

Differing approaches to education policy by Aboriginal communities: Case study of Yirrkala and Yipirinya

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade a range of different approaches to Aboriginal education have emerged in the Northern Territory. Yirrkala School (Amhemland) and Yipirinya School (on Aranda land) illustrate two of these approaches. During the 1980s each moved towards Aboriginal-controlled schooling, but in very different ways. Broadly speaking Yirrkala worked within the government education system by utilising government educational initiatives to their advantage. Yipirinya, on the other hand, developed as an independent school outside the government system. While it might appear that these two different approaches were an outcome of government policy initiatives, a detailed exploration of Yirrkala and Yipirinya indicates that this was not quite the case. Rather, these case studies suggest that the choices each community made regarding education in the 1980s were influenced by their respective histories of contact with non-Aboriginal people, and that each community faced constraints when they moved to control their own education.

Two Way Education: Enduring Spirit in a Timeless Land

There is a timelessness to this land;
The timeless quality of the essential elements of life;
Of harmony and unity,
The cultural identity and spirit of man.

The Spirit of the Dreamtime,
Of Yirrkala and Yipirinya;
That enduring spirit of man
entwined inescapably with this timeless land.

The Spirit endured destruction of the body
through massacre and disease;
desecration and colonisation of the country;
Two centuries of cultural fragmentation;
White man's education: colonisation of the mind.

It was (and is) a tale of sophisticated resistance
and dynamic cultural survival;
A tale of desired continuity of identity
and yearned for self-determination,
enabling empowerment of the Yolngu

through two-way education and decolonisation of the mind.

A tale of hope for the future of Australia;
Entwined inescapably with the past.

Introduction

Contemporary education policy in the Northern Territory needs to be contextualised within historically recent Aboriginal demands for self-determination. Through these demands the Northern Territory government has officially moved away from assimilationist models of education towards a model which supports the notion of Aboriginal self-determination. This has been expressed in government educational policy since 1986 as 'the Aboriginalisation of schooling'. This shift has been in response to increasing pressure by Aboriginal communities, who have made it patently clear that the form of schooling they want from the government is 'two-ways' or 'both ways' education. Essentially this means education which builds on Aboriginal knowledge and is culturally-sensitive, while at the same time offering specific non-Aboriginal knowledge and skills that have been selected by the Aboriginal people themselves as useful. The bottom line is that both ways should be determined and controlled by Aboriginal people themselves so that education serves the political, social and economic purposes of Aboriginal communities (see Lanhupuy, 1987; McTaggart, 1988).

Over the past decade a range of different approaches to Aboriginal education have emerged in the Northern Territory. Yirrkala School (Amhemland) and Yipirinya School (on Aranda land) illustrate two of these approaches. During the 1980s each moved towards Aboriginal-controlled schooling, but in very different ways. Broadly speaking Yirrkala worked within the government education system by utilising government educational initiatives to their advantage. Yipirinya, on the other hand, developed as an independent school outside the government system.

While it might appear that these two different approaches were an outcome of government policy initiatives, a detailed exploration of Yirrkala and Yipirinya indicates that this was not quite the case. Rather, these case studies suggest that the choices each community made regarding education in the 1980s were influenced by their respective histories of contact with non-Aboriginal people, and that each community faced constraints when they moved to control their own education.

Yirrkala School

Background

Yirrkala is situated near Nhulunbuy on the Amhemland east coast. Since traditional times the fundamental social organisation of the yolngu has been 'a society that divides everything into two ... the Yirritja and the Dhuwa' (Yunupingu, 1990: 101).¹ Within this mode of organisation the unity of the two parts has been important for the well being of the whole.

The yolngu experienced varying degrees of contact with outsiders long before the British invasion of 1788. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries various seafarers visited. These included Macassan trepang traders, Japanese pearling and fishing luggers, and the occasional Dutch, Portuguese and British ship. The most significant visitors were the Macassans. Although a sizeable number visited, a generally peaceable extensive trade developed between the two groups (continuing until Australian customs prohibited it in 1907). Overall the indigenous social mechanisms were flexible enough and contact gradual enough to result not in 'culture shock' but in absorption of selected elements without changing the fundamental yolngu cultural basis.

Initially then the yolngu fared slightly better than many Aboriginal groups due to their comparative isolation. Between 1824 and 1849 the *balanda* (British)² tried three times to establish

settlements on the north coast. All failed and had a minimal effect on the yolngu. The explorer Leichardt crossed the area from the south but did not venture to the east coast (Thompson, 1949).

It was during the 1880s that a northern land boom brought pastoralists, disease and confrontation to Arnhemland. A prospector was killed at Blue Mud Bay in 1875, while Florida Station on the Goyder River was started but abandoned in 1893 due to 'hostile blacks' and 'sour unsuitable country'. An English company acquired this land in 1903 instigating a systematic extermination campaign of feral animals and Aborigines. The land remained poor; the yolngu continued to spear cattle; the company went bankrupt in 1909 and cattlemen never returned (Powell, 1982: 129).

