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Learning Versus Education: Rethinking Learning in Anangu Schools

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In the remote schooling context, much recent media attention has been directed to issues of poor attendance, low attainment rates of minimal benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, poor retention and the virtual absence of transitions from school to work. The Australian government's recent 'Gonski review' (*Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report 2011*) also strongly advocates the need to increase investment and effort into remote education across Australia in order to address the concerns of under-achievement, particularly of Indigenous students. Large-scale policies designed to improve access to services have caused a significant increase in services delivered from external sources, policy development at all levels of government, and tight accountability measures that affect remote communities and in turn, schools in various ways. Remote educators find themselves caught in the middle of this systemic discourse and the voices and values that exist in the remote communities where they live. Within this complex environment, the purpose of this article is to amplify Indigenous community voices and values in the discourse and by doing so, challenge ourselves as educators and educational leaders to examine the question: 'While we're busy delivering education, is anybody learning anything?' This article focuses on the Anangu (Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara) context of the North-West of South Australia, southern regions of the Northern Territory and into Western Australia. This region is referred to as the 'tri-state' region. Using a qualitative methodology, this article examines three Pitjantjatjara language oral narrative transcripts where Anangu reflect on their experiences of growing up and learning. By privileging these Anangu voices in the dialogue about learning in the remote Aboriginal community context, key themes are identified and analysed, highlighting important considerations for remote educators in understanding the values and cultural elements that inform Anangu students in their engagement with a formal education context.

■ **Keywords:** remote Indigenous education, Anangu

In the remote schooling context, much recent media attention has been directed to issues of poor attendance, low attainment rates of minimal benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, poor retention and the virtual absence of transitions from school to work: 'Fear APY School Attendance Rates Falling' (ABC News, 2011), 'Parents "Part of" Truancy Problem' (Martin, 2012a) and 'Language Skills Poor in 40% of APY Children' (Martin, 2012b) are all examples of this trend. The Australian government's recent Gonski review (Gonski et al., 2012), although not negatively framed, also strongly advocates the need to increase investment and effort into remote education across Australia in order to address these concerns of underachievement.

In the Northern Territory, the NTER (Northern Territory Emergency Response, often referred to as 'The Intervention'), the Stronger Futures policy (replacing the NTER), RSD (Remote Service Delivery policy), NTG (Northern Territory Government) 'Growth Towns' and RPAs (Regional Partnership Agreements) are all examples of programs and policy interventions aimed at addressing the concerns that remote Aboriginal students are 'behind', or simply failing in their education. These large-scale policies have caused a significant increase in the volume of externally centred service delivery, policy development at all levels of government and tight accountability measures that affect remote communities and in turn, schools in various ways. To compound this issue, there seems to be an increase of multiple, sometimes conflicting and differently timelined accountability measures to contend with.

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Remote school principals find themselves caught in the middle between this governmental discourse and the voices and values that exist in the remote communities where they live. Within this complex environment, the purpose of this article is to amplify Indigenous community voices and values in the discourse and by doing so, challenge ourselves as educators and educational leaders to examine the question: 'While we're busy delivering education, is anybody learning anything?'

This work focuses on the Anangu (Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara) context of the north west of South Australia, southern regions of the Northern Territory and into Western Australia. This region is referred to as the 'tri-state' region. I have been involved in this region for more than 20 years and worked at Ernabella Anangu School from 2002 to 2008, including 5 years as Deputy Principal and Principal. Since 2008, I have worked extensively throughout this region with schools, Principals and Anangu educators as well as roles including translation and interpreting in Pitjantjatjara language communities, and supporting Anangu researchers to conduct research in their own communities.

Throughout this article, I examine three key questions:

- What are the challenges that remote educational leaders face in delivering education?
- What do Anangu say about learning from their perspective?
- What are the implications for educators in taking account of Anangu perspectives in their work as educators?

In this article, I reflect on my own experience as a non-Indigenous educator and then principal working in remote areas to raise a wide range of issues that emerge through lived experience in community settings. I then foreground the voices and accounts of Anangu through drawing on a series of four Pitjantjatjara language interviews with senior community members who reflect on their experiences in schooling and also the processes by which they learned outside of formal schooling. By engaging with the perspectives raised by Anangu, non-Indigenous educators can reflect on the need for a focus on learning that builds self-discipline, acquires the 'codes of power' (Delpit, 1993) and prefers the building of a 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004) to an education where the mark of success has tended to be distilled down to the measures of attendance rates and the acquisition of minimal benchmarks in English literacy and numeracy (see Guenther, 2012).

