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Learning from Anangu Histories: Population Centralisation and Decentralisation Influences and the Provision of Schooling in Tri-state Remote Communities

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Remote Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools and communities are diverse and complex sites shaped by contrasting geographies, languages, histories and cultures, including historical and ongoing relationships with colonialism, and connected yet contextually unique epistemologies, ontologies and cosmologies.

This paper explores the history of Anangu (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra) populations, including the establishment of incorporated communities and schools across the tri-state remote region of central Australia. This study will show that Anangu have a relatively recent contact history with Europeans and Anangu experiences of engagement with colonisation and schooling are diverse and complex. By describing historical patterns of population centralisation and decentralisation, I argue that schooling and broader education policies need to be contextually responsive to Anangu histories, values, ontologies and epistemologies in order to produce an education approach that resists colonialist social models and assumptions and instead, works more effectively towards a broader aim of social justice. Through assisting educators and policy makers to acquire a clearer understanding of Anangu histories, capacities and struggle, I hope to inform a more nuanced, contextually responsive and socially-just consideration of the provision of Western education in the tri-state region.

■ **Keywords:** Anangu education, Anangu history, tristate schools, colonisation, remote communities

In this paper, I describe the historical context for the establishment of Anangu (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjarra) communities and schools and discuss interactions with colonialism that shape diverse Anangu histories. These historical accounts are important as they directly impact the lives of young people currently enrolled in Anangu schools and inform the nature of family and student interactions with schooling. This paper aims to assist educators and policy makers to better understand schooling in the tri-state area (the region where South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory meet), and by coming to terms with history, inform a more contextually responsive, long term approach to remote education provision.

I outline the centralising influences on Anangu populations and the subsequent decentralisation (and recentralisation) policy eras that influenced the establishment of Anangu communities and community schools. I then provide an overview of schools in the tri-state area, including recent school closures and conclude with a discussion on the implications for educators and policy makers working in Anangu education contexts.

Methodology

This paper draws on research being undertaken as part of my doctoral dissertation. For this work, I have recorded, transcribed and translated a series of interviews with Anangu that include oral histories and in-depth conversations about young people, education and the future. There are ethical and methodological considerations through this approach in working as a non-Indigenous, 'outside' researcher in specifically Anangu knowledge, social and

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historical spaces (Guenther, Osborne, Arnott, McRae-Williams, & Disbray, 2014; Nakata, 2007). Through an open interview method, visiting and revisiting narrators and stories over a long time period (2–3 years) and working in local languages, I have privileged A<u>n</u>angu voices and standpoints in staging a 'virtual' (within the text) dialogue with remote educators. Ethical and methodological considerations in relation to this work are discussed more fully in Osborne (2015) and in the forthcoming thesis.

In establishing a view to the future, A<u>n</u>angu narrators prioritised oral histories and extensive historical accounts of various interactions with colonialism and education, leading me to further research to more fully understand the historical context of these stories. History is not merely a backdrop, but notions of the future rely on history where concepts of solidarity, social fabric and sense of self is grounded in place and history, for how do we understand who we are now if we do not understand who we have been? A<u>n</u>angu narratives recalled pre-European contact experiences, interactions with 'doggers' (dingo scalp traders, see Edwards, 1992; Young, 2010), early era mission life, skirmishes with police (in)justice, life on and around cattle stations, the impacts of nuclear weapons testing at Maralinga, interactions with opal and nickel mining enterprises and of course, schooling. These oral histories were shared within the broader context of continuing A<u>n</u>angu values and priorities as narrators described the various experiences that shape their standpoint accounts (Nakata, 2007) in relation to A<u>n</u>angu education.

In response to the A<u>n</u>angu oral history narratives, I have drawn on oral history recordings (Bain, 2012) and official documents (National Archives of Australia, 2007; Northern Territory Archives Service, 2014), anthropological and historical records (Duguid, 1963, 1972; Edwards, 1988, 1992; Gara, 2003; Mountford, 1962; Ngaanyatjarra Council, 2014b; Tindale, 1933, 1937) to establish European accounts of these interactions. I then sourced publically available information about schools in the tri-state area including organisational websites and *My School* data provided by the Commonwealth Government (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014) to provide an overview of schooling in the region.

The tri-state area described for this paper includes the A<u>n</u>angu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the far north-west of South Australia, the southern region of the Northern Territory west of the Stuart Highway including the Watarrka region but not the Western Aranda community of Ntaria (Hermannsburg), and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia, including Kiwirrkura. Schools such as Yalata, Oak Valley, Tjuntjuntjara, Finke, Titjikala or boarding schools located outside the region are not included, although they can be considered part of the tri-state region under other definitions.