Missions came to Arnhemland in the early 1900s. Generally missions provided a barrier to further annihilation but were paternalistic. Through this missionaries acquired varying degrees of power over Aboriginal lives. There is plenty of evidence of yolngu resistance to this paternalistic control, particularly in regard to the attempted 'colonisation of the mind' which was mounted by the dormitory system of education separating children from traditional group influence and forbidding use of the local vernacular (Swain & Rose, 1988).

It was not until the 1930s that the Methodist Overseas Mission's (MOM) Reverend Chaseling established Yirrkala mission as a protective measure for a group of east coast yolngu who, by 1933, had killed twenty-one intruders. Matters came to a head with the killing of Japanese fishermen at Caledon Bay (probably provoked by abuse of hospitality) and the death of an investigating policeman. Public opposition to a police punitive expedition resulted in the Anglican Christian Missionary Society sending a peace expedition to bring the offenders to Darwin. Despite government assurances of freedom they were charged with murder, with the constable's killer being condemned to death and the other two receiving twenty years hard labour. The Caledon Bay clan and others joined the mission and a year later the offenders were repatriated after public protest that it was unjust to hold people responsible for breaches of a code utterly foreign to their own.

In 1927 MOM had denounced paternalism calling for communication in the vernacular, the end of the dormitory system, and a policy of self help. Missionaries received some training in anthropology and thus the MOM missions tended to be less repressive than many others. Consequently, Chaseling's objective was to present Christianity as a fulfilment of yolngu culture rather than a judgement of it:

It is unjust for any alien to come ... for the purpose of upsetting their mode of life and converting them to living and thinking as he. ... An effective approach can only be made on the basis of his religion, ... appreciation of his habits, outlook and philosophy of life (Chaseling, 1957: 19, 170).

He disagreed with the more prevalent attitude that Aborigines were 'savages' or 'childlike creatures not endowed with the same sensitivity as whites' (McKenzie, 1976: 3). Considering them people with feelings like everyone else and admitting 'he had a lot to learn from them before presuming to teach' (Chaseling, 1957: 46). Agriculture was introduced, deemed essential for a less nomadic life and Mrs Chaseling started an outdoor school and then a bough-shed school in 1939, at the beginning of World War II.

During World War II Arnhemland became the frontier defending Australia, and thus witnessed considerable military activity. Many people visited Yirrkala in these years, giving the yolngu further glimpses of the white material world. In 1942 an Aboriginal unit was established; the men were said to have excellent 'guerilla warfare' skills and the Japanese had long been their enemies. The men in this unit however, were not formally enlisted and received only rations and goods as payment. On numerous occasions yolngu tracked down RAAF men forced down in the rugged country of the yolngu homelands.

Post-war political activity: Land rights movement

Yolngu relationship with their land is eloquently expressed by Gatjil Djerrkura from a Yirrkala homeland:

The land is the mother, we are her children. Land being the mother which cares and provides food for all, it looks after her children. The land belongs to us and is part of us. The land is like the skeleton of my being. I could not live without it (cited in an unpublished manuscript, 1979).

In 1963 the yolngu protested a lack of consultation between the Commonwealth, Nabalco and themselves regarding the proposed mining of bauxite at Gove, land they had considered theirs since time immemorial, by presenting to Canberra a Bark Petition declaring the land vital to their survival in both sacred and livelihood aspects. In 1969 Yolngu concerns became reality when Nhulunbuy, with a population of 4000, was built along with the mine. Seeing the land destroyed the yolngu grieved as if for a death. Yirrkala School's contribution to *The Aboriginal Children's History of Australia* sums up the situation:

It was at Gove ... that the white man came and settled down to work. My people thought it was very bad because they came and pulled down our sacred trees ... The Riratjingu and the Gomartj own this country ... before the mining there were animals everywhere and it was a pretty place. Now its mined ... it's dusty everywhere ... a lot of our people have jobs with the mining Some of our people are drinking grog Sometimes they fight (1979: 93).

With the support of the church, the Yirrkala yolngu took legal action against the mining company and the Commonwealth Government first in 1969 and then again in 1971. Central to this battle were issues of legality of Aboriginal prior land ownership and the British ownership claim. They lost the case but the dispute marked the beginnings of change. Extensive media coverage of the battle increased public sympathy - which was already high after the 1967 referendum giving Aboriginal people citizenship - strengthening the case for Yirrkala Land Rights. Aboriginal people converged on Canberra and a tent embassy was erected at Parliament. In 1976 the Federal Aboriginal Land Rights Act became legislation for the Northern Territory.

Towards self-determination: The homeland movement

Before the 1976 legislation was enacted, several hundred Yirrkala residents left the township to establish nine outstations as part of the newly growing Homeland movement that was emerging in Arnhemland. They had several motives: giving credence to their proposed land rights claim; protecting the land; wishing to separate themselves from the social unrest that had developed at Yirrkala; reaffirmation of traditional elder authority and traditional culture; and self-determination in a context free from white domination.