In doing so, I hope to highlight the presence of disciplines, values and 'imagined futures' (Nakata, 2007a) rather than focus on the somewhat despairing deficit discourse that crowds the academic, policy and public focus in this field. As Boomer (1999) and Lingard, Hayes, Mills, and Christie (2003) explain, a critical goal of educators working with students in the margins of social disadvantage is to enable an education experience where social justice remains a priority. This work aims to provide perspectives on how remote school leaders and educators might reposition their work to provide a more fulfilling and socially just education in remote schooling.

What Are the Challenges That Remote Educational Leaders Face in Delivering Education?

The Challenge of Meaningful Measurement

As part of the move to be better informed by the collection of nationally uniform data for comparison, schools across the country routinely collect data on student attendance, literacy and numeracy progress (using National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy testing [NAPLAN]), student retention figures and transition to employment data. For remote schools, this data can be of some value, but the very nature of remote communities — 'sparse populations, limited livelihoods, scarce resources, social uncertainty, and cultural differences' (Stafford Smith & Huigen, 2009) — as well as language diversity, limit the validity and the value of this data in terms of its potency for informing educators about student progress in real terms (Wigglesworth, Simpson, & Loakes, 2011). Despite claims to the contrary (see, e.g., Burns, 2012), it is difficult to find evidence in the analysis of NAPLAN data that shows significant change in results over the longer term either in the Northern Territory as a whole or for remote communities generally (ACARA, 2011). The same could be said for other jurisdictions around Australia, with the possible exception of Queensland (Bain, 2011).

The Flexibility Challenges

Remote school principals, who are significantly non-Indigenous, are normally asked to cover an extremely broad range of roles that may not otherwise be considered part of the urban principalship. For example, senior bureaucrats and politicians make concerted efforts to visit communities to make key policy announcements, touch base with communities and to open facilities. In any calendar year, principals may have entertained, accommodated and had intense discussions with a range of federal and state/territory ministers and chief executives. The irony of the 'remote fishbowl' (distant, but highly visible) is that despite the vast distance between remote communities and the city centres that manage them, remote principals often engage in the broader public domain through media and the high-level visits described above and need to be proficient in the game of politics, given the politically sensitised nature of their position.

On the other hand, the scarce availability of skilled trade workers also sees remote principals spending early mornings and late evenings unblocking toilets with the wet mop

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and flush technique, finding extra chains and padlocks to secure doors with broken locks, screwing sheets of iron over broken windows to secure buildings, or collecting coffins from the airstrip in the school troop carrier. Such examples are 'normal' for most remote principals; it isn't unusual if remote principals saw themselves as caught between the 'fishbowl' and the 'toilet bowl', so to speak. I once unknowingly left a state government minister (on an unannounced visit) waiting in the school office for over an hour while trying to deal with some challenging student behaviour in the yard, as well as dealing with a burst water pipe that was gushing out from underneath the administration building. We were understaffed and I was trying to support the teachers to continue in the classroom uninterrupted by dealing with the myriad of issues by myself as they arose. Eventually, after numerous polite encouragements, an Anangu Education Worker came to me and said: 'I know you asked me to tell the whitefellas to come back later, but I really think you'd better come for this one.'

In remote schools, principals also have a higher degree of responsibility for their staff in comparison to their urban colleagues. A high proportion of the remote teaching force is beginning their career as they arrive in the community. For many of these young people, this can be the first time they've had a job, the first time out of home and certainly the first time they've lived in a community where their own values and epistemologies are not only in the minority as far as population goes, but do not seem even to make sense to the broader community. Teachers take up remote teaching positions from a range of experiences; some come escaping a relationship breakdown, some seek adventure and others, professional stimulation or financial stability. Some have significant teaching experience and others are beginning their career. The staff not only work together, but also live together and it is the principal's responsibility to ensure they are safe, respectful and coping in all aspects of their life as it directly affects the whole of the staff and their work when things aren't going well. These are but a small portion of the total package of demands and responsibilities that remote educational leaders are faced with before they even consider the complexities of the 'cultural interface' (Nakata 2007b) and how they might re-shape the schooling experience for students to engage with confidence and enthusiasm.

The Challenge of 'Making a Difference' in the Remote Classroom

In the Anangu context, many educators seek a remote posting, eager for the opportunity to foster a quality teaching and learning environment in a culturally diverse context. It is a preferred appointment, rather than a last resort decision. They work hard, care about their students, take on a range of responsibilities and hone their skills in classroom teaching with a desire to see their efforts resulting in improvements in student outcomes. Perhaps the most frustrating part of all of this, however, is that there is little evidence of this effort and commitment making significant shifts in the long-term view of nationally collated figures around attendance or NAPLAN achievement data (Ford, 2012). In fact, analysis of very remote school data from 2008–2011 shows that in measures of attendance, literacy and numeracy, despite intense focus and investment from federal, state and territory governments there has not been improvement (see Guenther, 2012). It can take a matter of years for remote educators to realise that pedagogy, curriculum or community engagement on their own, will not make THE difference; that is, Anangu students achieving the same results from the same tests as their urban counterparts. This can cause frustration and even despair as long-held beliefs in ideas such as education being 'the key' (Kronemann, 2007) are challenged as it becomes clear that the teaching and learning experience does not reflect their own experience from when they were last in school, either as teachers or as students (see Delpit, 1993). And thus, remote educators arrive at the realisation that despite the busyness of 'educating', it's unclear whether students are really 'learning'. This is not to denigrate the daily learnings and achievements that we know take place in remote classrooms, but to speak to the broader question of whether we are really 'making a difference'.

