarations, containing 63 specific allegations that stated that the Minister for Education, Tom Harris, had failed to protect the rights of Aboriginal teachers, students and parents and failed to exercise proper authority over his department generally and in particular, failed to ensure that a thorough and impartial inquiry was conducted by his department into the substantial allegation concerning individuals and the education system generally. Concurrent to this action a motion was put to the Legislative Assembly listing to censure Minister Harris demanding his resignation. The Labour Leader the Honourable Graeme Smith asked the following questions:

Does the Minister really expect people who have put their jobs on the line and made formal complaints to him and to his department to say, on the basis of an informal and secret inquiry of which no public report is made and from which no action results, to be satisfied?

Does the Minister really expect any reasonable person, any person who has had the guts to get up and say that something in the system stinks and to ask for help in fixing it, will be satisfied with that response?

[The Department] has brave, gutsy teachers out there who are prepared to stand up when they think that there is something wrong, not out of personal interest but out of a genuine desire to improve the system and make it work, and it will not even listen to them and treat them seriously. They have the right to have those allegations investigated. For those reasons the minister should be censured and should resign (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 1990).

The Education Minister remained in his position and the communities failed to get due consideration. Once again the system had unequivocally let Aboriginal people down and regardless of their struggle to record their dissent about what was happening in their schools...little seemed to change.

Conclusion

While the millennium announcement regarding Aboriginal education was a national priority, parity with non-Indigenous Australian students still remains wanting. Nevertheless, there have been significant developments in the number of innovative programs such as Dandjoo Darbalung, Dare to Lead, Follow the Dream, Partnerships for Success, Clontarf Academies, cultural competency training, scholarships to private school/university opportunities, particularly those advanced by philanthropic and mining company funding. However, now as much as ever, transformation towards culturally sensitive emergent educational frameworks must underpin learning. “It is imperative that rather than providing a mainstream program into which Indigenous students must fit, the system should be changed to develop schooling that is intimately related to the backgrounds and needs of the students” (Partington, Godfrey, Harslett & Richer, 2000). Education has to be deeply rooted in respect for people and their relationships with their community, culture and each other. In doing it this way, students provided with authentic relevant learning can go on to live consequential long and worthy lives, contributing socially, culturally, economically, and becoming custodians guiding a new generation.

References


Gun-ngaypa Rrawa ‘My Country’: a commitment to both-ways language documentation

**Margaret Carew**

**Introduction**

This paper outlines an approach to collaborative intercultural work in language documentation through a project called Gun-nartpa Stories (2010-2014). The work commenced as a repatriation of 75 digitized cassette tapes recorded during 1993-96 from elders at Gochan Jiny-jirra outstation in north-central Arnhem Land, and developed into a collaborative documentation and publishing project. A core project team emerged, consisting of this author and An-nguliny men Patrick Muchana, Crusoe Botara and Raymond Walanggay. We worked together to review the recordings and select, transcribe and translate a number of stories and numerous other family members also participated as transcribers, translators and consulted with the team on aspects of the project. Some contributed additional material to the project through recordings and conversations about history and clan connections (England, Muchana, Walanggay, & Carew, 2014, pp. xii-xix).

Throughout the process of working with the recordings, the project team enriched the stories as they provided more detail about events, places and people. In particular they were specific about family relationships between those telling the stories, the people referred to within them, those present at the story telling events, and the people alive today who have a relationship to the stories. To take account of these contributions, I wrote commentary text linking the stories together. Over a period of four years, I worked with the team to refine the text and compile the stories, along with photographs and artworks, into a book called Gun-ngaypa Rrawa ‘My Country’ (England et al., 2014). The book is produced with the technology of ‘sound printing’. Using an audio player which scans a code embedded in the page, a person can both read the text and listen to the corresponding sound file. In this way, the book allows its readers to listen to the stories as told by the Gun-nartpa elders in the 1990s. This project was accomplished through support from Batchelor Institute, an organisation which has provided adult education for Indigenous people for 40 years in the Northern Territory of Australia.1

Our collaboration took place against a backdrop of cultural shift and changing demographics in the Maningrida region. The generation who held memories of pre-contact childhoods in the bush and lived through the settlement period from the late 1950s are mostly now gone. The lifestyles of these older people are now an important theme in the practice of constructing historicised local identities through oral storytelling, just as the events surrounding the visits of Macassan trepangers, Japanese pearlers, the Second World War and traditional warfare were for the generation before. These local identities are - at least in part - responses to the changed circumstances of life resulting from contact, engagement and influence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the region. They are ‘intercultural’ identity formations in the way that has been framed by (Merlan, 1998, 2005) and others working towards accounts of how social and cultural differences are negotiated between people from different cultural orientations in contemporary Australia, especially in remote Indigenous communities (Altman, 2005; Hinkson & Smith, 2005). In our project, stories provided testimony of social and cultural continuities in the face of social and economic changes. Their tellings and retellings were a framework for articulation of these identities and to the aspects of traditional life that are key to them. The book projects these identities – for example the interpretative texts that frame each story.