The anthropologist Berndt (1962: 87) describes a desire amongst the yolngu of Elcho Island to 'stand on their own feet' even before that date. In his opinion, they were not prepared to accept a position of inferiority and attempted to capitalise on their situation by making use of the very elements mitigating against the continuance of their still somewhat dominant traditionalism. Hence they employed a strategy of political goodwill towards government. Control would be gained through subtle manipulation, resourcefulness and perspicacity. Involved were matters of status and role, beliefs, ideology and values. Their aim was to take advantage of selected things European yet maintain an essentially Aboriginal focus on life. The resulting balance would bring together the two elements forming a *coherent whole which has meaning for them and is not just imposed from the outside*.

Berndt's comments on Elcho Island yolngu provide a framework for understanding the broader shift to community control which occurred at Yirrkala in the 1960s. During this decade the MOM Board encouraged self-determination through vesting more authority in local yolngu councils. In 1974 a Uniting Church Commission entitled *Free to Decide* advocated the empowerment of

Aboriginal people so that they could control the rate and pace of change working with white people. Self-determination became government policy in 1973. Yolngu replied that they wished to move out of their dependent situation - but not until they were "standing properly on their own feet" (Uniting Church, 1974: 2). In this context they requested missionaries to stay at Yirrkala and help develop a number of Yolngu-controlled formal bodies. These included a Town Council which administered municipal services and which became the employer of mission staff, a Village Council of elders for traditional matters, and the elected Dhanbuy Community Association, which managed financial matters. The largest Yolngu presence over which they did not have control at this point was the school.

Towards control of the Yirrkala School

Yirrkala Mission School in the 1950s was a three teacher school providing education in accordance with the government policy of assimilation. (Since 1950 Northern Territory Aboriginal education came under Commonwealth administration.) Schooling was therefore paternalistic but caring. The curriculum centred on English, Arithmetic and Social Studies. Showers, clean clothes and a meal were provided at school (personal recollection of Beth Graham, mission teacher, cited in Weame, 1986a: 31). In accordance with mission policy, Yolngu carried out many community duties associated with the Mission School.

Yirrkala Government School began in 1968: a time of 'culture shock' associated with the onslaught of mining when the community became more mobile, more familiar with mainstream culture, and more literate in English (Gilbert, cited in Coombs, 1977: 17). Graham notes that "as white people 'took over' Aboriginal people stopped doing and, therefore learning" (cited in Weame, 1986a: 32). By 1974, however, Yirrkala Yolngu were expressing a desire to shape and control their own education as the system was instigating a conflict of values and not living up to the promised provision of skills enabling them to run the community. Consequently they requested *a programme based on Aboriginal ideas but containing (only) what was good from the European side*. In particular they requested instruction in both the vernacular and English, and teacher training with proper qualifications (Uniting Church, 1974: 18; Wearne, 1986b). To implement their request the community drew on broader educational innovation that was occurring at the tertiary level, and transformed it to Yirrkala's advantage. In particular they sought to employ Aboriginal Teacher Aides and to develop a Bilingual Education programme.

Aboriginal teacher aides had first been employed in the Northern Territory in 1953. A one-year (assimilationist) course began a training aid credentialing process in 1968. While the aim of the course was assimilationist there was nevertheless an awakening acknowledgement of Aboriginal aides as teachers (Morgan, 1988: 5-6). Some short in-service training occurred in the sixties. Bilingual education was introduced in the 1970s across the Northern Territory - and to Yirrkala in 1974 - to establish literacy in the vernacular before doing so in English. However, by extension, it acknowledged the worth of Aboriginal language and culture, and, as Aboriginal staff were the key factor in the bilingual programmes, they obtained some 'power' in the classroom and their professional development was fostered (Russo, 1988).

Due to demand from many northern remote Aboriginal communities - including Yirrkala - by 1983, this course had developed into a three-year accredited Associate Diploma course at Batchelor College. However, this qualification was only recognised for Aboriginal schools. In response to community requests a new community-based course was negotiated and piloted successfully at Yirrkala. This three stage Remote Area Teacher Education course (RATE) implied a central decision making role in the educational process for the community and Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal teachers requested a fourth year upgrade to the qualifications. In 1986 the Deakin University community-centred Batchelor of Arts in Education commenced with one of the three full-time students being Bakamana Yunupingu from Yirrkala, supported by community elders.

While the Yirrkala community was very active in supporting the local and statewide changes to education, these did not address all of the issues involved in establishing 'two-ways' education.

During 1970s balanda staff were appointed with little or no experience and/or knowledge of Aboriginal culture. There was a high turnover and increased tension and conflict amongst staff. In the early 1980s English was still the school language of 'power' forcing yolngu staff to look at school from a balanda point of view; giving them little confidence at staff meetings and causing them problems with curriculum language. Overall, pedagogy followed the balanda way (Yunupingu & Christie, 1987: 8-11).