All this points to the question of what learning is really for in the remote context, and if it is about 'work', what kind of work counts as meaningful. A number of studies conducted in various parts of remote Australia suggest that the reasons people engage in learning about literacy and numeracy are not necessarily related to what might be expected in an urban context. For example, Kral and Falk's (2004) study of literacy practices in desert Alyawarr communities suggested that reading and writing were more important for functional and Christian purposes than for work-related purposes. The notion of what counts as 'work' and its connection to learning in the Aboriginal domain is often misunderstood and leads to disconnects between curriculum delivered and curriculum needed. The Djama and VET research report (Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council, 1998), though written 15 years ago, highlights many issues like this, which still have currency today. More recently, work by McRae-Williams (2008) and Kral (2012), confirm that what is taught by the system does not necessarily have direct relevance for the kinds of work that people living in remote communities do.

Power and Pedagogy

Lingard et al. (2003) highlight the fact that all education institutions incorporate learning that is both social and academic. Hayes, Mills, Christie, and Lingard (2006) make the point that 'productive pedagogies', in order to deliver a socially just, or 'powerful' education, must provide opportunities for students to engage in high order thinking as well as the operational aspects of learning (such as

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repetition of low level literacy and numeracy skills). An education limited to the acquisition of basic skills, they argue, will have no impact in shifting students from the margins of social and educational disadvantage (see also Boomer, 1999).

To achieve success in meeting powerful intellectual challenges, remote educators need to have a sense of what is meaningful from the perspective of community-held values. They need to interrogate their own inherent value systems and social norms that are routinely reproduced within classrooms and understand that the students they teach do not carry an implicit understanding of the 'culture of power' (Delpit 1993); and, given that '[t]he rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power' (p. 122), being intentionally explicit about the embedded social norms and expectations becomes critical. Delpit (1993) further explains:

> *I have come to conclude that members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-members. However, when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down. Each cultural group is left saying, 'Why don't those people say what they mean?' as well as, 'What's wrong with them, why don''t they understand?' (p. 123)*

Delpit goes on to argue that: 'Unless one has the leisure of a lifetime of "immersion" to learn them [the "codes of power"], explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier' (p. 123). In the remote education field, much has been said about the need for explicit teaching in the academic sense (see, e.g., Pearson, 2011), but here Delpit argues also for the need for explicit teaching of the social learning goals of education that often remain unspoken.

The Challenge of 'Understanding' in Anangu Communities

Remote educators need to understand that significant ontological, epistemological, axiological and cosmological differences exist between themselves and the lived reality of the students they aim to educate (see, e.g., Arbon, 2008; Ford, 2010; Nakata, 2007b). As I have described, the life of remote educators affords them neither 'leisure', nor the luxury of 'immersion' in the culture of the 'other' (see Delpit, 1993). In the Anangu context, this can be particularly challenging. In some remote contexts, communities place great importance on the need to 'educate' visitors to be able to understand their place in the society, the interrelatedness of the community and the values that exist and so on, but in the Anangu context, this information is less explicit and held somewhat aloof from eager young teachers. The only way to begin to understand these things is to slowly glean pieces of the picture from spending time with Anangu, listening, observing and learning how to ask questions in the right way and at the right time where people might be more open to sharing some of this information.

On the other side, Anangu students attend schools where they wonder 'Why don't those people say what they mean?', as well as 'What's wrong with them, why don't they understand?' (Delpit, 1993 p. 123). Teachers reproduce an education program without being able to fully comprehend the implications of the culturally embedded social expectations that lie within the academic (and social) processes they present.

As a result of being part of raising such questions, I am looking here to what Anangu suggest 'learning' looks like from their own experience. I am drawing on oral narratives where both schooling and learning are discussed.

What Do Anangu Say About School and Learning?

This section of the article draws on the qualitative methodology of oral narratives, aiming to challenge traditional Euro-centric narratives of schooling. Working from Pitjantjatjara language oral narratives privileges Anangu voices in the dialogue about their own lives and themselves as learners. Smith (2012) explains that a critical methodological consideration for a western researcher working in Indigenous contexts is to centre Indigenous voices in Indigenous research as: '... research can no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter' (p. 10).

