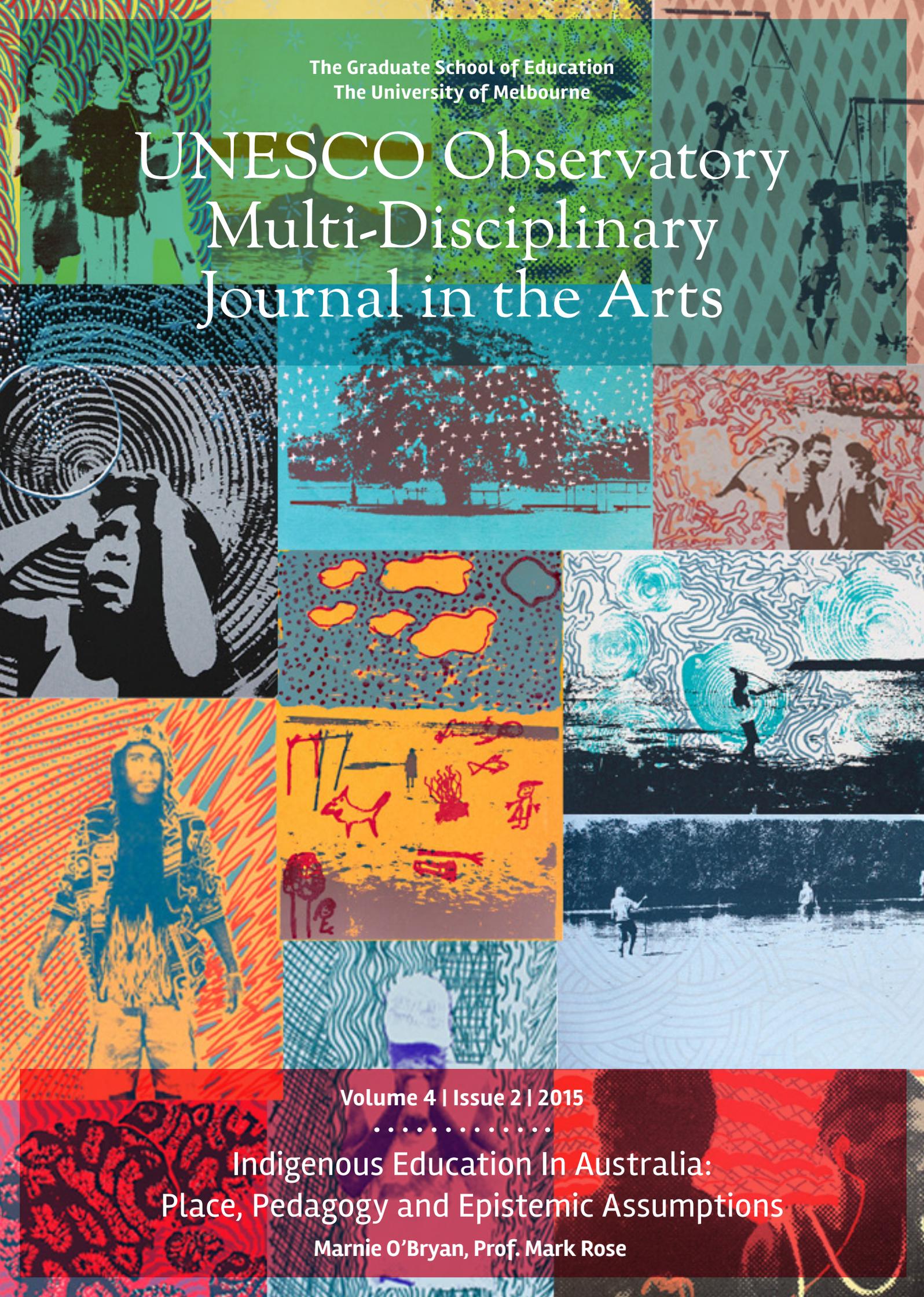


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Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions

Marnie O'Bryan, Prof. Mark Rose

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Volume 4, Issue 2

Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions

Guest Editors

Marnie O'Bryan

Prof. Mark Rose

THEME

This special edition of the UNESCO Observatory E-Journal focuses on education for and about the First Peoples of Australia and bears witness to the many faces of Indigenous education in Australia. It testifies to a complex landscape; places on a map, places in minds and places in spirit that taken together present a snapshot of the tone and dimension of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in early 2015.

Indigenous education policy is framed by a bi-partisan commitment to 'closing the gap'. In some instances, Indigenous leaders are framing the debate over how this is best achieved. At the same time, non-Indigenous educators are increasingly becoming aware that equality and mutual respect can only be established once the Australian community opens its mind to the ancient wisdom and the true stories of this place. Many of the articles in this publication identify the 'gap' as an epistemological divide and argue that, like any bridge, education measures aimed at 'closing the gap' need to be constructed simultaneously from both sides. To that end, a number of papers focus on initiatives being developed and explored by mainstream schools to give authentic voice to the perspectives of First Australians for the benefit of non-Indigenous students.

COVER ART

Yirrkala Collage

Various Artists,

Yirrkala Art Centre

*Courtesy of the artists
and Yirrkala Art Centre*

The papers in Volume One, '**Indigenous Education in Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis**', are all concerned with how Western educational structures and institutions work for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Volume Two of the Journal is entitled '**Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions**'. Each of the articles in this volume pertains to the education experiences of people living in remote Australia.

The articles in this publication take the reader through a rich multidisciplinary tapestry that points to the breadth and complexity of the Indigenous education landscape in Australia today. The papers are honest and true to the heterogeneous communities that are the First Peoples of Australia. Similarly, the poetry and artworks that appear here bear witness to the breadth, depth and diversity of artistic talent and tradition in this country. Taken together, they challenge the reader to move beyond a simplistic quest for 'the silver bullet' to redress disparity in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They encourage reflection, innovation, reciprocity, respect and empowerment through education.

We recommend each and every article.