A yolngu school council and Aboriginalisation policy

Amidst strong yolngu support for more meaningful involvement in education, a School Council was developed to review school aims and objectives. Each clan elected a representative and the school Principal who had expressed commitment to self-determination, was an ex-officio member:

the most effective direction education will take in the school will be provided by the Aborigines themselves and the sooner yolngu teachers gain teaching influence and affect school policy and the direction of education the better (Divola & Wells 1985: 4).

However, in practice, *authority/governance structures were left untouched* and the Principal continuing to assert his authority (Weame, 1986a: 57). In 1984, attempting to create a situation of real community input, the School Council formulated an Aboriginalisation policy aimed at self-determination with a yolngu Principal.

An Action Group was formed composed of all yolngu school workers, each having equal status in a traditional 'power sharing' fashion. Meetings were held in yolngu language with balanda rarely invited. Yolngu spoke forcibly about matters that had previously been designated as the exclusive concern of the Education Department and the Principal. In particular they expressed their desire to interview future balanda staff in order to determine the prospective teacher's commitment to working with the group, listening to the group and understanding the group.

The presence and concerns of this Action Group necessarily threatened the status quo and the Principal tried to maintain his power within the earlier authority structure. This promoted a yolngu-requested meeting between the community, the Northern Territory Minister of Education and the Secretary of the Education Department to negotiate a strategy for change. The outcome of this meeting was that a senior staff member supporting the yolngu would become Principal. It was further agreed that Bakamanu Yunupingu, who now held three-year trained status in the Northern Territory Teaching Service through his Deakin qualification, would become Principal-in-training in 1987 and gain Principalship within two years. Stress would be placed on training yolngu teachers and the School Council would decide staffing with balanda mainly being in facilitatory/advisory roles.

By 1990 long-term decisions affecting Yirrkala Community School were controlled by a yolngu School Council. A yolngu Principal, in conjunction with a yolngu Action Group made up of all yolngu school workers, made day to day decisions (Weame, 1986a). The curriculum seeks to 'straddle the cultural interface' (Watson, 1988: 2) by using community participation to develop a curriculum located in the yolngu world but enabling children to cross to the balanda world to gain skills empowering them to self-determination. Thus aspects of the dominant balanda culture can be used for yolngu goals, possible because in yolngu philosophy the two are not incompatible (Yunupingu, 1988). At present Yirrkala School is actively involved as a co-initiator of the 'Sister School' project promoting better understanding of Aboriginal people and culture. This is a programme whereby Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal schools are linked through television 'linkups' and some actual meetings. Yirrkala have initiated the theme video-song 'Come to Our School'.

Yipirinya school

Background

Yipirinya School is situated in Alice Springs, on Aranda land. Traditionally the totem for the Mpwamte (the Arrente term for Alice Springs) Aranda people is the caterpillar or Yipirinya. Local totem sacred sites, which are linked by dreaming tracks - such as Emily and Jessie Gaps and several gum trees in Alice Springs - remain to this day (Spencer & Gillen, 1968).

The contact between Aborigines and Europeans in the area came well after the 1788 invasion. The small exploring party of John McDougall Stuart reached the MacDonnell Ranges in 1860. He planted the British flag on Mount Sturt hoping that "it would be a sign to the natives that the union of liberty, civilization and Christianity was to break on them" (cited in Donovan, 1988: 34). This was hardly what happened. Exploration records indicate that Aborigines in the area tolerated Europeans so long as their behaviour did not indicate territorial conquest. In 1870 telegraph line construction from Port Augusta to Port Darwin, as a means of communication with Britain, focused attention on the area. Orders were given to Europeans for friendly relations with the indigenous inhabitants. At this point contact was usually brief, or Aborigines avoided it altogether. Where there was contact gifts of food and articles were made and few skirmishes resulted. The telegraph station was occupied in 1872, - near a waterhole named Alice Springs.

Pastoral settlement from South Australia soon followed, eager to exploit good land. The first leases were made in 1872 and the first homestead was built the following year. However the process was slow and frustrating due to drought and isolation in what seemed to many settlers a featureless land. European attitudes of the time regarding Aborigines were influenced by racial social Darwinist eugenistic beliefs concerning their physical, mental and temperamental inferiority and the certainty of their ultimate demise (Austin, 1989). The explorer Giles clearly expressed the European attitude of the time that this was divine will:

The Great Designer of the Universe in the long past periods of creation, permitted a fiat to be recorded ... that the beings whom it was His pleasure in the first instance to place amongst these lovely scenes, must eventually be swept from the face of the earth by others more intellectual, more dearly beloved and gifted than they. Progressive improvement is undoubtedly the order of creation (Giles, 1889: L1).