Life and Learning Before 'Education'

A<u>n</u>angu ('Yarnangu' in the Western Australian region of the tri-state area) have long transferred knowledge primarily through the use of informal and formal presentation of stories (*Tjukurpa*). These stories recount the journeys and interactions of the ancestor beings as they lived, died and created the various land and celestial forms in the creation period. These stories cover thousands of kilometres and provide a social framework for the rules of engagement with neighbouring families, language groups and regions. *Tjukurpa* also provides vital knowledge for survival, such as locating water across vast desert landscapes. It provides a way of 'knowing' a place without having ever been there.

These stories are recounted and taught in more formal contexts through songs and dances and the associated rituals of A<u>n</u>angu religious ceremonial life as larger groups come together for this purpose (Edwards, 1992). This is the preferred context for engaging with *Tjukurpa* in the sense of collective social adherence to law. Much teaching for survival, such as ecological knowledge including plant foods, bush medicine, fire management and the daily interactions with the spiritual beings of the land, is taught by family members as small family groups move throughout the country (Edwards, 1994).

Environmentally responsive mobility and socialisation patterns across the Western Desert (a term describing the broader region, see Tindale, 1937) have shaped a unique social and pedagogical model that is recognised by anthropologists as being distinct from other Aboriginal cultures and social structures by way of language, identity, mobility patterns and relationship to land (Elkin, 1938–1939; Strehlow, 1965; Tindale, 1937). This is the context of 'A<u>n</u>angu education' before Western schooling was introduced in the tri-state area.

A Brief Overview of the Social, Environmental and Residential Impacts of Early Contact Experiences with Europeans

A<u>n</u>angu populations have been heavily influenced in the last 100 years by encroachments of colonisation such as the pastoral industry and establishment of missions and subsequent communities and outstations. The introduction of herds of sheep, cattle, goats and the use of camels and horses by pastoralists and a range of other visitors (including release of unwanted domestic transport camels) put further pressure on already precious sources of food and water. Drought has always been a major influence on A<u>n</u>angu patterns of mobility and residence, and the sinking of bores and access to basic provisions such as flour, tea and sugar became increasingly vital for life. In combination, these factors devastated the environmental resources necessary to sustain A<u>n</u>angu lives in the desert to

the extent that many native mammals are now extinct from the region that provided vital food sources until relatively recent history but also embody the ancestral characters recounted in the *Tjukurpa*.

Whilst a more sedentary residence amongst Anangu populations commenced soon after pastoralists began to take up station leases on the eastern fringe of the tri-state region, many were still being 'brought in' from a nomadic desert life as late as 1984 (Ngaanyatjarra Council, 2014b). Depletion of water and food resources took a heavy toll in times of drought; very few Anangu outlasted the drought of the late 1950s and 1960s, finally forced into missions and centres such as Ernabella, Warburton, Ooldea and Finke.

An Overview of the Centralisation and Decentralisation Influences on Anangu Populations

It is important to note the political-economic imperatives that influenced historical population trends and to recognise Commonwealth resourcing of communities as critical to their ongoing existence (see Rothwell, 2014). In broad terms, I categorise policy periods that influenced population trends into four phases:

- Centralisation (late 1800s–1950s);
- Decentralisation (1960s–1980s);
- Further decentralisation (smaller outstations, 1970s–1990s); and
- Re-centralisation (2005–current).

According to Edwards (1992), the establishment of the Ernabella mission from 1937 was intended to be a centralisation point and 'buffer zone' from the negative effects of colonialism, however, this approach was not as influential on Aboriginal residence as might have been anticipated:

> *Everywhere it appears that emigration from unsettled areas began before any intervention by missions or governments and in many places continued in the face of active discouragement. (Long, in Edwards, 1992, p. 8)*

Edwards (1988) describes the ensuing period from 1967, as returning to 'country' and the establishment of communities and outstations as 'Pitjantjatjara decentralisation'. This followed the 1967 referendum which gave powers to the Commonwealth Government over policy-making and funding in relation to Aboriginal people, a responsibility that was previously held by the states. This enabled Anangu to establish their own communities with an economic support base, including social welfare benefits that was previously not available to them (or to missions and stations who were tasked with providing subsidised rations, and medical supplies).

Following 1967, a series of incorporated communities and schools were opened across the tri-state area with support from the Commonwealth to do so (see Edwards, 1992). Fregon and Amata, in South Australia, had been established as small-time cattle ventures out of Ernabella Mission and were the first in the region to become incorporated communities in 1968 with the most recent communities being Kiwirrkura (WA) in 1982 and Mutitjulu (NT) in 1985. Anangu living on missions and stations relished the opportunity to live closer to familial and ancestral homelands with the financial, local decision making and infrastructure opportunities to do so (Edwards, 1988).