In the Anangu context, oral narratives are a powerful and appropriate platform for sharing important information. By using Pitjantjatjara language narratives, Anangu voices are spoken from a privileged and powerful knowledge position.

In drawing on these Anangu perspectives, it is important to understand that the transcripts I draw on here are oral narratives centred on the question of personal experience in schooling and learning more broadly. They were not ever intended to be a singular or collective standpoint on Anangu perspectives on learning and education. As Nakata (2007b) points out: 'Standpoint accounts ... depend on reflexivity and the distinction between experience and standpoint' (p. 11). They do, however, reveal something of the experiences, knowledges and values that shape the implicit codes of Anangu culture. It is difficult to access this type of account. Indeed, all of these transcripts are recorded and/or transcribed in Pitjantjatjara language by Edwards (1994) or by me. I have provided a translation into English in order to make these voices accessible to the reader (with the exception of some sections of Andy Tjilari's *Ngayulu Iriti Tjitji Nintiringkunytja,* already translated, as noted below).

The first narrative, presented here by Andy Tjilari, is found in *Pitjantjatjara Tjukurpa Tjuta* (Edwards, 1994) titled *Kuulangka Nyinanytja* (Attending School). In this story, Andy describes arriving at Ernabella and

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attending school. Despite the fact that the period recollected is most likely to be in the early 1940s, some of the scenarios could well be describing a current situation. After three or so weeks of going to school, he realises he really has no understanding of reading and writing. Despite looking intensely at the writing on the board, he resigns himself to giving up: 'And so I didn't finish my writing; of course, I had no idea, I couldn't really do it, I had no idea' (Edwards, 1994, p. 6, translation provided by author).

After this short period, his parents inform him that he is to remain at school while they walk north to Hermannsburg. Andy protests, but is convinced that he needs to stay at school and eventually, he agrees. He spends the morning at school, but then sneaks off to catch up with his parents, now half a day's walk ahead. On his reconnection with the group, they ask him:

> *'Why did you leave school and come?' And I said, 'No, those kids are . . . well, what? They're different, they speak Yankunytjatjara, and I can't really understand, and so I came.'*

Andy does not continue with any stories of scolding or parental disappointment with what he has done. He continues the story with long and detailed observations of what his mother and father are carrying, how they got water, made fire and descriptions of the places and environment they travelled through. Having finally arrived at Hermannsburg, Andy's parents order him to school and he obediently goes off for his first morning and does some writing. At 'kapati' (recess), he experiences another emotional crisis as he realises that these children speak Aranda and he is forced to dodge a football that is kicked to him because he doesn't understand the game. So he decides to disappear and hide in the creek. Fighting off the fear of being followed by spirits, he catches up with his family who are digging rabbits out of their burrows. They order him back to school, but again, he makes uncontested protests: 'And I said: "No, they're speaking a different language there. I can't understand'" (p. 8).

They leave from there; the family walking along the road, with Andy hiding by walking along the hills until evening, concerned that his family may see him and force him back into school. Arriving back in Ernabella, he has another try at school. He tries and tries, watching and watching in an effort to learn to write and learning 'a little'. In the holidays, the family return to their homeland to gather dingo scalps in the spring to trade for rations and other goods as was the custom at the time in the Ernabella mission. Andy closes his recollections of schooling with the statement: 'I was always missing school — I couldn't understand, I couldn't write' (p. 8).

Even in these recollections of school, some striking contrasts emerge. The descriptions of learning in the classroom portray feelings of failure and the inability to understand, even after significant attempts to learn. In contrast, Andy makes keen and detailed observations about the tools and techniques for survival while on the journey from Ernabella to Hermannsburg. His lack of confidence in unfamiliar social contexts causes him to run way from school (even at the risk of being followed by the spirit men) to find his family. Of note, his parents insist he attends school, but seem to agree that Andy is justified in running away, given the fact that he has no confidence in the 'different' social context of the school and its language. The level of self-confidence and autonomous decision-making is indeed striking given that he lasted one morning in school, but confidently follows his family on foot undetected through the Western MacDonnell Ranges presumably for some time, to ensure he could not be forced to return to school.

This story is followed up by another story, *Ngayulu Iriti Tjitji Nintiringkunytja* (Edwards, 1994). The first section has been translated and adapted in *Learning as a Pitjantjatjara Child* (Tjilari, 2006). I will use this translation for this story.