Prof. Mark Rose & Marnie O'Bryan

Guest Editors

Accompanying Piece



Wild Yams
Bernice Baker

Courtesy of the Artist

Sharing Place, Learning Together: Mutual Capacity and Partnership Building

Sally Godinho

Marilyn Woolley

*Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne*

Jessie Webb

Kenneth Winkel

*Australian Venom Research Unit
Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics
The University of Melbourne*

ABSTRACT

Sharing Place, Learning Together (SPLT) is a cross-disciplinary education project that aims to develop the English and Science literacy skills of remote Aboriginal students. The project comprises an interdisciplinary team from the University of Melbourne (UoM) partnering with Maningrida College and the Djelk Rangers (Bawanninga Aboriginal Corporation) to support the College's 'Learning on Country' program. Through cross-cultural exchanges and 'on country' visits Aboriginal biocultural knowledge is integrated with Western scientific understanding to develop curriculum and literacy resources. This paper details SPLT's evolution and discusses activities and learning experiences the partnership has generated. Linked to the project's development, the paper presents the findings of a research study that investigated mutual capacity and partnership building between the Maningrida College Community and UoM. These findings reveal that relationship-building, coupled with a sustained presence in the community, were critical to strengthening the partnership, and highlighted that establishing trust and credibility must precede research initiatives.

KEYWORDS

'Learning on Country', place-based pedagogy, two way learning, cross-cultural knowledge, Indigenous voice, partnerships

INTRODUCTION

Maningrida is one of the largest and most diverse towns in the Northern Territory (NT), and home to more than ten Aboriginal cultural groups. Seven main languages are spoken in the area, predominantly Ndjebbana, Burrara, Nakara, Kunwin'ku, Gurrgoni, Rembarrnga and Jinang, with English being spoken to various degrees of proficiency. The Community school, recently classified as a college, is categorised in Government literature as disadvantaged. The My School website reveals that Maningrida College has an official enrolment of 554 students — 97 per cent being Indigenous, with a language background other than English. The measured level of disadvantage is reflected in its My School Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) rating of 581 (1000 being the average), and an attendance rating of 53 per cent (ACARA n.d.).

The University of Melbourne's (UoM) connection with Maningrida College was made in late 2010 when Mason Scholes, a senior teacher and an Australian Museum Eureka Science prizewinner, contacted the University's Australian Venom Research Unit (AVRU). He invited a partnership to broaden the venomous biodiversity theme within the school's Learning on Country (LoC) program, beyond spider biology. The latter element of the program, developed in collaboration with Dr Robert Raven of Queensland Museum, had previously resulted in 46 new spider species being identified on the floodplains near Maningrida. Mason had developed an integrated fieldwork program for senior students with Traditional Owners (TOs) and senior Indigenous Djelk Rangers. This later evolved into a government-funded LoC program, one of four piloted in Arnhem Land, designed for Indigenous students to learn 'on country' through day trips and bush camps within the large Djelk Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) surrounding the Maningrida township.

The LoC program in this community is seen as vital to sustaining engagement with country, given that the large majority (approximately 75 per cent) of the estimated 2,000 Indigenous people residing in the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) now live within the large Maningrida township. However, a study of LoC programs by Fogarty and Schwab (2012) found that, while the Maningrida program had achieved markers of success, its dependency on the dedication of one staff member (Mason Scholes) meant that the sustainability of the program was vulnerable.

The *Sharing Place, Learning Together* (SPLT) team, led by the AVRU (in the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics) and the Graduate School of Education at the UoM, has been developed to support the College's LoC program and its sustainability. More specifically SPLT aims to enhance the development of the science and literacy skills of remote Aboriginal students through knowledge exchange, and to deepen both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student understanding of Australia's biodiversity and natural resource management. This participatory, community-based project aligns with Maningrida College's Operational Plan (Maningrida College, 2013), which seeks to increase school attendance and halve the gap in reading and writing achievement for Indigenous students within a decade. SPLT's intentions resonate with the notion that partnerships involve individuals and organizations working collaboratively to bring about an agreed outcome, and to leverage maximum gains over policy agendas (Cardini 2006; Lowe 2011).

Partnership formation in any institutional setting presents challenges (Cardini 2006; Huxham 2000; Lowe 2011) but in this context they included disciplinary, social, cultural and linguistic considerations. A Melbourne Social Equity Institute (MSEI) research grant in 2013 provided an opportunity to explore the complex circumstances that can impact on sustainable partnership formation in a remote Aboriginal community. Following the documentation of the activities and learning experiences initiated by the SPLT project, this paper then discusses the study's research findings of what impacted the partnership building processes between UoM and Maningrida Community.

FRAMING THE SPLT PROJECT

The LoC program is grounded in place-based pedagogy where learning and communication are structured around what is most meaningful to the students — their places, their culture, their experiences (Gruenewald 2003; Comber & Kamler 2004). The project initiatives planned by the UoM team with Maningrida College to foster its LoC program are premised on learning being two ways, a meeting of Indigenous and Western knowledge and communicative capacities. These initiatives identified closely with the pedagogies endorsed by the *8 ways of Aboriginal learning* (Yunkaporta 2009; Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011) framework.

TWO WAY LEARNING

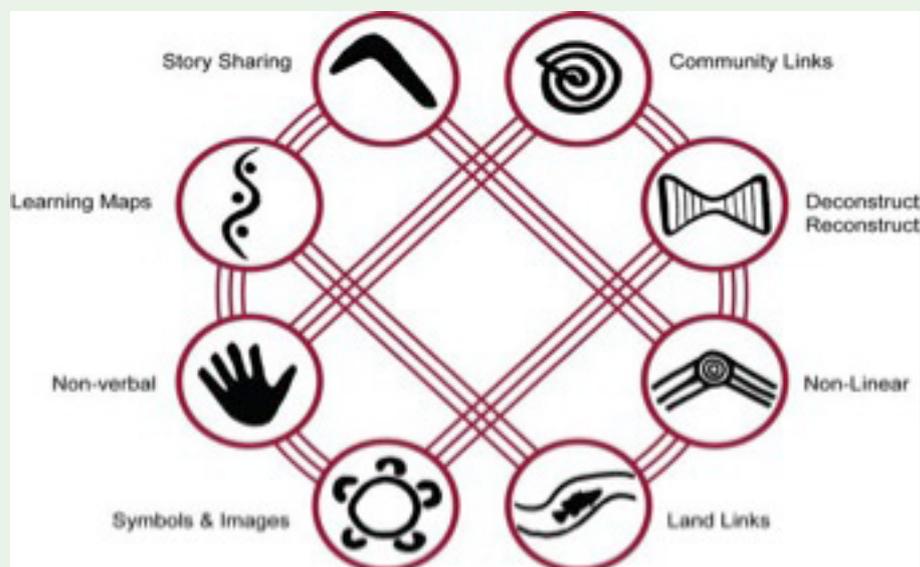
The SPLT team emphasized building capacities in both basic western and Indigenous scientific knowledge and in the reproduction of Indigenous ecological knowledge, as recommended by the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Altman et al. 2011). Specific health perspectives were added to these two way capacities. This position aimed to augment the science curriculum and teaching in the College, and make more explicit links with Indigenous cultural frameworks and the customary Indigenous visual and spatial ways of knowing (Fogarty 2012; Kimpton 2013).