A further decentralisation period followed with establishment of smaller homeland communities and outstations from the late 1970s into the late 1990s. Outstation or 'homeland' schools were developed in the 1980s and 1990s to provide schooling for these smaller family groups (Kenmore Park, Murputja & Watarru (SA), Lilla & Ukaka (NT), Tjirrkarli & Patjarr (WA), for example) but the size and variable nature of these communities (for example, families may leave a community to avoid conflict or for a number of years after a death) puts pressure on systems to continue to resource these schools. Smaller homelands and outstations ceased to receive Commonwealth Government funding under Minister Amanda Vanstone and the Conservative (Liberal-National coalition) Howard Government in 2005, describing them as 'cultural museums' and 'without a viable future' (see Eastley, 2005), heralding a policy period I have described as 'recentralisation'.

In 2015, Watarru, Tjirrkarli, Patjarr and Ukaka schools are closed. The recent *Forrest Review* (2014) addressed Indigenous employment and welfare concerns, adding to debates between the Commonwealth Government and the states of South Australia and Western Australia (and less publicly, the Northern Territory) as to who should bear responsibility for resourcing remote Aboriginal communities. This has reinvigorated calls to close remote communities and local schooling options, some of which are located in the tri-state area (see Forrest, 2014; Kagi, 2014). Smaller communities, homelands and outstations would be the most susceptible to closure under this type of policy action.

The language of 'centralisation' and 'decentralisation' indicates policy shifts from an approach of attracting people to resources provided centrally at missions and stations, to resourcing Anangu to return to dispersed sites and establish communities. However, this terminology should not be confused with the long established cycles of centralisation and decentralisation as water and food supplies flourished and then retreated again in drought (Edwards, 1992). It is also important to highlight the limitations of this terminology in that Anangu continued to move into, out from, and between stations and mission centres, incorporating these sites and resources into a long established, broader mobility pattern of their own choosing (Duguid, 1963, 1972; Edwards, 1992).

Pre-Centralisation Contact and Intercultural Exchange; Explorers, Prospectors and Doggers

Early interactions with colonialism acted as an entrée to formal education experiences for Anangu, providing opportunities for social, linguistic and cultural exchange.

Prior to establishment of centres such as stations and missions, small parties of explorers and dingo scalp traders ('doggers') made trips into the tri-state area, inducing the earliest occasions of Anangu interaction with Europeans. William Gosse was the first explorer to travel through the tri-state region in 1873 'discovering' and naming the iconic sites of Ayers Rock (Uluru) and Mt Olga (Kata Tjuta). Both he and another explorer Ernest Giles failed numerous times to 'penetrate the apparently waterless sandhills of the Gibson Desert' (Gara, 2003, p. 1).

A number of expeditions followed with 'a variety of explorers, adventurers, prospectors and survey parties' (Edwards, 1992, p. 6). Growing resentment after the 'continued appropriation of valuable water sources and the desecration of sacred sites', or perhaps the 'killings of Anangu during Henry Hill's expedition in 1899–1900 . . . sparked a number of attacks on subsequent prospecting parties', resulting in a period of very few expeditions from around 1906 (Gara, 2003, p. 4). Gara surmises that 'at least 40 parties traversed the region between 1894 and 1916' and that 'it is likely that at least 120 white men entered the region during that period, as well as a dozen or more Afghan camel-drivers and a handful of "foreign" Aboriginal guides' (2003, p. 7).

The 'colonists' bureaucratic reframing of dingo as vermin' (Young, 2010, p. 296) set in place the earliest forms of economic exchange, payment for labour and access to European goods such as food and clothing. Through providing access to desirable goods, doggers soon found that they had company moving with them on their journeys. Young (2010) describes Tindale's (1933) frustrations that doggers attracted such large groups, to the point that it became difficult for him, as an anthropologist, to attract Anangu to travel with him as guides. Tindale (1933, p. 567) also claims that doggers employed 'propaganda' tactics to cause 'the natives' to fear the company of others such as anthropologists.

Both Gara (2003) and Scales (2007) recognise that doggers represented a new type of interaction with Anangu. Scales praises the 'true bushman' and 'pioneering spirit' exemplified by doggers and their Aboriginal wives who traded scalps and negotiated the emerging space of intercultural collaboration across some 40 years in the region. He also notes serious concerns, where, according to Mountfords' 1940 diaries (see Mountford, 1962) De Conlay, Davis and others were renowned for their lacing of flour and treacle with strychnine as well as shooting Anangu, although charges were never laid in regards to these observations. De Conlay was later charged with the murder of 'Lolly legs' (Laliki, see Duguid, 1963; Scales, 2007) but according to Duguid, was acquitted due to interference resulting in a lack of evidence against him. Despite these concerns of character and behaviour, the doggers established patterns of reciprocal relationship and exchange that was significant enough to establish trade bases (at Ernabella, for example) and Anangu were significantly invested in the relationship.