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1 The Gun-nartpa Stories project was supported by a Batchelor Institute Internal Research Grant (2010-11), by the Australian Government’s Indigenous Languages Support Program grants (Gun-nartpa Stories 2012-13; NT Language Centre Support 2013-16) and by the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (Small Grant SG0161 2012-13). Archiving support was also provided by the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures. See the publication Gun-ngaypa Rrawa ‘My Country’ for further acknowledgements (England et al., 2014, p. xxi).
emphasise the central importance of *trawa* ‘country’, *bapurrur* ‘clans’, *yakarrarra* ‘clan lineages’ and other kinds of social connections within the dense cognatic descent groups that structure the Gun-nartpa social universe. In particular, the repatriation of the recordings links to family memorial practices relating to the storytellers themselves. These practices refer to traditional ways of commemorating the deceased through funeral rites, alongside of more contemporary practices such as keeping and sharing photographs and maintaining grave sites. From the earliest stages of bringing the recordings back to the community, the memorialisation of the storytellers became central to the project. This shaped the scope of the project, the way that the project team worked together and the form that the final publication took.

The approach of this project is also intercultural. It is situated within interactions between people from very different lifeworlds, and negotiated through various engagements with kinship networks, local organisations and organisations further afield. Through these engagements we formed an alliance, a structured way of collaborating that allowed us to bring this work to completion. The importance of alliances rests upon local practices, such as collaborations towards staging major ceremonies, in which social roles are circumscribed in terms of kinship categories roles and responsibilities and economic exchange. Alliances are also a key strategy in how Indigenous people engage with people outside their kinship networks. They are relationships that develop within intercultural contexts: for example, through schools, non-government organisations, education and training providers and engagements with university-based researchers. Through alliances, people aim to support and sustain local practices “which are concerned with continually creating possibilities for the future of one’s kin and the extended networks from which one draws strength and community” (Christen, 2009, p.viii).

In the following sections I outline an approach to collaborative language documentation and conservation which derives from Batchelor Institute’s *Both-Ways* philosophy and practice in Indigenous education (Fraser, 2006; Ober & Bat, 2007a, 2007b). I argue that *Both-Ways* provides a practical orientation to intercultural collaborative work, and that its principles are consistent with current practices in the field of language documentation, conservation and description.

‘Both-ways’ - collaborative language research through Batchelor Institute

An important driver of Batchelor College’s development throughout the late 1980s and 1990s was its role in providing teacher training for remote community people through the Federally funded Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program. Many local teachers held positions in their schools while undergoing teacher training with Batchelor College (Uibo, 1993). During these years Batchelor College was an important venue for the articulation of new educational philosophies, which aimed to integrate Indigenous educational perspectives with Western ones. These are interculturally positioned discourses – they emerged as Indigenous people began to engage in structured interactions with outsiders in educational encounters. These teams of local teachers, and their (mostly) non-Indigenous colleagues and lecturers brought diverse cultural perspectives to a shared project to implement culturally appropriate schooling for Indigenous children in remote community schools. These various approaches have come to be known as ‘Both-Ways’ or ‘Two-Way’ education (Ober & Bat, 2007a). Both-Ways is in fact a heterogenous set of perspectives (Smith, 2006, p. 31) which share an orientation which values Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in areas which can be otherwise construed as Western, such as the institutions of education and research. Framings of Both-Ways frequently highlight the existence of separate Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.
and cultural life practices (for example, Windy, 1996). Also central to Both-Ways are the differences and intersections between Indigenous kinship based social formations and Western institutional frameworks as the basis for social action. As an example, for Yolngu educators, roles and responsibilities in educational projects can be mediated through galtha, a means of “gathering together ideas as a starting point for sorting out important issues and problems, ceremonies and individuals’ roles in participating in these ceremonies” (Marika-Munungiritj, 2002, p. 44).