Pastoralists soon threatened Aboriginal lifestyle. Local ecology showed the impact of introduced animals; access to waterholes, which were important also as ceremonial meeting places, was lost, and ceremonial gatherings were affected by lack of food due to increased competition. Sacred sites were desecrated. Although some European behaviour stemmed from ignorance of Aboriginal custom, the deliberate sexual abuse of Aboriginal women was a major source of conflict.

Aborigines reacted creatively by using traditional bush skills to good effect as 'guerilla warfare' tactics. Payback killing, linked to the Aboriginal ethic of reciprocity in restoring the status quo after death or injury, was also used on Europeans. European response was often severe punitive expeditions. Many of these expeditions were led by police who were 'protectors' but, isolated from administrators, chose to protect Europeans rather than Aboriginal people. Wearne (1986b) describes this period as "open season on Aborigines". Many were shot or arrested in chains. Mutual fear and suspicion grew, compounded by successive conflicts.

By 1886 the frontier balance swung in favour of the Europeans with improved firearms and their increased confidence in the bush. Aboriginal life became increasingly difficult as dwindling food supplies caused malnutrition and death. Somewhat reluctantly they were pushed to a perceived safer life on the fringe of white society: an action also fraught with risk due to the secondary effects of colonisation, disease and social and cultural fragmentation (Reynolds, 1981).

In the 1880s the township of Sturt began. In 1911 Northern Territory administration transferred from South Australia to the new Commonwealth Government. Development was slow, so slow that in 1921 the white town population was still only twenty-seven. Some 300 Aborigines were camped

outside the town. In 1926 the Presbyterian Reverend John Flynn (of Flying Doctor fame) established a town medical hostel but refused to treat Aborigines. There was no hospital to which they could be admitted as well as inadequate government health funding for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal prisoners were seen about town, chained together. Any white person associating with an Aborigine was liable to arrest. In 1929 the railway arrived, isolation lessened and the white population surged to some 200. In 1933 Alice Springs assumed a new role as government capital of central Australia, and more public servants arrived (Hartwig, 1965). The Catholic 'Little Flower' mission was established in 1935 with the presbytery being used to treat Aboriginal medical needs as well as functioning as a school. Some parishioners objected to using the same seats as Aboriginal children for mass, apparently due to concern over disease resulting from poor Aboriginal hygiene. This sort of public objection forced the mission out of town to Charles Creek in 1937 (Pye, 1988: 2-14, 35).

During this period many Aborigines learnt stockmen skills, allowing them continued contact with land and rations. They became a vital part of the industry but for many conditions were poor and black/white relations strained. In the Coniston massacre outside of Alice Springs some 100 Aborigines were killed in reprisal for the death of pastoralist Brooks who allegedly had taken liberties with Aboriginal women. A government enquiry found the reprisal was justified. Aboriginal accounts, such as the following poem, indicate otherwise:

And they bin turnem round and shootem all.
All people, all, like bullock.
Old people bin here, this country.
All bullock, like bullock. Big mob we got it. Oh woman ... kid ... man.
(Jimmy Jungarrayi, Warlpiri, Yuendumu, cited in Read & Read, 1991: 54)

Illicit sexual relations by European men with Aboriginal women, both forced and unforced, resulted in a concomitant growth of a population of mixed descent. Popular belief was that they deserved a chance to assimilate due to their European ancestry. Government policy was to segregate 'half-castes' from 'full bloods' in order to remove Aboriginal influence.³ Children were placed in institutions to acquire 'white' values through social, moral and religious training (Austin, 1989).

Fortunately implementation of the policy was somewhat spasmodic but many light skinned children were rounded up from the camps and sent south or taken to the Bungalow, an institution built in Alice Springs in 1914 to cater for thirty children. Conditions were extremely unsatisfactory and soon overcrowded. By 1939 it housed 120 children and 14 adults. The children attended a segregated school: white classes lasted four hours in the morning, while in the afternoon Aboriginal children received one and a half hours education after which they scrubbed the desks. They were taught to despise the life of 'wild blacks'. Little vocational training was provided although girls were mainly sent to domestic service and boys to pastoral properties. Educational conditions did improve slightly when a qualified teacher was appointed in 1935. By 1938 and the onset of World War II full-time schooling was provided for Aboriginal children by three teachers. Eighteen months were taken to complete a year's work as it was assumed they were less bright than white children, despite good results.

Alice Springs played a crucial role in the war. The population swelled by several thousand military personnel and associated civilians in tented camps. Administration was also moved there from Darwin. Aboriginal people of mixed descent were eventually housed in Rainbow Town, just outside the boundaries of Alice Springs. They had restricted access to town during daylight and on Saturdays to go to the pictures (Perkins, 1975).

An Alice Springs Aboriginal Army Platoon of some 150 men was formed to provide labour for the military camps and to release soldiers for active duty. The platoon was housed out of town at the Telegraph Station with after-hours contact officially banned.