Bishop and Berryman (2006) identified that developing culturally responsive relationships requires schools to build Indigenous pedagogies into their curriculum and classroom programs. This infers that teachers need to ensure students feel they can bring who they are and how they make sense of their world to educational interactions. Further, opportunities should be created to elicit their value system, their desires and aspirations, and what motivates them. Such actions embrace what Martusewicz and Edmundson (2005) term a pedagogy of responsibility. This positioning and presentation of knowledge, and the engagement with questions of diversity, democracy and sustainability aim for a decolonizing partnership process of recovery, knowing, analysis, and struggle (Tuck 2009). As Apple (2013) attests, educators must consider how to create pedagogies that are deeply connected to the reality of people's lives.

In negotiating a position with the College partners, the SPLT team promoted a willingness to participate in the teaching program 'on country' and in classrooms in order to produce Indigenous-generated literacy resources. It was intended that such resources would foster the recognition and endorsement of intergenerational knowledge and communication forms. The team's chosen position gave precedence to Indigenous ways of knowing and to crucial issues of place, participation, engagement, representation, and audience (Cahill & Torre 2007). It encouraged diverse, recorded knowledge formats authored by Indigenous participants, rather than a limited focus on journal articles conventionally shaped and written by academics with Indigenous 'informants' as field assistants or embellishments within the text (Cahill & Torre 2007; Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research 2012; Fine & Torre 2008).

The framework shown in Figure 1 was developed by the Community and Elders of Western NSW, the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Western NSW Regional Aboriginal Education Team, and Tyson Yunkaporta (Yunkaporta 2009; Yunkaporta & Kirby). The eight interactive teaching and learning pedagogies include narrative-based learning, visual learning processes, hands-on/reflective techniques, use of symbols/metaphors, land-based learning, indirect/synergistic logic, modelling scaffolded genre mastery and connectedness to community.

Figure 1
8 Aboriginal ways of learning (Yunkaporta, 2009; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011)



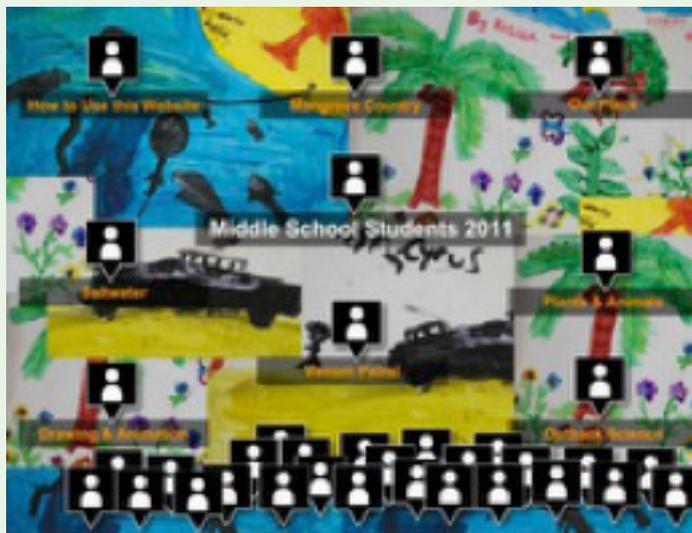
To strengthen their knowledge of specific, place-based collaborative processes in Arnhem Land, UoM team members analysed models of sustained collaboration and successful outcomes in projects involving Indigenous ecological knowledge, writing, and resource development (see for example, Altman et al. 2011; Ens et al. 2010; Ens & Towler 2011; Jackson et al. 2011; May & Ens 2011). The following processes were identified to guide the partnership interactions and the planning of learning activities:

- begin with local knowledge systems of place and seek opportunities for transfer of these traditional knowledge and skills to the focus of inquiry;
- employ respectful listening and acknowledgment of cultural knowledge to establish trust;
- incorporate new technologies for capacity building, and enhanced literacy and numeracy skills gradually and concretely;
- implement ways of collaboratively communicating integrated knowledge to the local broader community;
- explicate local complexities and constraints ; and
- recognize the need for constant face-to-face communication and supportive scaffolding to sustain engagement and impact.

COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

On the initial visit to Maningrida College in May, 2011 *The Venom Patrol* website (University of Melbourne, 2011), developed by the UoM team, visually linked Western first aid treatments and injury prevention to the students' on country experiences. It served as a prompt to elicit Indigenous knowledge of danger and safety, first aid procedures and appropriate bush medicines and treatments. A bush trip with students, Elders and teachers to Mangrove Country, along with follow up activities whereby students illustrated, painted, spoke and wrote about their knowledge led to the development of a website (Figure 2) for the school, featuring student profiles and group presentations. The website was shown to family members and Elders as a visible celebration of student knowledge of country and multimodal presentation formats. Community responses were very positive and the College sought future collaborative activities to diversify resource development.