Cows, Bombs, Mines and Missions; Significant Centralisation Influences in the Tri-state Area

Cows

The most easterly populations in the region were most affected by the establishment of cattle stations from the 1880s, following the first Europeans making their way through the centre corridor from Adelaide and into the Northern Territory in the 1860s. Cattle stations became an established source of rations, water, (unpaid or low wages) work and shelter, but did not provide schooling for Anangu children. Edwards (1992) explains that, by the late 1950s, most Yankunytjatjara and some Pitjantjatjara people lived on cattle stations in the east of the region.

With the virtual absence of non-Aboriginal women in the region, many Piranpa (non-Aboriginal) men fathered Aboriginal children with varying levels of recognition and acceptance of these children (Edwards, 1992). Stations were paid and resourced to administer rations to elderly Anangu and children, keeping records of men, women and children living at the station (see National Archives of Australia, 2007). These reporting processes were also used to assist authorities in locating mixed-descent children for removal and institutionalisation. Haebich (2011) describes the Warburton Mission's difficult relationship between family care, dormitory accommodation for children and political pressure to forcibly remove children to stations well south into training and employment programs. Although there is no evidence that Anangu children were removed from Ernabella mission, many children were removed or relocated from stations and into institutional care under the assimilationist policies of the day. Lowitja O'Donoghue (State Library of South Australia, 2014) and Randall (2003) are two of the more publicly recognised Anangu members of the 'Stolen Generation' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), the term used to describe children removed under government policies of this era.

Stations provided much earlier contact experiences for Anangu and many families assimilated into pastoral life, embracing the dress, social customs and identity of the cattleman's life on the land that was established through this period even though few Anangu remain on stations or in employment in the industry. Despite the absence of formal schooling, stations

provided significant sites of intercultural learning and engagement (see Lester, 1993) and many Anangu consider their time of living and working on stations as the most effective form of Western education they have experienced.

Bombs

Two major events affecting the region were the Maralinga atomic bomb testing that took place from 1952 to 1967 (southern regions of the South Australian tri-state area), and the 'blue streak' rocket testing from the late 1950s (mainly affecting the north-western region of the Western Australian tri-state region).

In the case of Maralinga, people were cleared out and displaced to make way for testing from the early 1950s. Despite little documented evidence, Anangu stories refer to many deaths on the fringes of the test site, and complaints with eyes and breathing. Lester (1993) describes his loss of sight following the fall-out period, and many others' health problems. Another senior Yankunytjatjara man (Kantji, 2012) described his mother's panic as the dark cloud passed over them. In fear of this imposing and strange cloud, she dug out a series of rabbit burrows and buried the children until the cloud had passed. Yankunytjatjara witnesses such as Yami Lester and his mother Pingkayi provided eyewitness accounts as evidence to the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia (Australian Royal Commission, 1985) and described the thick black cloud that blocked out the sky and kept coming and coming, leaving a black, moist, sticky substance that covered the ground, the leaves and the buildings.

It is difficult to imagine a more comprehensively violent form of dispossession than for those Anangu on the southern fringes of the tri-state area and more widely dispersed throughout the Maralinga region. Under the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 (South Australian Government, 2014), a huge area of land (10 per cent of the South Australian land mass) was returned to Anangu from the region.

In Western Australia, Yarnangu were cleared out and brought in to mission and ration centres to make way for rocket weapons testing out of Woomera known as the 'Blue Streak' project. The Ngaanyatjarra Council (2014b) describes removal of people from the north-western region of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands from the late 1950s where Government employed 'Native Patrol Officers' moved 'the remaining nomadic Yarnangu from their country ... in order to protect them from rocket debris' (n.p.). Yarnangu were taken to 'Warburton Mission ... Jigalong and Balgo in WA and to the government settlement at Papunya in NT' (n.p).

Ongoing struggle for compensation, so far unsuccessful, continues for Anangu and service men exposed to nuclear radiation through the 1950s weapons testing programs (see Nicholson, 2014).

Mines

Individuals and small groups pursuing small-time mining interests travelled around the tri-state region beginning in the late 1800s (see Edwards, 1992; Gara, 2003). The ill-fated expedition of Harold Lasseter in the early 1930s became the most famous of prospecting legends after he perished in search of a lost 'reef of gold' and inspired other fortune seekers as well as the national imaginary (Gara, 2003). Small to medium sized mining operations were established in the Ngaanyatjarra region in the 1950s but were abandoned following extended drought. Meagre infrastructure left over from small time mining interests proved to be valuable to Anangu seeking to establish new communities. South-Western Mining's abandoned headquarters at Tollu, near the Blackstone Range, for example, provided materials for Yarnangu to transport and establish the Blackstone community (see Ngaanyatjarra Council, 2014b).

The Wingellina community was also shaped around early mining interests in the late 1950s but 'fraternising' between the miners and Anangu was discouraged outside of some paid employment and work for rations (Ngaanyatjarra Council, 2014a, n.p.). Opal mining had small-scale beginnings at Coober Pedy in 1915, but mining towns and camps have since been established in the south-east of the tri-state region from Coober Pedy through to Mintabie and across to smaller sites such as Lambina.