Towards self determination: Town camps, a joint land claim, and Tangatjira Council

Many Aborigines in the area had no inclination to return to bush settlements after finding work in the war years. They preferred to remain in the town vicinity with its access to material goods. However, most war years work soon disappeared whilst the social problems (such as alcohol and gambling) remained. Government response was to relocate them to reserves or missions until they were 'socially and culturally adjusted' (ie assimilated). Many people of mixed descent still lived in Rainbow Town without power and with inadequate water. Two church hostels for children of mixed descent continued in the town and during the 1950s seventeen homes were built in the European area for those demonstrating an 'acceptable way of life'. Aboriginal people from such reserves required passes to enter the restricted area of town; until 1953 those of mixed descent required exemption certificates. The latter group were in an anomalous position for even if they identified with the white population they were not accepted by it. Ex-diggers remarked "we cannot have the freedom we willingly enlisted for" or "I didn't need an exemption to allow myself to be shot at" (Heppell & Wigley, 1981: 7, 8). In January 1951 over 100 children were withdrawn from Alice Springs schools in protest over these prohibited area laws.

In this context the Bungalow became a reserve for Aborigines visiting town with authorisation, after the war. By 1960 it was a permanent home for some 386 people. Many unofficial camps, built mainly from 'dump' materials and without services and facilities, were established on the town fringes. An official policy of neglect was pursued, fuelled by fears that any material improvements would encourage permanency. The decision by Aboriginal people to stay in such conditions should be viewed positively as one of cultural survival. Camps were based on ties of amity and kinship, as well as linguistic and traditional country origins. They were also a refuge, providing

secure living with other Aborigines ... sharing each others problems. Knowledge of a hostile town environment inhibited many from leaving the town camps. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1981: 43).

These camps were not, however, viewed favourably European townspeople. In the 1960s, tourism, along with Aboriginal mobility due to relaxation of some restrictions, caused growing public discussion of town camp conditions. For many whites the remedy was 'to blame the victim'. It was now legal for Aborigines to drink alcohol and without work alcoholism increased. In 1968 award wages for Aboriginal stockmen were introduced. Many pastoralists opted for white labour adding further pressure to the camps as Aboriginal stockmen were forced off the stations.

The government remedy to this 'problem' was to establish Amoonguna in 1960. This was a town settlement equipped with a hospital and school fourteen kilometres from the town centre. Aboriginal houses were aluminium on a concrete block, making them unbearably hot in summer and cold in winter. Tensions sprang up between the several linguistic groups housed there. With only one bus to town daily it was clearly a separationist policy.

By this time the population in Alice Springs numbered some five thousand. New primary schools and a high school opened. Business also developed rapidly, including a tourist industry mainly associated with Ayers Rock. By 1971, the continued effects of this tourist industry, government employees, and the development of the Pine Gap facility, was to increase the population to 11,172. This rapid expansion threatened many Aranda sacred sites. The government policy of segregation had bred mutual long standing fear and suspicion. At Amoonguna there continued to be tensions between the different linguistic groups in addition to these larger tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in and around Alice Springs. Tension led to periods of violence and confrontation. In March 1972 authorities therefore approved plans for two camps including basic services, one for the Pitjantjatjara and the other for the Warlpiri.

Under the 1976 Lands Rights Bill Aranda traditional owners were precluded from making claims on the basis of traditional ownership as their land was either within town boundaries or on surrounding pastoral leases. Urban Aborigines could, however, acquire land on a basis of need

through application for leases of crown land. Joint action was thus taken by town camp communities to secure leaseholds for thirteen town camps. *Out of this town camp politicization and security of tenure a mood of self determination grew.* The Tangatjira Council was established, providing a unified voice and a service for management of their own affairs and development of solutions to their problems. In 1976 with Commonwealth funding the council and community became involved in designing and building multi-purpose camp buildings. By January 1980, fifty-three powered brick houses, fourteen amenity blocks and eight shelters were built. In 1983 a council survey revealed that town camp people still desired access to traditional land and maintenance of their culture.

Towards an independent school

During this entire period Aboriginal education in urban Commonwealth government managed schools was uncommon. Besides church missions providing some schooling, the government saw little need because in 1951 the total Aboriginal population Territory-wide was only 117 (Shimpo, 1985: 35). Under the post World War II assimilation policy better educational access was gained but improved results did not follow. The system, designed for middle-class English speakers, was based on a vastly different world-view from the Aboriginal one. Popular explanation for their failure, however, was the psychological theory of cultural deficit and disadvantage, thus 'blaming the victim'. The government remedy was to offer a deprivation/deficit-based compensatory education programme. It is in this context as well that the Northern Territory government supported the establishment of bilingual programmes.

Nonetheless, bilingual education was not introduced into all urban schools. Yipirinya is *still* the only urban designated bilingual school in the Northern Territory. Furthermore Aboriginal people in and around Alice Springs had little chance of teacher education. Most have received little or no schooling themselves, and Batchelor College was at a frightening distance from town camp security.