Figure 2
Open Explore Home
Page, showing student
art work, group
presentations and
individual student
profiles developed
after the Mangrove
Country trip



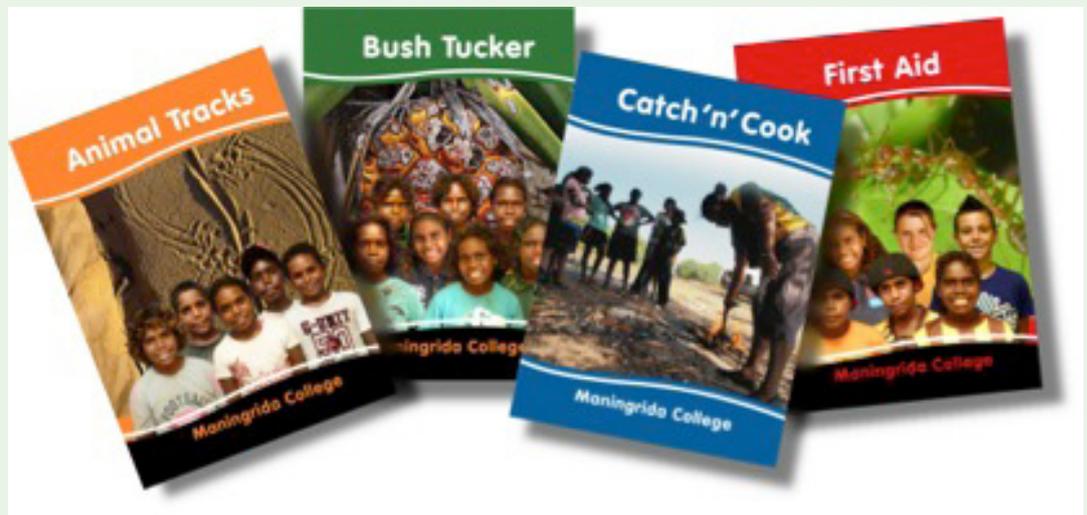
The UoM team was subsequently approached to facilitate students' writing of factual text genres (recount, information, explanation, descriptive report and procedure). A directive from the College staff was that computers not be used for initial drafts, but rather students were to work on paper, with teachers scribing when necessary. Prior knowledge of the students' literacy levels, along with an awareness of their capacity to produce their own creative literacies (Kral 2009) led to a team decision to support students in authoring a series of Pocket Books, with content drawn from their knowledge of country.

TEXT PRODUCTION PROCESSES

The text production processes were perceived as a form of knowledge exchange — two way teaching and learning. Students informed and shaped the content, and the SPLT team provided the literacy support for the students' writing, led the publication process, and sought permissions from Community Elders and TOs. In accordance with the pedagogy advocated by Shor and Friere (1987) and Noddings (2005), among others, the SPLT team saw their roles in ways described by Smith as the 'experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities' (2002: 593).

A Pocket Book (Figure 3) format, using text constructed in English, was chosen because the size meant that these books were easily portable and could become a prompt for student inquiry when out 'on country'. The notion of Pocket Books was also an attempt to look beyond schooling and embody critical knowledge for rangers and eco-tourism — places where students are likely to seek future employment (Fogarty & Schwab 2012). Each book was developed to model specific genres and text layout consistent with the writing outcomes for the NT English as a Second Language curriculum framework (NT Government of Australia 2013). The books were also intended to provide opportunities for students to record and express cultural knowledge for a wider audience. Production of the books was staggered to make the task manageable between SPLT team visits, and this strategy was outlined to the College in a book development plan, which was created in Melbourne and sent to the school in advance.

Figure 3
Pocket Books authored
by Maningrida
College students.



Within small group student learning contexts, the construction of each text was preceded by carefully scaffolded teaching strategies: manipulating and sorting visual information; drawing on prior knowledge through whiteboard concept mapping; modelling sentence starters and prompts; sequencing of statements; use of references; questioning strategies to build vocabulary and extend descriptions (e.g. leaf shape or animal body features); and assembling artwork and photographs to support the written text.

The UoM team drafted the intergenerational Indigenous knowledge onto book pages for Indigenous teachers, students and Elders to review critically or augment. Revised texts were then printed as Community and College science literacy resources, each with visible, photographic evidence of Indigenous knowledge, ownership and authorship on the front cover. Figure 4 shows students sorting visual information prior to drafting the text for their *Animal Tracks* Pocket Book and Figure 5 highlights the modelling of a procedural text for a page in the *Catch 'n' Cook* Pocket Book.

Figure 4
Students matching
animals with their
tracks during the
process of Pocket
Book development.

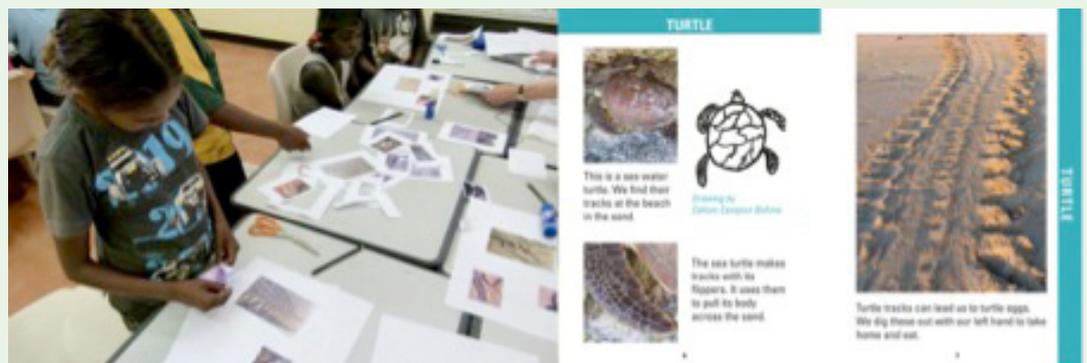


Figure 5
Teacher modelling the
use of visual images
to scaffold the writing
of a procedural text.



In accordance with the College's Operational Plan to focus on literacy, students demonstrated their capacity to meet the targeted writing outcomes for the NT English as a Second Language curriculum (Northern Territory Government of Australia, 2013), when content was relevant and engaging. An encouraging outcome identified by a teacher was that the students' Science vocabulary had expanded noticeably through working with the interdisciplinary team members. The Pocket Books enabled a context for learning where the students were able to bring their own culturally generated ways of knowing to their literacy experiences (Bishop & Berryman 2006; Webb et al. 2013). Moreover, the Pocket Book production process offered a model for other teachers in similar contexts to utilise (Godinho, et al. 2014).