Mining interests in the tri-state area have historically generated minimal opportunities for Anangu employment and development. Populations have centralised around sites such as Wingellina and Mintabie, although this has tended to be discouraged both by Anangu and mining interests (see Edwards, 1992).

Missions

Ernabella

The Ernabella mission was established in 1937 after Dr Charles Duguid lobbied the South Australian Government from 1935 for a 'buffer between the Aborigines and the encroaching white man' (Duguid, 1972, p. 115), having witnessed what he considered widespread abuse and exploitation of Aboriginal people across central Australia (see also Edwards, 1988) by 'unscrupulous whites'. Duguid was well positioned, using his networks across the Presbyterian Church, the medical profession, universities and governments to inform and lobby for action on a range of issues affecting Aboriginal people. The philosophy of the mission was to encourage Anangu to broker between traditional life and engagement with Western society through prioritising local language and flexible engagement between cultural and familial responsibilities and mission activity including the church, arts and craft, choir, pastoral ventures and food production, and schooling, which was offered from 1940.

Warburton

According to Edwards (1997), United Aborigines Mission (UAM) missionary Will Wade commenced the mission in 1935 after a series of exploratory trips. Schooling commenced almost immediately following the establishment of the mission and Edwards noted marked philosophical differences between the UAM approach and that of the Ernabella mission, stating that, at the Warburton mission, 'Aboriginal cultures and languages were largely denigrated', and further, that the, 'UAM mission philosophy was one of replacement [of local languages and cultures] rather than of adaptation' (Edwards, 2011, p. 7) but also notes that UAM missionary Wilf Douglas, 'impressed the people with his language ability' (p. 7). In the 1950s, the Warburton Mission community came into collision with assimilationist policies of the day and what Haebich (2011) describes as 'a new frontier of military and scientific intervention, notably the atomic tests that affected vast areas of the Central Reserves and incursions by international mining corporations' (p. 1039). National debates and protests raged over the welfare of Yarnangu who were still in or moving through the Western Desert and a public awareness campaign by filmmaker Bill Grayden and Aboriginal activist Pastor Doug Nicholls resulted in a cancellation of plans to remove 'all school-age children to a mission hundreds of kilometres to the south to be educated and trained as workers for the local pastoral industry' (Haebich, 2011, p. 1039).

Areyonga

In 1940, Duguid and Strehlow (see Duguid, 1963) travelled to the Petermann Ranges (Docker River area in the Northern Territory) to assess the validity of various accounts of people suffering in the face of prolonged drought. It was finally agreed that a rations station be set up close to Hermannsburg (130 kilometres west of Alice Springs) as an outpost of the Lutheran mission. By 1943, Areyonga community (as it came to be called) was established and a school opened. The Petermann Range people still relate across the Docker River and Areyonga communities with strong ties to Warakurna in Western Australia, Mutitjulu in the Northern Territory and beyond. In its early years, the wide range of goods available through the store attracted A<u>n</u>angu from outside the Petermann Ranges to travel there (Edwards, 2011; National Archives of Australia, 2007; Young, 2010).

An Overview of Schools in the Tri-state Region

The three mission schools of Warburton, Ernabella and Areyonga and a school at the small township based at Finke provided centralised access to schooling before communities and government schools were established. A teacher and A<u>n</u>angu teaching assistant were sent from Ernabella to Fregon in the mid-1960s to begin a school program and from 1961, as Ernabella sought to establish the Musgrave Park cattle venture, two A<u>n</u>angu community members re-purposed a rations shed to provide a schooling program before the formal commencement of the Amata school with qualified teachers in 1968 (Amata educator, 2015). The three mission based school sites were under the authority of different church denominational institutions which, along with the influence of various individuals shaped diverse attitudes and approaches to educational policy. In particular, Aboriginal language and culture and its relationship to Christianity and the broader aims of the missions varied across the region (Edwards, 1988, 1992, 2011).

Local government-run schools were established across the tri-state region in the years between 1968 and 1985 (Docker River: 1968, Indulkana: 1971, Mimili: 1972, Jameson: 1976, Blackstone: 1976, Piipalyatjara: 1976, Warakurna, 1976, Wingellina: 1976, Imanpa: late 1970s, Kiwirrkura: 1982, Mutitjulu: 1985). Smaller homeland community and outstation schools were established in the 1980s and 1990s (Tjukurla: 1986, Tjirrkarli: 1987, Wanarn: 1989, Lila/Watarrka: early 1990s, Ukaka: early 1990s, Kenmore Park: 1990s, Patjarr: 1995, Murputja: 1995, Watarru: 1999). Smaller outstation communities have struggled to retain ongoing funding, particularly where enrolments have remained low for extended periods, and in 2015, Tjikarrli, Ukaka, Watarru and Patjarr remain closed. All of these schools were almost exclusively funded through the respective State and Territory governments. Mission schools were transitioned to State and Territory government management between the late 1960s (Warburton) and the early 1980s (Areyonga). Some schools began in caravans known as 'silver bullets' (Mimili, early 1970s, Docker River, 1968, Mt Ebenezer in the late 1970s before relocating to Imanpa) or rudimentary bush bough shelters (Piipalyatjara, 1976) before resources were made available for buildings and teacher accommodation.