Both-Ways offers an approach to undertaking collaborative language research, framing both ethical matters and research methods which draw from Batchelor Institute’s decades of educational practice in partnership with Indigenous thinkers and practitioners. Since the 1990s the field of language documentation has been transformed by digital recordings, tools and data management strategies (Bird & Simons, 2003; Himmelmann, 1998; Thieberger, 2004). This has enabled a foundation for collaborative practice, as language data can be recorded, reproduced, stored and mobilized for a much broader range of purposes than previously possible (Nathan, 2006b). This links to and overlaps with existing approaches to collaborative practice in language documentation (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1993; Stebbins, 2012; Stenzel, 2014).

Such guiding principles support our aims for pertinent outcomes of language documentation practices (Nathan, 2006a). These are outcomes that combine the different priorities of collaborative allies, created within a framework for intercultural work that supports, sustains and develops a broader set of local practices, strategies and goals at the family and community level. One of the strengths of Both-Ways is that it values the ongoing learning and socialization that happens outside formal educational contexts, recognizing and validating the knowledge and practices of Aboriginal family and community lifeworlds (Ford & Klesch, 2003). Language documentation work intersects with these worlds, through interactions between language speakers and linguistic specialists and a set of ‘situated practices’ (Barton, 2007): practices that are aimed at recording, analyzing, describing language and mobilizing the resulting artifacts in various ways. In the next section I present a picture of what is meant by ‘situated practices’ in language documentation, before turning to consider the Gun-nartpa Stories project more specifically.

Research at Gochan Jiny-jirra 1993-96

Figure 1: Map of the Maningrida region, with a focus on Gun-nartpa site names. Map: Brenda Thornley

Gochan Jiny-jirra is an outstation on the Cadell River, in the Maningrida region in north-central Arnhem Land. This region has long been noted for its linguistic diversity (Capell, 1942; Elwell, 1977), with up to ten Indigenous languages spoken as mother tongues in a multilingual language ecology. The main language spoken at Gochan Jiny-jirra is Gun-nartpa, which is a dialect of a larger language group often referred to as Burarra (Elwell, 1977; Glasgow, 1994; Green, 1987). The family maintain ongoing connections with their traditional country and ancestral creation spirits and are active participants in ceremonial life.

The Gun-nartpa have a history of engagement in language and cultural maintenance activities, through education, religious life, performance and visual arts. Many of the Gochan Jiny-jirra family had participated in the Burarra Bilingual program through Maningrida Community Education Centre from the early 1980s until 2008 as teachers and literacy workers (Christie, Bow, Devlin, & Simpson, 2014). Some senior family members had worked closely with Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) linguist Kathy Glasgow on bible translation, literature development and the Burarra/Gun-nartpa dictionary project (Glasgow, 1980, 1994). Through such long-standing collaborations, both the practice of literacy and the value of texts as a means of presenting language and cultural knowledge developed in importance. For example, Katy Fry learned to read and write from the Glasgow’s as a teenager in the 1960s. She taught family members...
literacy and was one of a number of people who helped the Glasgow’s in bible translation work and language research more generally. She went on to study with the School of Australian Languages and in education at Batchelor College/Institute. She worked for many years as a literacy worker in the school at Maningrida, and produced numerous Gun-nartpa and Burarra language resources for the Burarra bilingual program.

I lived at Gochan Jiny-jirra and Maningrida between 1993 and 1996, while undertaking language research on Gun-nartpa. For much of this time I participated in everyday life at Gochan Jiny-jirra – this involved hunting and food preparation, participation in ceremonial events, gathering and processing fibre for twining and looping bags and mats, and much time spent at the campfire talking with family groups. During this period of my research a number of people contributed to recordings of stories and other genres of speech, in particular England Banggala, Harry Ngamandara Litchfield, Jane Banyala Litchfield, Terry Ngamandara, Rosie Jin-mujinggul, Michael Burrurrbuma and Mary Karlbirra. These language recordings were made on cassette tape and supplemented by notes, drawings and photographs. The community were interested and supportive of the work that I was doing at Gochan Jiny-jirra during this period. However their expectations and understandings of the role of a linguistic fieldworker were almost a polar opposite to my own at that time. I was preoccupied with what Bowern (2008) calls Type 1 linguistic research. My activities were oriented to producing research outcomes framed by academic questions and I was collecting language data to contribute to a dialogue almost exclusively conducted between academic specialists. The traditional academic fieldwork model puts the work of the linguistic fieldworker at the centre of fieldwork activities. Such activities include observation and participation, recording and working with consultants to transcribe, translate and interpret the content of recorded material. Away from the field, there is data analysis, theoretical modeling and writing for an audience of academic peers.