The Pocket Book production prompted a female Elder, Leila Nimbada, who has worked at the Community nursery for many years and been involved in the College's horticulture programs, to signal that she would like her knowledge of plants recorded within a larger format book (Figure 6). The UoM team worked with Leila to compile material on the nature and uses of bush plants in descriptive, explanatory and historical recount genres, which was drafted onto an electronic template and organised under categories of plant uses: food and nutrition; bush medicine; material culture; and tools and implements. Senior art students critically read the drafted text, and then produced the botanical illustrations (Figure 7). This larger book titled *Using Bush Plants*, has assisted in forging stronger links between the LoC and College art programs, and formed part of a student art exhibition and knowledge exchange at UoM as part of a visit to Melbourne by Maningrida College students, as detailed later in the paper.

Figure 6
The cover for the book,
Using Bush Plants.



Figure 7
The incorporation of students' illustrations within the book, *Using Bush Plants*.



REINVIGORATION OF THE LOC PROGRAM

The reinvigoration of the LoC program and extended 'on country' camps was witnessed by the UoM team over two years of regular visits. Collaborative planning for a schedule of camps in 2013 was undertaken by the teachers, Djelk rangers, NT Government scientists and UoM team members. The rangers, in their land and sea management activities, have close relationships with TOs whose country the College visits for the LoC camps. Mobilizing TOs and other family Elders as additional teachers was acknowledgement that their presence was essential for sustaining deep, cultural learning in these settings and elevating the cultural material within school-based disciplines and pedagogies. Their active participation in the LoC program facilitated fulfilment of the Community's wish for greater inclusion of cultural content in the curriculum, such as moiety, family and kin relationships, skin names, cultural protocols and the roles and responsibilities to country in which Indigenous Ecological Knowledge is embedded.

During the camps held in 2013, Western science knowledge provided by NT scientists together with Queensland Museum's Dr Robert Raven was successfully integrated with the Djelk ranger program, extending the opportunities for students to learn about how to research animals and plants. Simultaneously, TOs, Elders and rangers provided rich trans-generational cultural engagement with the surrounding rock art and reinforced Indigenous knowledge and cultural protocols surrounding animal and plant handling/collecting (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Lesson on rock art with
Traditional Owner,
Wesley Campion
during 2013 'on
country' activities.



The interactive 'on country' experiences for the students were carefully planned using a two way learning focus and embracing Aboriginal pedagogies identified within the *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning* framework (Yunkaporta 2009; Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011). Journal writing sessions were conducted on the camp whereby students could interact with Elders and record relevant information about the topic (Figure 9). Photographs taken on camp reveal the intercultural exchanges that enabled productive follow-up learning activities back in the classroom supported by UoM team members (Figure 10).

Figure 9
A journal writing session on camp, illustrating teacher/student/Elder/TO collaborations.



Figure 10
PowerPoint produced by a senior art student, Noeline Galarla, after the camp for assessment of an arts-based subject.



The LoC activities and their outcomes demonstrate that a remote learning program can facilitate the maintenance and strengthening of culture and the ability of students to live in two worlds (Guenther, Osborne & Bat 2013). Moreover, the LoC program challenges notions of those who are more typically defined as teachers, recognizing the importance of a ‘whole-of-community’ (Emerson et al. 2012) approach to teaching and learning (Figure 11). As indicated by College records, these LoC camps encourage student attendance, which is an explicit aim of the College’s Operational Plan. This outcome affirms Emerson et al.’s claim that the LoC approach to learning can lead to more positive attitudes to schooling.

*Figure 11
Alistair James and
Joseph Diddo, school
staff and Traditional
Owners, demonstrating
traditional rope
making techniques
at Ndjudda Point, a
‘Learning on Country’
site to the north of
Maningrida College.*



The reinvigoration of the LoC program has created a need for documenting the College’s approach to learning ‘on country’ and developing a systematic curriculum scope and sequence of the cultural knowledge, concepts and skills embedded in the associated activities. TOs, Elders and Community members are critical points of reference and consultation in writing this culturally responsive curriculum, and the UoM team supported the initial documentation processes. This focus on community participation is contrary to claims by Lowe (2006) that there has been little evidence of a commitment to develop curriculum that acknowledges the distinctiveness of Australian Aboriginal cultures and also builds on the theory of quality pedagogy practices.

VISITS TO MELBOURNE BY MANINGRIDA COLLEGE STUDENTS

The Maningrida College's annual 'Learning on City' visits to Melbourne are an extension of its LoC program. These visits align the SPLT project's intent to provide opportunities for students to share their cultural knowledge and to experience learning activities beyond the local community. 'Learning on City' visits are deemed by the College as a reward for increased attendance in Years 11 and 12, and as an incentive for middle school students to stay at school and attend frequently when in the senior school.

During the Melbourne visit in 2013, The UoM team organized visits to Bundoora Secondary College and Nossal High School. The former is a suburban school with a sizeable Indigenous cohort that embraces Aboriginal culture and implements Koorie Education Learning Plans (KELPs) for all Indigenous students. The latter is situated on the outskirts of Melbourne and places a strong focus on Science education and connecting with the local Indigenous cultural heritage. At Bundoora, students viewed an art exhibition and exchanged their experiences of creating art works using a variety of techniques and media. This was followed by a shared intercultural art experience when students assembled handprints on tee shirts. Maningrida visitors were then given the opportunity to share their knowledge of kinship systems, skin names and aspects of their Learning on Country Program with the Bundoora Secondary College students and staff. When visiting Nossal High School, Maningrida students partnered with Nossal students in a range of Science laboratory workshop experiments. This was followed by a lesson on native bush plants and foods from the local environment. The College's Operational Plan now commits to continue intercultural student exchanges with these nominated partner schools.

During the Melbourne visit, Maningrida students also visited wildlife parks and the Melbourne Zoo's reptile house and the butterfly house, where they learnt from scientists about animal husbandry and research procedures. The interactive First People's Exhibition at the Museum of Victoria offered a unique cultural experience where the students learnt about how the exhibition was mounted in collaboration with clan Elders. On another day, a tailor-made art workshop was developed by the Education Officer at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to introduce the exploration of art in other cultures, along with the introduction of new art techniques. Here the students learnt about Japanese tea ceremonies and were able to connect this with their own experiences of the preparation of green ant tea, demonstrated by a female Elder, Laura Rungguwarnga, on a LoC camp in 2013 (Figure 12).