Nyangatjatjara College opened in 1997 as an A<u>n</u>angu-governed Independent Aboriginal School and provides primary and secondary schooling at Docker River and secondary schooling at Mutitjulu and Imanpa communities. Funding is received predominantly through the Commonwealth Government. A<u>n</u>angu fought for this college 'to overcome this aching for home' (Armstrong, 1997) as an alternative to the Northern Territory Government's policy of minimal provision of secondary schooling in local communities, expecting students to leave home and attend boarding school where there was an inclination towards schooling in the senior years. This policy has been restated through the recent Wilson review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (Wilson, 2014).

For A<u>n</u>angu who grew up around cattle stations or away from mission centres before the decentralisation of communities (1968 and later), experiences of Western education and society occurred through interactions with station families and staff, through work, contact with missionaries and traders such as doggers and small time

miners and sporadic involvement in larger social events as well as family and cultural engagements across the region. Anangu narratives highlight the diverse nature of historical interactions with colonialism across Anangu experiences in the tri-state area. These experiences significantly shape attitudes towards and expectations of education, notions of aspiration, and the venues for educational and economic engagement that Anangu seek. Yankunytjatjara histories for example, being closely linked to stations rather than missions, differ greatly from their westerly relations in terms of their interactions with education, employment and historical social policies. Yankunytjatjara people were far more likely to provide cheap labour, intermarry and also experience the removal of children to southern institutions.

Based on 2014 figures available through the *My School* website (ACARA, 2014), 22 community school sites in the tri-state area provide schooling for 1125 student enrolments. The schools' ICSEA (Index of Community Socioeducational Advantage) scores reflect significant socioeducational disadvantage with scores falling between 388 (Areyonga) and 676 (Kenmore Park) where the average national ICSEA value is 1000 (see ACARA, 2014). Student enrolment figures reflect the nature of small communities with enrolments ranging from 13 students (Lila/Watarrka) to a high of 135 (Amata). The Ngaanyatjarra Lands School operates as a single school site for data collection purposes and represents 312 student enrolments across eight campuses that are currently open. This reflects the nature of small, diverse and widely dispersed school populations across the region which covers two states and a territory, three state/territory jurisdictions as well as an Independent Aboriginal school with Commonwealth funding, and represents at least five distinct yet connected language groups (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi, and Luritja).

Diverse interactions with and experiences of colonialism and population centralisation influences make it important for educators to actively investigate the histories, challenges and opportunities of each school community to better inform their own practices as contextually located educators. Schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon in tri-state communities and historical interactions with colonialism and education strongly shape the nature of engagement and trust with schools and broader policies, often far more than is understood by nonlocal educators.

There are notable synergies in language and values across generations of Anangu narrators interviewed as they provide standpoint accounts of their hopes for young people, education and the future. Strong commitments to Anangu identity, culture, language, country and family are repeated throughout all accounts, with significant emphasis and depth. Anangu narrators presented a unified expectation that education should sustain young peoples' robust engagement with Anangu values, even as they pursue Western education. Diverse historical interactions with colonialism and education deeply influence the positions and available venues for advocacy of these values. Whilst engagement with language, culture and the land remains strong, education dialogue tends to occur 'on location' where typically, Anangu are positioned as submissive or unequal in relation to the various institutions that hold decision making power about the delivery of education in tri-state communities.

Locating Anangu Education within the Historical and Cultural Context

Aboriginal education, Welch (1988) argues, historically maintained an attitude of exclusion or limited participation where typically, instruction is strictly in English with a limited curriculum focus on 'rudimentary skills only in keeping with the lowly social class which the colonised occupy . . . ' (p. 207). Attitudes of disdain fuelled by 19th century Social Darwinist notions gave way to assimilation and integration as prevailing ideologies in the early 20th century. The removal of children, particularly with lighter skin from their mothers, with the view to absorb them into dominant culture society was so comprehensive, this policy period which continued until the 1970s came to be known as the 'Stolen Generation' (Haebich, 2011; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

Aboriginal students were frequently forced to accept curriculum that excluded them or caricatured them in colonial historical accounts of themselves. Their families also had little say in what should be taught or how it should be done (Buckskin, 2009; Partington & Beresford, 2012; Welch, 1988). Following the 1967 referendum and the Whitlam Government era, the priority moved to concepts of self-determination with the establishment of the NACG (National Aboriginal Consultative Group) in 1974 and in 1977, the NAEC (National Aboriginal Education Committee) to provide the Commonwealth with formal advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators as to the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and how best to meet them (see Buckskin, 2009, pp. 84–85). Partington and Beresford (2012) explain that this policy shift towards self-determination did not necessarily shift Aboriginal peoples' unequal power relationship with colonialism, resulting in this postreferendum policy period being described as 'neocolonial' where 'governments continu[e] to act as if they were colonial powers' (p. 60).