Yipirinya school grew out of the dissatisfaction of some town camp people with government and non-government schools in the town, within the broader context of politicisation and securing land tenure. Schools were perceived as 'alien institutions, monolingual and monocultural in which foreign teachers offered the children foreign content in a foreign manner' (Rabuntja & Yule, 1981: 1). This presented a hostile environment where whites were stultifyingly dominant and the Aboriginal community was generally not involved in school policy, councils or parent associations. Aboriginal children were also teased about their colour, lack of footwear and language. They were labelled 'dirty' resulting in them feeling ashamed of their Aboriginality. Thus the establishment of Yipirinya school is also inseparable from a defiant proclamation of emergent pride in Aboriginality (Roberts, 1986: 24).

The establishment of Yipirinya school was also an essential part of town-camp environment. This environment offered security in kinship cultural survival and community development: a movement out of the creatures of the authority (Heppell & Wigley, 1981: 4) syndrome they had been forced into and a demonstration that self-determination under Aboriginal control was possible even in Alice Springs, a place exemplifying "everything that Aboriginal affairs should not be" (Perkins, 1975: 25). Yipirinya was also seen as a way of keeping the community together. Many town camp people remembered days when children were forcibly removed to receive education (Sykes, 1986: 105-7).

Thus in June 1978 Yipirinya School Council was formed, proposing schooling in line with camp social structure and traditional organisation. It was felt that the camp environment would encourage community participation and a sense of control of the programme. Elders would carry out traditional learning encouraging respect. Aboriginal teachers would play an important part. Their lack of formal European teacher training was admitted but they were deemed to possess other important qualities: community membership; ability to speak the children's language; and their

relationship with the children. Thus they would be able to relate to the children's needs, use appropriate teaching styles, and transmit Aboriginal values and attitudes (Yeperenye Yeye: 1982).

The Northern Territory Government did not support the establishment of Yipirinya under the above guidelines, for the government's preferred model was services that were run under the direction of the Minister. A protracted struggle for registration and funding ensued. In May 1979 the Education Department suggested a primary school annexe under the direction of the Principal. Yipirinya School Council would be able to participate in the selection of departmental staff considered to be suitable for the school. The issue of control and employment of Aboriginal teachers was, however, paramount to Yipirinya philosophy:

Yipirinya would be finished if they did not continue to have responsibility and control over teachers and program ... Parents are the best teachers and know what is best for Aboriginal children (Yipirinya Council, cited in Coombs et al., 1983: 342-344).

Meanwhile camp classes operated in open sheds built by the Tangentyere Council, with no protection from extremes of climate or furniture due to funding problems. The programme survived on donations. European teachers worked for \$50 a week. Attempts were made to gain funding from many other Territory and federal Government sources, mostly unsuccessfully. Under the Northern Territory Education Act the Minister cannot refuse to register a school if the education provided is deemed suitable having regard to the age and abilities of the students (1979: Sections 62-65). Suitability on cultural grounds is not a consideration and the criteria for suitability is determined by the Minister. The protracted struggle continued until 1983. Yipirinya appealed the registration refusal to the Supreme Court but were willing to settle out of court providing their basic principles were not compromised. With a change of federal government the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs granted emergency funding in the light of the principle that Aboriginal independent schools require financial support to establish themselves. The National Aboriginal Education Committee mediated on Yipirinya's behalf with the Northern Territory Department of Education. On 23rd September 1983 Yipirinya gained registration after submitting a revised application (Yeperenye Yeye, 1982).

In line with registration guidelines and to allow expansion, Yipirinya required land and a new central school. In line with town camp philosophy certain criteria for choices were set as a traditionally neutral block located equidistant from town camps that had a Yipirinya class, and land they could identify with. The site chosen had on it two sacred Yipirinya gum trees, associated with the strength of the community and which, as an integral part of the school environment, would be a constant reminder of the value of Aboriginal identity, culture and knowledge and an ideal place for learning how to protect sacred sites. Yipirinya thus applied to the Lands and Housing Minister for title stressing the site's significance:

If we had a school here ... we could keep teaching our culture ... Being so near a sacred site ... this is the right place for Yipirinya School ... for it to be a real Aboriginal school (Yeperenye Yeye, 1984: 9).

The traditional owners thought the matter so important they released the Yeperenya traditional story and a Yeperenya Dreaming sacred painting so everyone could realise its significance. At an Alice Springs press conference, the Northern Territory Minister for Lands attacked sacred site legislation:

I cannot believe that it was intended that sites of a simple storytelling nature in Aboriginal folklore should be preserved for all time (Rabuntja, 1984).

Despite representations from the federal government in support of the Yipirinya's claim, the Northern Territory Government preferred the land to go to a private developer. Due to urgency of acquiring land in a fast growing Alice Springs, Yipirinya accepted another block and the Commonwealth Schools Commission allocated finance for a new school, which was completed in 1988.