The opening section of this narrative strongly highlights the process and disciplines in Andy's 'education':

> *As a child, I learned from my father. This is the way he taught me. He broke off a tecoma branch and put it in the fire and when it was hot he flexed and straightened it while I watched. I thought to myself, 'Ah, it's straight now'. Then he scraped off the bark and when it was straight, sharpened it again with a spear thrower. This is how I learned, watching continually as my father worked, thinking to myself, 'Ah, so that's how my father makes it'. (pp. 5–6)*

Andy continues to describe the intricate process of spear making and seems to make an inference that he would like to try, but is reminded that his intentions are premature:

> *As he tied it, I watched and learnt, and I asked my father, 'Father, what is this you are doing?' He replied, 'No, you must watch and learn. I am making this and binding it with kangaroo sinew to make it tight.' (p. 6)*

Andy goes on to describe his gradual inclusion in the process of flushing out euros, a hills kangaroo, and how he learned to use a spear by playing with the other boys, eventually making and 'looking after' spears. He talks about only knowing 'a little' about what his mother did because he didn't observe closely, although continues to describe a range of observations and knowledge of the women's work with seeds and plant foods.

Nganyinytja Ilyatjari also contributes a substantial narrative on the same theme as Andy's *Iriti Ngayulu Tjitji Nintiringkunytja* (Learning as a Pitjantjatjara Child). This narrative is preceded in the collection (Edwards, 1994) by 'Living at Angatja', 'Going for Bush Foods' and 'Following a Kangaroo'. Nganyinytja is featured in photographs as an excellent example of children growing up as healthy, vibrant and intelligent children at the Ernabella mission. It

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is interesting that in asking her to reflect on learning and growing up, she has chosen to solely focus on the skills and experiences she developed growing up at Angatja, more than 250 km to the west of Ernabella, the site of the only school in the region at that time.

In many regards, Nganyinytja's recollections are similar to Andy's in that they contain highly detailed descriptions of the land, foods, tools and the interactions with family members that take place along the way. What sets Nganyinytja apart is that she embraces a much wider range of family members to learn from, whereas Andy was deeply affected by his father, but 'didn't observe closely' the things that his mother did. Far more confidently, Nganyinytja embraces learning from the skills of the men in cooking meat and making spears.

Nganyinytja begins her narrative by listing her teachers: 'I was living out at Angatja as a child and my father, mother, grandmother, older brother, aunty and also my uncle taught me' (p. 22, translation mine).

She intricately recollects the experiences through which she learned. These include learning by observing her mother in the collection and preparation of plant foods and her father's work in preparing meat and making spears. Through the days, she goes with her mother to collect a wide range of seeds and fruits that grow on trees. At night, the group comes together and the men tell stories one by one, followed by the women. The stories continue long into the night until finally everyone falls asleep. Nganyinytja learned to carry firewood and to shape digging sticks. She learned as a young girl to dig with smaller sticks and dishes, collecting witchetty grubs, lizards, rabbits and other animals.

Nganyinytja continues the narrative with the same level of detail and knowledge across dealing with snakes and ants, food collection and preparation and the dangers of poisonous plants, learning to avoid men's sacred areas and cannibalistic ogre like creatures (*tjangara*) and understanding the work of *ngangkari* (traditional healers). She describes the values that underpin teaching and learning, child rearing and social interrelationships, and continues with other stories about reading the wind and managing seasonal weather, fire management, obtaining water, and the importance of learning and obedience in it all.

In contrast, Sheila (not her actual name) was born near Irrunytju (Wingelina, WA) on the western fringe of Pitjantjatjara country, and made a number of epic journeys in the first year or so of her life in early 1942 (based on unpublished transcript, Osborne, 2012). From Wingelina, she was carried by her mother (and others) to Ernabella (a distance of more than 350 kms and on to Angus Downs, out to the west of Kata Tjuta, across to Finke and eventually back to Ernabella where she stayed for a while. From this point, Sheila spent time at Ernabella, Areyonga and Hermannsburg School. These schools are spread across some distance of 500 km.

Like Andy, Sheila's recollections of schooling and learning focus on recalling the struggle to resist school:

> *And I was wailing to leave at Ernabella, but my mother was threatening me and following me to get me to go to school but I was constantly racing off well away from her, poor thing! I just totally sped off. My older brother from Docker River, he took us to school, but there were two kids missing, and my cousin, he's my older brother (we, Anangu, say 'kuta' – older brother), he was searching and following us with a stick to hit me saying, 'Go, go, go!' [to school]. Without mum there, he was thinking to stick with me, standing in a clearing through the bushes and they were both crying, Amanyi and all of us.*

Also like Andy, the family makes clear and concerted efforts to get their children to school, eventually giving in as the child's resilience in resisting 'apprehension' seems to win out. Despite Sheila having exposure to three different schools, she recalls learning to read at Angus Downs (a cattle station between Uluru and Erldunda in the southern region of the Northern Territory) as the weekly mail arrived containing the week's Lutheran liturgical readings and activities, which she was expected to read to the other children. It was all in Western Aranda (not her family's language), but she forced herself to learn so that she could read to the younger children. There was no school at Angus Downs, and by this time, Sheila's formal schooling had already finished.