Figure 12
Laura Rungguwarnga
giving a lesson on
making medicinal
green ant tea during
a LoC camp.



A deliverable specified by the MSEI research grant was a participatory workshop in 2013 to which people from across UoM with interests in Indigenous education were invited. Aims of this workshop were to promote the potential for greater knowledge exchange across the UoM, and to raise Aboriginal students' aspirations for engagement in further education. In alignment with the Bradley Review (2008), Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff but also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy.

This workshop was a whole-community approach to representing the LoC program within which the students mounted an exhibition of their artwork and LoC program materials. This mode of delivery recognized the need for creating a space for those Community members involved in the program to inform both the partnership and

the wider UoM community. It represented a commitment to centering marginalized voices (Torre & Fine 2006: 458) and offering a new medium for student expression: those whose voices are often not heard (Masters 2010; Zbar, Kimber, & Marshall 2010, Apple 2013).

The artwork exhibition (Figure 13) formed part of their school assessment and provided each student with the opportunity to take the role of expert/teacher to the workshop participants. The impact of this participatory workshop on students' confidence and sense of achievement was communicated by a College staff member after this Melbourne visit.

The staff and students in the Graduate School created a conducive environment for our students to talk and, most importantly, build confidence. One of my highlights was seeing the students mingle with the crowd at the presentation, describing their work and showing what great things they have created and learnt at school.

Figure 13
Examples of the artwork and media techniques displayed as part of the exhibition, including bark painting, linocut prints and fabric printing.



COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIP FORMATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The SPLT team had delayed any formal research, mindful that essential to a successful and ethical research outcome was the establishment of trust through building robust relationships with Community members (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003). After two years of regular visits, the team believed it now timely to investigate the partnership formation and capacity building between UoM and the Maningrida Community with funding provided by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute. In choosing the emphasis of what was to be studied, a small case was framed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011; Yin 2009), focusing on the centrality of human interaction and the social situatedness of sharing place and learning together.

Throughout the conduct and analysis of semi-structured interviews with a diversity of partnership stakeholders, the SPLT team sought to identify the processes of capacity building amongst community members. The aim was to assist with identifying opportunities to merge Indigenous and Western knowledge and practices, and gain perspectives on partnership formation. The research project was approved by the UoM's Human Research and Ethics Committee and the NT Department of Education and Children's Services, and consent was obtained from the College's principal, and the 14 participants.

EDUCATIONAL SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

Fourteen College and Community members were invited to participate in the study and accepted the invitation, having read and signed the plain language statement. The participants included: TOs, members of the College leadership team, the Language and Cultural Coordinator, classroom teachers involved in the LoC program, an Indigenous teacher assistant, a teacher involved in the Family as First Teachers program, and a UoM Master of Teaching graduate who was employed by the school.

Community members participated in individual semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour's duration, which were conducted on site. With the intent of producing knowledge about partnership building from the interview process, open-ended questions were asked to facilitate participants giving voice to their own experiences of the SPLT partnership (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The interviews were all audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and made available to each participant for member checking during the follow up visit. The qualitative analysis of data involved coding to identify emergent themes (Gibbs 2007; Miles & Huberman 1994; Richards 2005) in relation to partnership building. Snapshots from these emergent themes are now presented.

TREPIDATION, UNCERTAINTY AND MISGIVINGS PRIOR TO GAINING COMMUNITY TRUST

The term partnership is suggestive that trust exists between the organizations involved (Cardini, 2006). The interview data affirmed the importance of fostering trust and credibility, but revealed uncertainty and some misgivings around the team members' intentions at the project's outset. When asked 'How did you initially feel about UoM's involvement with the College community?' one of the leadership team responded, 'there was definitely some trepidation.' Another stated, somewhat cynically, that 'Maningrida is so heavily hit by government visitors and researchers, any people that think they want an Aboriginal experience. They choose Maningrida because it is on a quick flight from Darwin.' Participants believed that researchers were generally self-serving with little commitment to the school, and this was expressed poignantly by a school leader:

[W]e get over loaded big time with researchers, medical people, other people from other places who just think just they can just come here and fix the problems experienced and go away and write some fantastic paper about the wonders of the world in Maningrida. But at the end of the day leaving us to do the actual groundwork of what it is really about.

The teachers shared the leadership team's misgivings, one teacher describing her response to the SPLT team's visit as 'dubious' and making a clear distinction between its positioning to the project and that of the teachers: 'Like you came in with your agendas, and we came in knowing the context and the kids' (Teacher). The teacher participants also expressed resentment that the SPLT team was afforded privileged treatment, such as visits out country.

Balandas [a term used colloquially to describe non-Aboriginal people throughout the Maningrida region] come in and they get to go on all these great things ... And you think I have been here for three years and I've never been to Kolorbidahdah (campsite). But people come up for two weeks and they go to Kolorbidahdah. So you feel like you are doing the hard yards but you are not getting the rich experience the visitors are getting, you know.

The participants acknowledged that their trepidation diminished with time as commitment of the SPLT team to support the LoC program, and the College's Operational Plan was evidenced through the website and book production initiatives. One teacher commented, 'We have seen the work that happens when you do come here and also the results from the work that you have helped facilitate.' After several return visits, it was accepted that the team's presence was 'not a one off'. A school leader articulated that he now perceived the SPLT team's involvement with the College as 'a continual thing – growing the school and growing the Community.' Overall, interviewees viewed the team as 'sympathetic to the needs of the students' and considered members were 'more giving than taking'.

The importance of relationship building as a factor which earned the Community's respect and trust was consistently raised. As one participant elaborated:

You weren't trying to push through your objectives. You wanted to work with the kids. And likewise those students responded in quite a relatively short time because Indigenous students see right through into what's inside a person and whether they are genuine or not.'

Similarly, the teacher stated, 'The children already know who you are. They 'sus' things out; they know who's coming and who's going out before we do.' Giving time to relationship building was deemed critical, and as she noted: 'We took it slowly, and you listened to what we said.' Importantly, as one teacher expressed, the return of Indigenous Assistant Teachers and TOs 'who left the school when bilingual education got canned ... have only just now come back to the school.' He added: 'Mason, coming back had lot to do with that ... But you can take that as a pretty good indicator that the Indigenous people who are involved with you guys, and what you are doing with the school, are happy.'