Running parallel to these historical policies, various sites of struggle, resistance and innovation in education practice occurred in attempts to prioritise Aboriginal epistemologies and values in spite of broader assimilative attitudes and policies. Ernabella mission, for example, prioritised Pitjantjatjara as the language of instruction from the outset in 1940. Graham (1999) documents the strong involvement of Aboriginal communities and

educators across the Northern Territory following the introduction of policies in 1972 that allowed instruction in languages other than English. Following nearly 30 years of bilingual education development, gradual withdrawal of political and financial support for this approach resulted in policies once again insisting on delivery of education in English language by the late 1990s (Graham, 1999; Nicholls, 2005). In the tri-state area, Areyonga community resolutely defended bilingual education as a basic human right in the face of policies seeking to limit or deny the role of first language in schooling (Devlin, 2011).

Through the 1990s, political narratives focussed on the language of reconciliation, with the newly elected Howard Government in 1996 announcing a shift from 'symbolic' reconciliation towards a focus on 'practical' reconciliation (Partington & Beresford, 2012). Drawing on narratives for social, educational and welfare reform from prominent Aboriginal intellectuals such as Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson with his focus on the 'right to take responsibility' (Pearson, 2003), the logic for education delivery moved through notions of intervention (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007) to 'Closing the Gap' (see Abbott, 2015).

In 2014, the policy priority for remote education moved further towards an economic rationalist position with a focus on welfare reform (Forrest, 2014), strengthening boarding school programs (Penfold, 2013; Wilson, 2014) and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through 'Closing the Gap' in attendance rates and scores in national English language literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN, see Abbott, 2015; ACARA, 2014). This positions remote schooling policy in a neo-colonial 'time-lag' of sorts, with the language and logic of remote education delivery returning to more interventionist and assimilative 'catch-up' ideology which was roundly criticised, in particular for its failure to engage and prioritise Indigenous voices and participation (see Buckskin, 2009). This approach also consigns Indigenous parents and communities to be constantly voicing claims for recognition of the existence of alternative and distinct languages, cultures and values within mainstream schooling and policy contexts that prioritise neoliberal dominant culture norms and values.

Learning Lessons From History

European contact, colonisation and the provision of schooling in the tri-state area is relatively recent. In two recent interviews, Anangu recounted memories of life before contact with Europeans. Examining Anangu histories shows Anangu to be adaptive and resilient, having survived great hardships and injustice. Earlier, I described Anangu social and geographical mobility patterns as being 'environmentally responsive'. This dynamic remains strong, and a school environment where teachers and teaching are engaging, contextually responsive and seen as relevant by the community tends to enjoy reciprocation through strong attendance, engagement and community investment in the school. On the contrary, schools that cleave to the notion that their role is to replicate the values, logic and priorities of mainstream schooling as a cloudy mirror, somewhat in the sense of a colonial outpost continue to lament poor enrolment and attendance figures (Guenther, 2015).

Tindale, the highly regarded anthropologist lamented his inability to coax Anangu to work with him due to the 'distraction' of 'unscrupulous' doggers enjoying mobile populations travelling with them (Tindale, 1933, p. 567). The doggers offered a reciprocal exchange relationship which Anangu were willing and eager to participate in. Historical approaches to Aboriginal education that are punitive and colonial in their assumptions and positioning have failed to attract strong engagement from remote communities (Buckskin, 2009; Welch, 1988) and so it is unsurprising that current remote education policies that are experiencing Tindale-like frustrations are both narrow and strongly colonial in their approach. The Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) trial in the Northern Territory (see Wright, Arnold, & Dandie, 2012) and to a lesser extent, the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) program (National Employment Services Association, 2015) have adopted neo-colonial, top-down approaches to remote education policy and practice, focussing solely on attendance measures. The SEAM trial featured triggers for removal of parent welfare benefits for noncompliance and whilst RSAS is not structured for punitive actions, political frustrations have tended towards threatening language at times (see Martin, 2014). In very remote central Australia, these programs have achieved patchy results at best.

In tri-state communities, Anangu remember historical interactions where punitive approaches resulted in poisoning, shootings, removal of children, entire families being marched across vast deserts tied behind camels in neck irons and hand cuffs and the exploitation of women among other injustices (Brown & Studdy-Clift, 1990; Duguid, 1963; Gara, 2003). Haebich (2011) argues the importance of 'remembering' the historical context that frames Aboriginal education policy and practice, drawing on Stanner's (1969) description of 'non-Indigenous Australians' 'cult of forgetfulness or disremembering.' (p.1034). She argues that 'forgetting in action' (p. 1044) summarises the nation's attempts 'to force Aboriginal people to abandon their past and ... to forget those uncomfortable aspects that prevent them from feeling fully reconciled or to identify unconditionally with the nation' (p. 1044). Remembering Anangu histories, epistemologies and values in Anangu education practice is a first step towards a more just reconciliation (Haebich, 2011).

