



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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As new teachers come to work with me in the school, I would hope to help them by:- acting as a bridge for language between students and the teachers, working with children who have special problems, familiarising new teachers with the local situation.

It is clearly necessary for Island people to move in to teaching roles in the school; it is also important these people are sufficiently qualified for the job. I consider that teaching English in the school as the main language is worthwhile, despite our apparent lack of success at present. The main difficulty for students is that Standard English is not often spoken at home. A program of Adult Education in Standard English could be quite useful.

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A LETTER FROM BLACK TO WHITE *

James Galarrwuy Yunupingu
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A song of the joy which lies in the land. Read it and feel humble at the greatness of humanity as a part of the world. "The land is YOU", said Galarrwuy.

When I was a little boy I used to listen to my mother and father telling me stories around the camp-fire. These stories were simply children's bedtime stories.

One day I caught the biggest fish I ever caught in my boyhood. Only my grandmothers and aunties were allowed to eat that fish. After that when I caught more large fish, turtles or kangaroos all the other people in the family shared my catch. My mother and sisters would not eat anything that I'd caught until I had been circumcised.

Whenever there was a ceremony all the young boys would take part in the singing and dancing. The ones who didn't know how to dance would sit and watch the others sing and dance and maybe they

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would learn how to do one of these dances when they were old enough.

When I was 16 years old, my father taught me to sing some of the songs that talk about the land. At that age I was able to listen and imitate my father in singing and dancing. I was able to ask him, what those songs meant. He told me enough in all the songs he had been singing. The whole songs are history of the Gumatj people, which talks about us being one with nature.

My father sang about the dark cloud which hung over the boundary line of my country and my mother's country, and with its shadow covering both our lands.

It is about November, when there is wet in Arnhem Land, and it will be raining in my land. The song talks about that month of the year. We sing about the thunder and then the continuous rain that brings the goodness to the land and makes other nature live, and then drains out into the main river throughout our land. The main fresh running water has importance to our clan and to the other clans as well. It is not only rain water, but also a spring water which comes out from the foot of the paper-bark trees. These trees are very special to us. I cannot say here why they are special.

In the story the water stops for a while and then becomes streams. Whatever there is that we find in the water, they are sung about.

As I grow older, my brothers and other relations in the family learn me more about the *madayin* (sacred) stories, songs, dances and arts. All of these tell us about what Aboriginal land is all about.

All Aboriginal people are either Dhuwa or Yirritja. The lands are the same. Then there is all the things that mother nature gives us, they too are Dhuwa and Yirritja. There is more to just being Dhuwa and Yirritja, I may not talk much longer on this because you may not understand what I am talking about. My people cannot take Dhuwa person and make him Yirritja because that is impossible to my thinking. You must be born to that group to become that group, to become the owner of that land and its sacred totems that claims that land.

Sacred totem is like black and white stamp of the land givers. Barama has given land and totems to all the Yirritja moiety while Djankawu has given land to all Dhuwa moiety.

The stories about these two leaders go separately but what they did was the same. When I was young man I was accepted to be initiated,

enabling me to tell and sing and to perform any ceremony.

In all these ceremonies, I learnt things that only tell about the tribal land, how it is talked about, sung, dance, paint and most of all feel as though the land is another you.

One day I went fishing with dad, as I was walking along behind him I was dragging my spear on the beach which was leaving a long line behind me. He told me to stop doing that. He continued telling me that if I make a mark or dig for no reason at all I've been hurting the bones of the traditional people of that land. We must only dig and make marks on the ground when we perform or gather food.

The land is my back-bone. I only stand straight, happy, proud and not ashamed about my colour because I still have land. The land is the art. I can paint, dance, create and sing as my ancestors did before me. My people recorded these things about our land this way, so that I and all others like me may do the same.

I think of land as the history of my nation. It tells us how we came into being and what system we must live. My great ancestors who lived in the times of history planned everything that we practise now. The law of history says that we must not take land, fight over land, steal land, give land and so on. My land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land, and so did my ancestors of the same land. We may have come in dreams to the living member of the family, to notify them that the spirit has come from that part of our land and that he will be conceiving in this particular mother.

My land is my foundation. I stand, live and perform as long as I have something firm and hard to stand on. If there is a flood on my land I will have to swim and all Gumatj clan will have to swim, but not for long, we will surely perish, then we will be just like thousands of other people whose lands have been stolen away from them.

We will be the lowest people in the world, because you have broken down my back-bone, took away my arts, history and the foundation. You have left me with nothing.

Without land I am nothing. Only a black feller who doesn't care about anything in the world. My people don't want to be like you!

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