Like many Anangu who grew up on cattle stations without a school, for Sheila, various forms of learning took place on the station (see Osborne, 2012). Cattle station life and work was where many Anangu were challenged to engage western contexts and the world of work, take risks, and learn the self-disciplines required to do the work. Yami Lester is a prominent example of this life experience that he describes at length in his autobiography (Lester, 1993). Sheila describes some of the work she did:

> *I would do all sorts of things like a man. For Mr and Mrs Liddle, I would carry heavy things and bag everything. I would join with the men and lead bullocks, ride horses. It was great learning all of those things. Out there, I learned all of those skills until I became worn out.*

What Are the Implications for Educators in Taking Account of Anangu Perspectives in Their Work as Educators?

While it could seem problematic to highlight the learning experiences from the 1940s to inform teaching in schools some 70 years later, it is critical to understand that the values systems that are described, in particular by Andy and Nganyinytja, continue in Anangu families, although they may be less visible at first glance. On the surface, students are far more comfortable with school and learning in school, and student understanding and experience of the wider world is far different from that of their great grandparents. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to assume that

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Anangu students in schools today have therefore adopted the western neoliberal values and motivations that underpin the social and systemic constructs of formal education in Australia (see Guenther & Bat, 2012). Understanding the strength and value of teaching and learning in the Anangu context can challenge us as remote educators to look for the presence of these existing values, rather than despair the apparent 'lack' of values, a hasty conclusion that is over-represented in media reports, staff room conversation and policy assumptions.

Education and the Autonomy of the Child

In Andy and Sheila's accounts, they have both described at length the battles that occurred between their parents and themselves in regards to attending school. There is strong evidence that their parents encouraged and even made attempts to force the children to attend school. However, it seems that there is a certain point where the autonomy of the child and the child's right to ultimately make their own decision on this matter is given priority. Sheila and her two relations win the day by splitting up and putting on a fairly significant performance (including tears and terror) so that their *kuta* (older brother) finds it impossible to take the upper hand; and Andy argues that it is excessively cruel to be made to feel 'different' and to be left in a place in such contrast to the freedom and confidence he experiences being with his family. I am arguing here that 70 years on, Andy's logic and Sandra's strategy are as powerful and effective in many Anangu families today.

As discussed earlier, Delpit (1993) describes the frustration of students who enter schools where teachers (often unknowingly) create an environment built on the values of the 'culture of power', but students lack the life experience to understand the unspoken social expectations about behaviour, values, power and 'success'. This dynamic extends to the content of the learning also as implicit values so often determine *what* is to be learned.

Despite various policy attempts to ensure that parents take responsibility for their child's attendance (e.g., the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure; Wright, Arnold, & Dandie, 2012) at school, it remains paramount that teachers understand the need to build confidence in both the social and academic contexts of learning. Remote educators have little influence on the policy environment or the capacity or willingness of parents to force their autonomous children into schools, but they can explicitly teach the 'codes of power', as Delpit suggests, building confidence and a sense of mastery in the learning environment. The contrasting image here is Andy, running away terrified, 'almost blindly', through a creek from the Hermannsburg School to return to the comfort of his family's company. After realising this could be a problem with his family, he then confidently travels along the hills to remain out of sight to put beyond question the possibility of him returning to school.

Capacity to Aspire and Imagined Futures

If national media were to write about the plight and problem of these three children in schooling and education in the APY lands of 2013, their schooling encounters would no doubt provide 'solid evidence' of systemic failure to provide a 'quality education'. But what do education researchers suggest a socially just education looks like when working in marginalised community contexts?

Nakata (2007a) outlines the critical nature of the 'imagined future' for Indigenous young people in the pursuit of education and 'success'. Appadurai (2004) argues, from his experience in marginalised communities in India, that building a capacity for aspiration is critical in communities where aspiration has traditionally existed within the broader constraints of the known and unequal societal structures, limiting aspiration to life improvements such as a sheet of iron to adorn the family dwelling and the like. In Australia, voices such as Noel Pearson (2011) argue that the issues facing remote Aboriginal communities in terms of education and broader social concerns have shifted little in 70 years, and attainment should be measured in terms of nationally compared statistics and commonly understood measures of 'success'. This includes measures of attendance, literacy and numeracy benchmark scores, student retention rates and transition from school to university, accredited training, or employment.

These positions highlight the diverse and contested nature of perspectives of what a 'good' or 'successful' education looks like. As Guenther, Bat, and Osborne (2013) argue, the tendency in recent years to distil broad concepts of a 'good' education (see Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) into a narrow suite of measures for very remote schools (attendance, literacy and numeracy benchmarks, student retention figures and transitions to further learning or employment) has resulted in political pressure and public scrutiny of very remote schools within this narrow frame of what a 'good' education is, causing educators to focus far more heavily on these more simplistic measures in the attempt to make improvements.