CRITICAL EVENTS AND ENABLING FACTORS THAT CONSOLIDATED THE PARTNERSHIP

The Pocket books were unanimously identified as 'a real winner' — several interviewees noting their celebration by the wider Community (Godinho et al. in 2014) — in addition to many individual critical events being cited as assisting with partnership formation. However, relationship building between the partners emerged as a key sub theme. One teacher named the Mangrove Country trip visit as a critical event saying, 'I saw the faces of yourselves and the students when you got back and, yeah, that would have been one of the key excursions to forge relationships with the students.' However, a leadership member, identified curriculum resources provided by UoM to support the documenting and scoping of the LoC program as the critical event:

The biggest one for me, although I like the books, is the ACARA units of work you have been writing. Because even though we are not using them at this moment they will become part of the long term mapping of the curriculum that middle school going through to upper school can deliver.

A senior school teacher identified a camp experience at Kolorbidahdah:

[You engaged] with the students and with what I was doing with the rock art and around the plants and the work with Anna. You supported what I was thinking and feeling. ...I came back from that camp very excited and charged with lots of energy, new ideas and new possibilities.

By contrast, several interviewees highlighted parental recognition and valuing of the project as critical to strengthening the partnership. A student, whose artwork was displayed in a history of venom exhibition at UoM Melbourne and published in the catalogue (Healy & Winkel 2013), gave her mother 'a sense of pride that was huge.' The school leader added, 'Those little things that Balanda people would see as little — minor — are monumental, huge and we can never undervalue them because the discussion and stories that stem from your contribution you can't put a value on.' He also referred to a father who speaks highly of the SPLT team, 'because of the time you have put into his son', elaborating, 'So, the fact that you are touching the students in a really positive way has their families talking [positively].'

Other interviewees referred to factors, rather than critical events, which they attributed to the capacity building around the partnership, including the teaching experience of some SPLT team members. A teacher interviewee stated, 'I respect what you have to say, rather than it just coming from the world of thinking.' And another noted that, 'It's the fact that it is you guys — the same people each time — that is a really good idea and if someone else was going to start coming up, I'd advise them to come with you guys first.'

'Having the right personnel and keeping the right personnel', in so much as they have 'something to offer something from a school perspective' was also raised as a critical factor. Moreover, it was the 'Continuity with people' that interviewees unanimously attested was critical to capacity and partnership building. As one teacher stressed, 'if the UoM want to be part of the school, they have to have a continued presence'. He remarked on the turnover of staff and principals claiming, 'I have signed 83 going away cards in five years and had three changes of principals. The [SPLT] team must ensure that new teachers know who they are and who they are working with.'

Another enabling factor interviewees identified was the connections that the UoM team formed with the Djelk rangers: 'We don't have the time to sit down with the rangers and make complimentary banks of what the teachers and rangers could be connecting with. We don't even have the contact with the rangers to do that.' The SPLT team was seen as filling a significant professional gap by collating and 'keep[ing] centralised documents, resources and information' that supported their classroom programs. This included providing access to integrated units of work that drew on the rangers' expertise.

The leadership who had been instrumental in securing funding for the Melbourne visit by students and staff from Maningrida in 2012 identified this as a critical event.

The trip that happened last year allowed the students to take their knowledge and understanding and show other perspectives of that knowledge and understanding in a different environment.

We all need to get out, and we all need to see what the world is around us. And having those opportunities in a safe environment, being facilitated by people who we trust, can help grow our learning and grow our understanding of the world.

To see a world that has got all the things in it that you talk about with Science and Maths and people actually engaged in research — people's whose whole lives are about venom, animals and museums. They haven't had seen that before. So, when they come back and they showed it [video] at the assembly, kids were going 'What's that?' It's a big science lab and the kids had something in their hands, you know it was fantastic These kids were watching the kids down in Melbourne do things.

On the strength of such feedback, the aforementioned second visit was planned and executed in 2013, and it is intended this will become an annual two way learning experience for both the Maningrida and the UoM communities.

CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP

The interview data highlight that 'sustained time is what builds currency'. Whilst the longevity of the project was acclaimed, the shortness of visits were said to impact relationship building as an Indigenous assistant teacher stated:

You build solid relationships with those kids but you are here for a relatively very short period of time. And then you have gone and come back eleven weeks later and then you are gone and you are back. And everything about Indigenous education is about time in the community and building relationships.

Commitment, as Michael Apple suggests, must be 'countered by humility and an equal commitment to listen carefully to criticism' (2013: 21), and this reality is a barrier that requires some thoughtful consideration.

Communication between the SPLT team and the College was seen as somewhat problematic with information often not being relayed from the leadership team to the teachers. In addition several staff stated they did not have clarity about the aims and purpose of the project and their roles with it. As one teacher attested, 'It took me a while to get my head around what your goals were and how they fitted with what our goals were', albeit acknowledging that 'this is a part of the school's [lack of] communication.' There was also a feeling of being insiders and outsiders, those who were not targeted by the school leaders to work with the SPLT team having little or no awareness of what the SPLT project entailed. The MTeach graduate teacher suggested a 'Q & A type thing like if you want to come and learn about what they [SPLT team] are doing.' Likewise a teacher suggested providing some documentation, a one pager, to list the team members' roles and to identify how the teachers fitted within the scope of the project.

Criticisms were also levelled at the visit to Melbourne supported by the SPLT team: 'something that could be improved on if the presenters were really aware of who their audience was and the nature of communicating with them. I feel there were quite a few missed opportunities when they were talking over the kids' heads.' Again reference was made to inadequate communication prior to the visit, and overlooking the need 'to involve the teacher in that teaching process as well', so that learning opportunities were maximised. The MSEI grant that funded this research afforded an opportunity to address some of these concerns when planning the 2013 Maningrida College visit to Melbourne, but importantly also to ensure that this visit embraced two way learning, a knowledge exchange.

