

2014 Australian Association for Research in Education Betty Watts Award Winning Paper

Learning in Place, Cultural Mapping and Sustainable Values on the Millawa Billa (Murray River)

Robyn Heckenberg

Monash Indigenous Centre, Monash University, Victoria, Australia

This paper presents an Indigenous perspective on the significance of land, culture and Indigenous rights. The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples promote the importance of traditional Indigenous societies, such as Aboriginal Australians. Participating in caring for country methods and having a close on-going relationship to the land is also supported in this Declaration. As well as this, these principles support the notion of Indigenous education for community, and youth in particular, in places of cultural significance and places of longstanding occupation. All of this lends itself to an Aboriginal way of being in terms of cultural teaching and learning. These principles are incorporated into a performative perspective of traditional pedagogy and the incorporation of cultural practices in a best practice model that can incorporate cultural mapping as an exercise that expounds environmental and ecological perspectives within learning places on the land. Through connection to land and community relationships to cultural knowledge and cultural values, this paper will provide an Indigenous standpoint on Indigenous experiences and senses of place and the importance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in advancing significant principles and initiatives that value Indigenous ways of being and doing.

■ **Keywords:** cultural mapping, traditional pedagogy, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous rights, Wagirra Trail

Earth by Wiradjuri poet Kevin Gilbert

Of the Earth am I

The breast that nurtured all the young
Of Earth; with earth to earth again I fly
With every thought and song I sung
Was earth and earth in all its bounty
Gave to me and mine a wise increase
(Gilbert, 1994, p. 1)

The origin of this paper is grounded in my connections to the Millawa Billa (Murray River) as a Wiradjuri researcher and artist. It has been inspired by my involvement in phases of the development of a local Aboriginal community vision, the Wagirra Trail in the regional area of Albury, New South Wales. The Aboriginal community of

the Albury region is Wiradjuri. Aboriginal people from other regions have also made their homes in this Murray River region. The community has a vibrant art life, gaining in vitality and capacity and is motivated to provide more opportunities in education and employment but also traditional cultural knowledge for their children, and an urgent need to impart Aboriginal knowledge and to tell their cultural story (Taylor & Neidjie, 1989). The concept of 'pedagogy of place' (Gruenewald, 2003) is a fairly new concept in terms of title and in terms of education discourse, but to Aboriginal people, instruction in country has always been a way of learning and teaching.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Robyn Heckenberg, Monash Indigenous Centre, Menzies Building, 20 Chancellors Walk, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria 3800, Australia. Email: Robyn.Heckenberg@monash.edu.

It is important to recognise that Aboriginal people are a spiritual people with a sense of cultural pride (Lovett-Gardiner, 1997) and that the Aboriginal people of the Murray Darling Basin have a continuing relationship with the river through strong 'social, spiritual and cultural values' (Murray Darling Basin Authority, 2011, p. 21). The Wagirra Trail became an opportunity for these characteristics to be welded together in both cultural learning and employment, and to support aspirations of cultural continuity. As Du Cros observes:

Cultural continuity . . . is stronger in south-eastern Australia than many non-Aboriginal people realise. Aboriginal people claim a physical and cultural legacy and they feel an increasing responsibility and obligation towards their children to preserve this heritage. (2002, p. 118)

The Wagirra Trail is planned to accompany the Murray River 70km from the Wonga wetlands, near Albury all the way up to the Hume Weir, and is traversing Wiradjuri Country. The trail is seven kilometres to date. *Wagirra* is Wiradjuri for 'to walk or step on the ground' (Grant & Rudder, 2005, p. 176) and the popularity and profound beauty of the trail means many feet walk this river track, tarmacked and connected with bridges and local esteem. The trail is rich with story and environmental lessons, the mapping of peoples' histories and the river's story being imbibed into the narrative of place. There are associations that have been established between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in this context; the trail team of Aboriginal young and older men; the steering committee; the artists associated with Wagirra sculptural designs and employees working for local council on this river trail project, all reflect the complex relationship which is part of the diversity of the communities of Albury-Wodonga. The specific intersection of these relationships is at an interface of knowledges which meet at a high level of cultural understanding. Those involved are practical exemplars of a positive enhancing of the term 'Cultural Interface' coined by Nakata (2000). This interface of 'Indigenous and Western domains' is a platform for solutions, not only contestation (Nakata, 2000). Reconciliation in action has supported the Indigenous and western spheres in working together towards a more unified approach in supporting caring for country. The outcomes resonate with an unambiguous range of knowledges. My personal perspective comes from having researched and written on the Wagirra Trail for some years, but also now to be part of the team which supported the making of the Wagirra Trail's *Yindyamarra* sculpture walk, as researcher and creative director. *Yindyamarra* is Wiradjuri and means 'respect, be polite, honour, do slowly' (Grant & Rudder, 2005, p. 335).

The range of knowledge has included Wiradjuri Elders as knowledge keepers, community Elders, young Wiradjuri with skill sets around eco-construction, arborists, grassland specialists, those with interests in tourism, community development facilitators and mentors, Aboriginal

artists and their stories, teachers supporting secondary school Aboriginal artists, as well as environmental scientists. Cultural contexts intersect and transmit a coordinated synthesis of community aspiration. As community consultant and Wiradjuri researcher for the project, I am a conduit to construct for the Aboriginal community a meaningful clarification and map of their viewpoint. This arose as documentation of the community research dialogue containing the history of the river, a history of the people, and an accompanying natural history of the region. The research sought advice from the community about what *they* perceived to be the future direction of the Wagirra Trail. Through cultural dialogue and community feedback it was decided the story to be depicted along the river trail would be in sculpture.