Engaging with Anangu histories and their complex and diverse relationship with colonialism reveals a

picture of ingenuity, independence and resistance as well as a strong and continuing commitment to cultural maintenance which includes a desire to remain connected to country, close to important ancestral sites in spite of the various policy priorities of the day. Anangu have played diverse historical roles at the interface with colonialism including employees, trading partners, educator and political activists. Many children currently attending Anangu schools will be largely unaware of stories of desert survival, centralisation, the struggle for land rights and the implications this has for land ownership and future economic opportunities. If educators remain unaware of these important events and the broader social, economic and employment context, it is unlikely that schooling will adequately prepare Anangu students for success in the local contexts of their communities. That is, to be confident of their place in their local communities and to gain confidence to step in and out of new social, economic and geographical spaces and opportunities (Burton & Osborne, 2014; Osborne, Lester, Minutjukur, & Tjitayi, 2014; Tjitayi & Osborne, 2014).

Thinking Locally, Thinking Regionally

Tri-state school data shows that Anangu schools are relatively small, dispersed, diverse and complex sites that according to ICSEA measures, experience significant socioeducational disadvantage. This presents challenges for educators working in small and geographically isolated schools, often with little guidance to understand (remember) what has taken place in the past, both in the school and in the wider community context. The temptation is to revert to a 'back to basics' approach, mirroring historically ineffective punitive and narrow practices where families and the wider community are not afforded space to significantly contribute to the education on offer to their children.

There is a sensible logic in collaborating as a region, utilising regionally available Anangu skills and funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and forming important, larger scale partnerships as a collective to offer social and academic opportunities that are otherwise difficult to secure when working as a small, individual school site. Such an approach can also focus financial and human resources on documenting histories, developing language-based curriculum and provide a venue for privileging Anangu voices in broader education dialogue. The 1990 tri-state report (Tri-State Board of Management, 1990) did a large amount of groundwork to argue the case for regional collaboration but fell short ultimately through a political inability at the time to work in a cross-border, cross-jurisdictional environment.

A contextually responsive approach to education delivery takes account of the historical and ongoing linguistic, cultural and social features of students' lives, their family and wider community context. Throughout interviews, Anangu narrators continually draw on oral history narratives to explain current values and priorities that shape the lenses through which the future is viewed. Repeated articulation of these priorities should cause educators to rethink how prioritising Anangu values of language, land, culture, family and identity can contribute to a more just education approach, including postschool social and economic outcomes. This also requires venues where Anangu voices are privileged in dialogue that shapes education provision and positions young people for postschool social and economic participation.

The greatest ethical responsibility to 'hear', with a 'special kind of listening' (Delpit, 1993, p. 139) remains with those who hold the most power; the education institutions and those with ordained power for decision making such as local school principals. This requires education institutions and educators in tri-state schools to take account of the diverse and significant histories that shape daily interactions between schools and Anangu. Anangu histories, values and experience should not be 'forgotten' (Haebich, 2011), but in remembering, provide rich and fertile material for curriculum development, responsive pedagogical approaches and active community participation in schooling.

Conclusion

The tri-state area, located within the broader Western Desert is a unique region where communities have experienced diverse and relatively recent interactions with colonialism. The region features connected and yet distinct languages, interconnected social relationships and shared responsibilities to geographical and cultural sites. These spaces are defined completely outside of state and territory borders and their corresponding political affiliations. Colonial economic interests and government priorities have significantly influenced patterns of Anangu residence and mobility across historical periods of centralisation and decentralisation policies. Influences of pastoralism, atomic weapons testing, mining interests and centralised missions have further contributed to diverse and complex Anangu interactions with colonialism.

Nonlocal educators must learn to hear (Delpit, 1993) and remember (Haebich, 2011) Anangu history, and to take account of the social, geographic, linguistic and epistemic features of the Anangu context that continue to shape the nature of engagement with schools and education more broadly. History shows that Anangu are resolute in adhering to their own values and priorities, in spite of the various national economic or political imperatives of the day, even if this means enduring material hardships. A serious consideration of the historical, geographical, social and cultural context is needed in providing education that supports Anangu aspirations (Burton & Osborne, 2014; Osborne & Guenther, 2013) and privileges Anangu in education dialogue. Creative thinking and collaborative

action is required across the tri-state area to reimagine possibilities for an education that prepares Anangu young people for a future that learns from past mistakes and also reminds young people of the strength of their own stories.

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