Yipirinya now offers a two-way bilingual programme of Arrente/English and Luritja/English. Priority is placed on cultural background and the spiritual heritage of being Aboriginal. Their

philosophy is that culture is the foundation of all education and through strong Aboriginal identity children will be able to meet the pressures of life. Education must reinforce, rather than suppress, their unique cultural identity. Yipirinya Aboriginal teachers receive an on-site accredited teacher training programme leading to Western qualifications. Yipirinya has also been using a cooperative approach with the Northern Territory Education Department to develop their post-primary programme in conjunction with facilities at Yirara College, a Departmental Aboriginal secondary college. Yipirinya receives funding through the federal Department of Employment, Education and Training. The Department prioritises accountability on academic terms rather than cultural ones, a view Yipirinya finds assimilatory (Yipirinya, 1990).

Conclusion: An issue of attitude to cultural survival and social change

Mission policy at Yirrkala, although paternalistic, recognised the value of Aboriginal culture and encouraged Aboriginal participation and decision making. This established a framework of contact history which enabled Aboriginal people to develop their own identity while gradually appreciating Western elements of their own choice. Consequently, Yirrkala's response in schooling was to take advantage of mainstream government initiatives, over some two decades, to bring themselves into a position of self-determination *within* the system. Yirrkala's actions demonstrate an extremely shrewd manoeuvrability to turn these initiatives to their own advantage without compromising their position of cultural integrity.

In Alice Springs, however, the dominant white attitude was one based on an ideology of cultural and racial superiority and an assumption that Aboriginal people were incapable of managing their own affairs. Through this attitude town camp people experienced subjugation and Government policies that kept them in an abject position. For many town camp people this meant they received no schooling and when schooling did become available the aforementioned attitudes and assumptions were 'built in' to all levels of the education system. Despite these constraints - and because of the nature of these constraints - town camp people found ways of resistance and persistence in deciding their own future and cultural survival. Living in town camps was one method. Establishing Yipirinya as an independent school was another.

In general terms, Aboriginal survival has always depended on co-operation and coexistence in both physical and social worlds and their preferred reaction has been cooperation and accepting social change as inevitable - but not at the expense of cultural integrity. The barriers to social change and the origin of tensions between the two groups are generally to be found in the dominant white attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, in cultural arrogance, and in the maintenance of assimilatory power structures forcing Aboriginal 'overt' action to achieve self-determined goals. The type of overt action taken by different Aboriginal communities needs to be understood in terms of the broader contact histories which help to shape the best course of action for achieving self-determination.

In this context it is clearly individual Aboriginal communities who are best placed to assess and articulate the particular educational needs of their own community. White society has professed to be the authority in the use of schooling as a tool of social change but in its maintenance of cultural arrogance it has proved it does not understand the principles behind change:

The people who the change will effect are best placed to judge, implement and later accept the consequences of their decisions. Any decisions taken by outsiders penetrate, if at all, only to the surface of the problem they seek to alleviate (Coombs et al., 1983: 19).

Yipirinya (1989) notes that the problems it faces are deeply entrenched in past failures by so called authorities in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal issues in general. One of the central issues that these two case studies have illustrated is one of control. Graham (1990: 9) argues that "[u]ltimately the focus will have to become not what decisions are made but how they are made and

by whom". Although she is discussing language teaching, the histories of Yirrkala and Yipirinya illustrate the need to extend this to Aboriginal education in general.

Together these case studies also support Wunungmurra's argument that in order to survive, Aboriginal society needs to adapt by finding a common goal (1988: 69). Self-determination is the negotiated policy answer and the flexible Aboriginal educational initiative designed to do this is Two-way schooling.

There has been much discussion in non-Aboriginal academic literature recently regarding this interface of two seemingly incompatible cultures. However, as Yunupingu (1988) notes in Yirrkala philosophy the two are not incompatible and as Yipirinya (1990) states: *This is the challenge of Aboriginal education ... to achieve a balance of measurable European outcomes with the reinforcement of the unique cultural identity*. Two way schooling can only be decided by priorities and accountability on Aboriginal terms. It involves Aboriginal people interpreting the Western domain through their own world view, appropriating chosen elements of it for Aboriginal use and thus creating a balance and not a conflict. At times Aboriginal decisions may threaten white 'ego'. Making space for these decisions to be put into practice demonstrates real commitment to self-determination, provides a strengthening choice in diversity of Aboriginal educational offerings effecting change both from inside and outside the system. It also demonstrates that white Australia is beginning to learn from its mistakes of contact history. This is our challenge for the contact future.

Notes

1. Yolngu: a local word for Aboriginal inhabitants.
2. Balanda: local word for Europeans, originally a Macassan term for Dutch
3. The terms 'half caste' and 'full blood' are used with reluctance as they are offensive to Aboriginal people. They are used here as historical government terminology.

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