I am arguing here that remote education will languish in deficit paradigms and 'underachievement' narratives if education remains framed in, and focused on the minimal aspirations of the 'mechanical' or low-level operational aspects of education — that is, attaining NAPLAN (minimal) benchmarks in English literacy and numeracy and making small gains in attendance rates. As Lingard et al. (2003) emphasise, students must engage in high order thinking, wrestle with the bigger issues, and find room for hope in order to obtain a 'powerful' or socially just education. Of course, the acquisition of the mechanical aspects are critical to an education, but the ability to think, reason, and to matter is not necessarily contingent on the low order skills that seem to have become so important and politically sensitised in recent years. Educators need to pay far more attention to the knowledges, language/s

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and cultural norms of the family and of relations, rather than simply identifying these aspects as barriers to 'success'. Scaffolding from one to the other and back again may well be important pedagogical innovations in such settings.

I am also arguing that remote educators need to see the capacity that exists, despite the well-worn list of 'barriers' and 'issues' such as poor health, poor literacy skills in English language, and lack of employment. If aspiration, or 'being someone', requires a linear checklist to work through (attending school every day, literate and numerate in English, high school education, further training, work readiness, aspiration to neo-liberal values and will 'move to where the work is'), we limit the power that education can offer and ultimately, the justice that educators of students in the margins of social disadvantage should see as their own aspiration. Education can be a vehicle that builds identity and provides hope (see Leadbeater, 2012) — it has the capacity to transform lives, rather than constrain them (Appadurai, 2004).

Let us just return to Andy, Nganyinytja and Sheila briefly. Their education report reads: very poor attendance and engagement, little or no achievement in literacy and numeracy and 'at risk' in that they were 'disengaged' as secondary age students (with the possible exception of Nganyinytja — see Hilliard 1968, pp. 165–166). And yet, the 'learning' they all describe as taking place outside of school afforded them all a sense of self, place and discipline that propelled the most incredible aspirations and indeed, achievements.

In addition to the cultural responsibilities and knowledge that Andy retains, he became an integral part of the Ernabella mission and the Presbyterian church, and as the community became stretched to its limits, Andy moved to Fregon and, building a bush-bough church, he spearheaded the establishment of the Fregon church and community in the 1960s. In his later life, he has become internationally recognised for his ongoing ngangkari (traditional healing) work, winning the Sigmund Freud Award (2011 World Congress for Psychotherapy), which follows on from the 2009 Mark Sheldon Prize awarded by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry (RANZCP), and the 2009 Dr Margaret Tobin Award for excellence in the provision of mental health services to those most in need.

Hilliard (1968) draws heavily on accounts of and from Nganyinytja, describing her as a reliable historian (p. 81), a ground-breaking early childhood educator, taking on the role of early years assistant while still a senior student and becoming a junior primary teacher once she had finished school (pp. 165–166), a skilled craft worker (p. 171), and one of the first Anangu to have been to Adelaide (p. 178). Nganyinytja is also described as 'a pioneer in so many ways' (p. 188) who takes on the role of intensively teaching the lessons required to undergo baptism. It is also interesting to note that she founded a tourism operation to Angatja, which still takes place today. She also pushed new boundaries in the embracing of new ideas and opportunities. Hilliard (1968) explains:

> *It was not until 1951 that Nganyinytja became the first of her people to come to the sister for the delivery of her baby. This was Nganyinytja's own decision despite opposition from the older women. (p. 138)*

Confronted with a terrible dilemma at the birth of a later child where she suspected she was having twins, Nganyinytja left to give birth alone as it was standard practice for the second baby to be killed in this instance (see Hilliard, 1968). Her relief at the realisation of only having one baby is replaced with a deep sense of grief as it becomes apparent the baby has only one eye and serious facial deformities. Despite this, she again breaks new ground by committing to raise the child; this daughter continues to be a healthy, loved and productive woman to this day. Nganyinytja was also instrumental in fighting for the establishment of the NPY (Ngaanyatjara, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara) Women's Council.

Yet, in reflecting on her learning as a child, she does not talk about the school or Mr Trudinger, her first school teacher — only the classroom of the Mann Ranges, the bountiful country of Angatja and the relations who taught her so expertly in that context.

Sheila was instrumental in establishing the community of Imanpa and also Nyangatjatjara College (an Independent Aboriginal Secondary School across Mutitjulu, Imanpa and Docker River communities) and served as the ATSIC representative for the Southern NT region for 13 years as well as a number of other directorships and executive roles. She has been a tireless advocate for Aboriginal organisations, education and community capacity for leadership and control of their own communities.