The lived experience was different to this. Throughout my time working at Gochan Jiny-jirra people were generous with their time and shared knowledge and resources that helped me survive in an unfamiliar environment. But there were expectations too, and they were different to mine. I came to understand that the community saw my main task as recording stories from old people and to work under their direction. It was my role to learn language so that I could participate in the kinship system and follow social norms and participate in a range of activities with the community such as hunting and ceremonies. Over time there was an expectation that I would use my knowledge, skills and connections to provide support and assistance to the community. One important role was to communicate my knowledge to other balanda ‘European person’ so that others could also learn about Gun-nartpa language and culture. This is exemplified by England Banggala’s description of how he and I were to visit his ancestral sites, which was published in Gun-ngaypa Rrawa (Banggala, 2014). This description reveals England’s awareness of my work practice, which focused on recording notes in a notebook, which he referred to as jurra ‘paper’\footnote{\textit{jurra} ‘paper’ is a Macassan loanword shared by a number of Arnhem Land languages (Evans, 1992).}. He describes how he plans to show me wangarr ‘ancestral spirits’ at certain locations on his country and says that I will put them in my book:

\begin{quote}
\textit{guborlkanyjarri wangarr ama barra / manymak gatparra nyirrinyileba / jurra abamja barra /} \\
She will get the ancestral spirit at Guborlkanyjarri. Ok, from there we will finish that, she will put it on paper. \\
(T06-04:EB:16-18)
\end{quote}

Towards the end of this recording Banggala described how he would show me the yellow ochre stone at Birduk Mu-yerrnyjiya, which is a manifestation of the ancestral \textit{birduk} ‘waterlily’ spirit. He planned to give me a sample of this stone, and send it away with me when it was time for me to leave. He situates this gift explicitly within a wider social frame, projecting his view on how his sharing this knowledge with me would propagate it further. He didn’t mention the university that I was enrolled in, or an archive, nor any other Western institutional structure - he talked about how I would take the ochre and show it to my family.
Kinship was the model for knowledge sharing and exchange that he appealed to, as he planned how we would collaborate on our project together.

She will write about it, and I will give it, I will give it. She will take it when she goes away. When she knocks off from here. She will take it. She will show her. She will demonstrate for her mother, she will do it for her mother. And dad, her father. And her sister and brother. And her husband. They will all listen, and look at the waterlily stone, like That’s mine, I will send my dreaming. They will see it in that place far from here.

This text excerpt is one of a number of statements that England made about the purpose of my research. His work with me was oriented towards this, through his careful descriptions of his bark paintings and the many visits to sites that we went on together (see England et al., 2014–25). Work that primarily focused on such expectations can be typified as Type 2 linguistic research, where the work of a linguist is product oriented and works as a consultant for the community (Bowern, 2008). For the linguist there can be tensions between different sets of expectations especially in situations where research funding is tied to particular types of research outcomes, often which leave little scope for satisfying the expectations of the community group (for a discussion see: Bowern & Warner, 2015; Crippen & Robinson, 2015; Crippen & Robinson, 2013). However, these tensions also need to be considered in ethical terms. Within an intercultural research collaboration, what is fair and what is right, and how do we work through the different perspectives on these questions? In fact as Bowern suggests, linguists and communities can usually achieve practical benefits through a marriage of Type 1 and Type 2 linguistic research. One consideration in combining Type 1 and Type 2 is to provide a model for language documentation that prioritises practical outcomes and honours the authority of knowledge holders, without effacing the role and contribution of the linguist, and without devaluing the important role of linguistic training for language description and analysis. The negotiation of such fine balances between priorities and expectations takes place in a dynamic context, as priorities and circumstances change throughout the lifecycle of projects and the relationships that they are situated within (Curran, 2013). To do this effectively requires careful attention to the processes of collaboration in these dynamic intercultural spaces (Holmes & Marcus, 2008, p. 85).

These considerations also index wider structural inequalities within Australian society and the systematic disadvantage of Indigenous peoples within them. While this project could do little to directly address these matters, as a professional ally of a family working to document, preserve and interpret valuable cultural material it was essential to consider how to proceed in a way that was not ad hoc, which mitigated the risks presented by working interculturally and where choices about the direction and content of the project were made by the people who had the highest investment in the material. Explicitly placing the work of language documentation in the framework of Both-Ways philosophies and methods enhanced our project in this way. This can be illustrated through an example from our project in which initial expectations about the form of repatriation were not met, and how this was resolved by the local team through asserting jurra ‘paper’ as the means by which they wanted their family to encounter the material and to memorialise the storytellers.
Decisions about the form of repatriation – *Jurra* is best.