CONCLUSION

The SPLT team's engagement with text production honoured a commitment to assist with the College's Operational Plan to focus on literacy outcomes and support the implementation of the LoC program. The team's involvement has contributed to moving the efforts of a single committed teacher working with Traditional Owners, Elders and Djelk rangers to a whole school and community involvement in the LoC program and place-based pedagogy (Gruenewald 2003; Comber & Kamler

2004). The LoC program and its outcomes resonate with the metaphor of 'red dirt thinking' (Guenther, Osborne & Bat 2013), which challenges dominant public discourse, government measures of disadvantage, and popular media emphasis on poor outcomes and failures in remote communities like Maningrida.

The findings from the small MSEI research study have revealed that relationship building coupled with a sustained presence in the community were pivotal to the partnership formation between the SPLT team and the Maningrida Community. They have also highlighted that partnerships need to be multidimensional and responsive to community needs. The critical events, which the interview data identified as evolving the partnership formation included: participation in LoC camps; support of teachers' classroom practice; adoption of Aboriginal pedagogies and two way learning; and engaging with Community members to produce Indigenous Knowledge resources. Importantly the interview data imply that establishing trust and credibility with Community must precede a research agenda. This finding indicates that academics may initially need to step back from the pressures for research outcomes imposed by their institutions, foster the building of trust and credibility, and adopt what Bell calls the cultural littoral where they, as visiting research partners, learn to walk the foreshore looking both ways (2011: 218).

Essentially, the partnership was contingent upon the Maningrida Community's preparedness to engage with an external, geographically distant institution and be open to the ideas and learning experiences that the team offered. Whilst there have been episodes of misunderstanding and fragility, there is overall goodwill, and the potential of this partnership was recognised in a joint NAB Schools Impact Award in 2013. Importantly, the partnership has affirmed the importance of embracing a pedagogy of responsibility (Martusewicz & Edmundson 2005) that builds two way capacities and brings forward the voices of Aboriginal people in this community to present their position (Guenther, Osborne & Bat 2013). The partnership between Maningrida Community and the UoM has shown that learning can be 'both ways' – a synthesis of Western and traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices.

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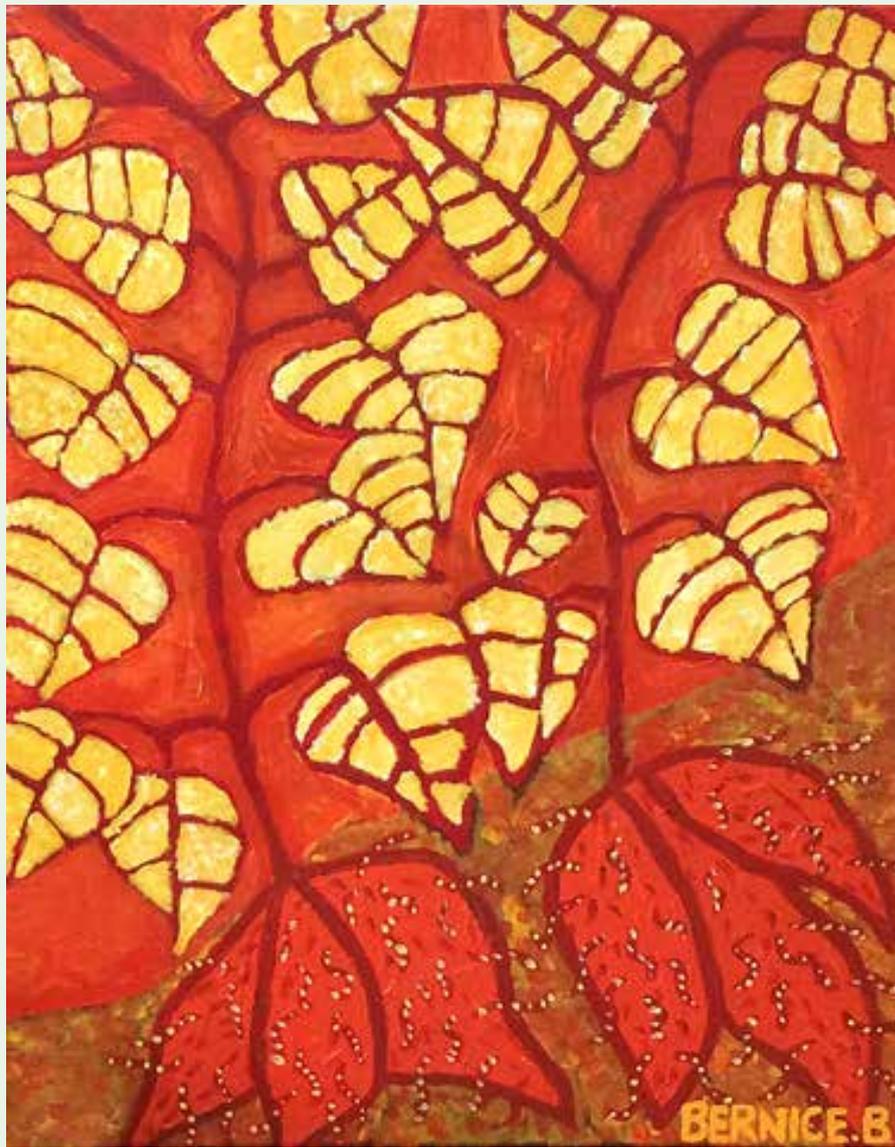
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ART PIECE

Wild Yams

Bernice Baker

Courtesy of the artist



Artist: Bernice Baker, 18 years old from Maningrida, West Arnhem Land

My skin name is Bangardijan and I am Martay Burrara. My father's country is Ndjudda Point on the Arafura Sea. My mother's country is Murrunga Island, near Millingimbi.

My painting is about the yams that grow in my country, We dig up the yams from the soil with a stick and then we cook them and eat them. I have learnt about this plant from my family. Its uses have been passed down from my mother and her grandmother.

This painting of the yam plant takes up most of my canvas. I have used warm colours such as reds, yellows and browns. I have used these bright and strong colours because they remind me of the yam plant and also they are some of the traditional colours of Arnhem Land.

I like painting on canvas, printing on fabric and drawing pictures of bush food. I got a lot of my ideas for my artworks from Leila's book about bush food and medicine. When I leave school I would like to work in the Women's Centre printing fabric.