Re-Thinking Learning in Anangu Education

From their own narrative accounts, it is clear that Andy, Nganyinytja and Sheila all felt a strong sense of agency for voice, action and change, of capacity to aspire, and to imagine a future worth fighting for. Their 'learning' was powerful, yet educationally speaking, they were 'failures'. Of course, the world has changed dramatically in 70 years. The irreversible impacts of colonisation on Anangu society have filtered through, and I am not suggesting 'the answer' is to simply recreate the scenes of the utopian recollections of Andy learning from his father or Nganyinytja learning from the land and her relations. I am also not suggesting that remote educators should compare their community contexts to the way things were. Indeed, issues of violence, neglect, substance abuse and self-harm add both complexity and significant pressures on educators in a modern schooling context.

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I am, however, asking remote educators to understand that there is another reality outside of externally imagined government policies and negative public scrutiny of deficits in the 'mechanical' aspects of remote education. I am asking remote educators to explore the latent capacity and presence of values and disciplines that seem absent, but have not been 'required' or perhaps expected in our classrooms. I am asking remote educators to recognise the intergenerational knowledge assets of students, their families and the broader community. I am asking remote educators to foster high order thinking in their own practice and find ways to let it breathe into their pedagogy and curriculum development.

In policy terms, rethinking learning in remote contexts, based on the accounts of Andy, Nganyinytja and Sheila, does not herald a call for the abandonment of participating in the formal education experience. It does, however, require education systems to consider the questions of what a systemic approach to building capacity for aspiration, reinforcing student identity and providing opportunities for the development of confidence and self-discipline might look like. As Nganyinytja, Andy and Sheila describe, they experienced all of these things in their learning, but not in their education. If remote schooling has become alienated from these critical aspects of a socially just education through increased pressure to make improvements in a few basic key areas, then remote educators will need to consider how place-based approaches might build the kind of learning experiences described by Andy, Nganyinytja and Sheila (see Gruenwald, 2003). This would include drawing on the intergenerational knowledge assets that exist in the community to contextualise national approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, as well as redefining the nature of community engagement as is understood in other contexts.

Systems need to develop alternative approaches to what is valued by Anangu and what is measured so that the narrative of 'gaps' and deficits is not the only education story there is to share. Engaging Anangu knowledge in the learning process, privileging the 'knowers' and the context for the knowledge (see Nakata, 2007b) opens spaces for alternative pedagogies and creative approaches to curriculum content. As suggested above, scaffolding across the knowledge systems is an important pedagogical innovation worth exploring to build confidence in acquiring skills in English literacy and numeracy and open opportunities for learning that connects with Anangu students so that learning in school reflects their own identity and they feel valued.

In order to shape the nature of schooling and the values that inform the schooling process to build confidence, affirm identity and improve student engagement and outcomes, school leaders and educators more broadly need to consider how this might be achieved. Continuing to build local community teachers, and prioritising working with community and not in isolation can help to integrate a role for the school in wider social efforts to deal with the challenges many communities face. Schools can see themselves as valuable sites for supporting the archiving of community histories, not just relating to the school, but by engaging in the development of locally constructed materials, resources and oral histories. Managing these processes locally can give a sense of continuity and importance to this type of work in the face of ever-changing non-Indigenous staff.

Conclusion

Prioritising the values, knowledge and local authority of senior members of the community in the school's daily business elevates the perceived value of their contribution to children's learning and can redress the balance where currently the demands of the system tend to dominate the focus of schooling in remote communities. An innovative approach may be to challenge the current context where education and service provision more broadly privileges western values to the extent that the economy of service provision is almost completely dependent on externally based non-Indigenous service provision. A shift away from externally based service delivery can ensure that the resources poured into remote communities don't leave the community in the same Toyota that brought them in, but by building local capacity in language development, cultural knowledge and community engagement, new opportunities can arise.

Consider, for example, what could happen if remote schools supported the development of language, local history materials and resources to the extent that the scope of this activity moved beyond student benefit alone and new non-Indigenous staff were required to engage in community-driven learning in local language, histories and cultural engagement. Such an approach could shift the sense of Aboriginal identity, values and cultural norms in schools, from one that is distanced to one that is centred as essential knowledge for professional engagement in remote Aboriginal schools and communities. This could generate paid work for local community members and equip non-Indigenous educators to take account of the broader educational needs of the students in their work. Such an arrangement may also begin to shift the environment of what is measured and what is valued in remote schools, from a narrow frame of attendance and benchmarks in English literacy and numeracy to an environment of intergenerational local knowledge that is valued by students, the community and the school staff alike. By building capacity for communities to teach non-Indigenous staff in education and other professional fields such as health and administration, the challenges described earlier where shared understanding between Anangu and non-Indigenous educators can be difficult, even elusive — can begin, in some way, to be addressed from a community-led position.

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