In 2010 I returned to Gochan Jiny-jirra for the first time in many years, at the beginning of a new project aimed at repatriating the fieldwork tapes I had recorded during the 1990s. Prior to the 2010 consultation I digitised the tape recordings and prepared a set of listening materials on CDs for the family. I made the digitised recordings machine readable through time-alignment software and annotation using ELAN (Wittenburg, Brugman, Russel, Klassmann, & Sloetjes, 2006). This resulted in a corpus of recorded material that could be searched and accessed for recordings from particular people and places, particular topics and genres of speech and performance. I extracted a number of stories and songs from longer digital files (one file per tape side), creating a set of audio clips of stories.

Crusoe Batara and Patrick Muchana represented the family in our discussions around the material and we met with many family members who listened to a selection of the recordings. It was clear from the outset that the family were deeply moved to hear the voices of their elders. It was less clear however how to repatriate the material in a meaningful or sustainable way. Initially it seemed feasible that providing copies of recordings on CD would enable people to listen to them on CD players. There was also the potential to copy the files onto a computer in the community school and to propagate copies from there. This proved possible but impractical as it rested on the community having access to the school for this purpose (which they didn’t have at that time). No one living at Gochan Jiny-jirra had a personal computer. The lack of support for access to digital formats also presented the risk of devaluing the stories by presenting them in an ephemeral form such as a CD or DVD.

Most importantly, the main message from the early meetings was that to be meaningful, the form of repatriation should honour the memories of the people who were in the recordings. These were important people, the elders of the family, and the audio recordings of their voices needed to be treated with respect. The longer stories also needed some interpretation and context, to frame them for a listening audience. As we discussed the project, Patrick Muchana suggested that a book would be a good way to present the stories. Books and paper presented an existing means of honouring people’s lives, relationships and achievements and had become an accepted way of looking at photographs of people who had passed away. As Patrick said during this visit ‘*Jurra* (paper) is best’. The challenge then became one to use the tools and methods of digital language documentation as a foundation for participatory practice to achieve this outcome. This shifted the project beyond simply returning a set of recordings to the task of creating a meaningful and linguistically rich tribute to the people who contributed their stories. The Gun-nartpa project proceeded on that basis, and the book *Gun-ngaypa Rrawa ‘My Country’* is the result (England et al., 2014).

Conclusion

This paper has outlined a case study of empowered language documentation work relevant to the Northern Territory context. It supports well-established principles in language documentation and incorporates Batchelor Institute’s Both-Ways

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5 The full set of recordings is now archived at the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Languages (PARADISEC) (http://paradisec.org.au/), and with the Hans Rausings Endangered Languages Archive (http://www.elar-archive.org/index.php). Photographs and selected recordings are available for local access through the Northern Territory Library’s Maningrida Community Stories Project (http://maningrida.communitystories.net/archive/index.php).

6 Since 2010 the school at Gochan Jiny-jirra has been closed, apart from brief periods.

7 By 2010 mobile phones had become popular as devices for capturing, storing and transferring files and so were useful as a way of sharing the digitized photographs and short audio clips of songs from the 1990s. For these items, it was straightforward to put the files onto a micro SD card that could be inserted into a mobile phone, and to rely on existing sharing practices to distribute the files. However, the length of some of these stories made for longer listening and also took up more storage space, a barrier to file storage and sharing.
approach to Indigenous education. Despite the emphasis on community empowerment our project also required the specialised role of the linguist within this model of collaboration. Skills in linguistic analysis underpin the work on transcription, language analysis and translation, and the synthesis of existing language description with previously undescribed lexical forms and grammatical structures encountered in the material (Garner & Glasgow, 1980; D. Glasgow & Glasgow, 1967; D. Glasgow & Kerr, 1964; K. Glasgow, 1964, 1981, 1988; Green, 1987). There are also benefits to other forms of linguistic research stemming from this project, such as the development of a rich corpus of time-aligned metadata that accompanies the set of recordings and archival deposits that preserve the corpus in the long term.

Through the work on this project the linguist also provided a service to the language community as a writer, trainer, technical support person, curator, advocate, project manager and grant administrator. Linguists don’t learn these skills as part of their linguistic training, but develop them as part of an applied professional role. This is especially true for linguists working in community contexts (Owalsky, 2014). Linguists learn much else besides, through the intercultural training provided by language speakers and communities. This knowledge is currency, exchanged for linguistic services and the opportunity to undertake language research. Such exchanges are an essential part of Both-Ways collaboration.

References