The culturally responsive framework in which the Wagirra Trail is being created has been carefully and mindfully resolved and is a binding of connection and ethical relations for everyone involved. In similar and different ways, this approach revolves around the cultural understanding of Wiradjuri and the protocols vested through *lore* (story) and law. In terms of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2008), the Wagirra Trail fosters an ability to work in country, learn in country and build an economy connecting to country. Within the mind's eye of the community there have been aspirational discussions of the trail becoming even something more, visions entailing economic and educational modelling. What has followed has allowed community vision to take on a visual dialogue as well as the design by local Wiradjuri artists and other local Aboriginal artists. These artists tell the powerful story of their history and connection to the river in not only three-dimensional sculptural design, but can be considered five-dimensional as it incorporates their spiritual language. Historically occupied for thousands of generations by Indigenous peoples, the natural environment has, through the creation of the trail, been made accessible to the wider community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The sculptures' recent installation speak not only of cultural sovereignty of the places they inhabit, but have a performative role in creating images of story, the narrative of cultural knowledge and of cultural practice. The sculptures also provide a pedagogy of place and a Wiradjuri cultural experience.

Wiradjuri Philosophy

The philosophy of the Wiradjuri is substantially presented through the proclamation of Pastor Cecil Grant, who as a Senior Elder of the Wiradjuri Nation, was a local leader within the Albury-Wodonga region and beyond in Wiradjuri spirituality and political activity. He voiced these words when welcoming people to Wiradjuri country:

Karrai binaal birrimal billa
Ngangaana-gu birrimal karrai billa
Dya birrimal karrai billa durai ngangaana ngingu.

Land of much bush and rivers
 Look after the bush, land and the rivers
 And the bush, land and rivers will look after you.
 (Albury Art Gallery, 2012; Heckenberg, 2013).

This deep long-standing philosophy of the Wiradjuri ensured an environment that remained pristine and with an ecology that was self-sustaining. This recognises the dynamic fiduciary relationship that man held nature as a core value of Wiradjuri life-ways. This is reflected in the cultural histories and cultural mores of present day Wiradjuri. This resonated powerfully for me as well, as a contemporary Wiradjuri researcher and artist.

One of the aspects reflected in the work of Kabaila (1995) in *Wiradjuri Places* is the close nature of family ties. This is in part due to the fact that so much of the Wiradjuri population were segregated onto missions and reserves, through the *Aborigines Protection Act 1869*. The other reason relates to tradition: the family ties and the strong relationships through kinship are part of a whole way of life connected to Country and very specific places. These places were recognisable meeting places and ceremonial sites. The most well-known around Albury is Mungabareena Reserve. Recollections relate that the actual campsite during these ceremonial times was on higher ground, further up the river. The present day site has the vestiges of ceremony in contemporary times and has become the traditional site for the old rituals and corroborees to be remembered. In the present era, the philosophies and traditions of the Wiradjuri around the Wonga Wetlands and Mungabareena site, in particular, are acknowledged in the Albury City Council's *Reconciliation Statement* (2005). The statement commits:

To work in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community in joint and significant local projects such as Wonga Wetlands Wiradjuri Interpretative Centre, Mungabareena Reserve site and The Wagirra Trail, including its *Yindymarra* sculpture walk increases cultural awareness and propagates greater opportunities for the young ones to learn in country. The commitment, within all is a learning scape within the environment, and this propagates cultural knowledge. All these ongoing projects maintain irrepressible association and relationships with the Murray River narrative. (Albury City Council, 2005)

The important meeting place of Mungabareena, an ancient festival site and place of connection and sharing knowledge has council support for a Mungabareena Aboriginal Place nomination and declaration process under section 84 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, for formal recognition of Mungabareena as a site of significance, important to Aboriginal community values and recognition (Heckenberg, 2013). This enhances Albury Council's aspiration in achieving the New South Wales' State Plan goals regarding 'Strengthening Aboriginal Communities'. Infrastructure work at Mungabareena Reserve also brings it closer to joining the other part of the

beautiful Wagirra Trail already completed further downstream.

The influence of the Bogong Moth Festival impacted on ancient societies in this area around the river for many centuries. Story, song and dance, all were enacted there at Mungabareena, and the young ones were instructed in cultural values and beliefs. Later the men trailed off to ceremony on Mount Bogong, a site shared with people from the Eastern side of the high country. The Ngan Girra Festival at Mungabareena Reserve became a way of reenacting this tradition. The festival in fact celebrates the powerful connection through story that the Wiradjuri and adjoining nations have to the high country. The mountains were connectors between east and west as people came from both sides of the mountains to the high country.

Wiradjuri Cultural Focus

Wiradjuri have a deep and significant connection to country and to the river and a ceremonial relationship with sites around Albury. Remember that the Traditional Wiradjuri wanted for nothing and enjoyed their lives connected intimately to the source of nourishment, the river, and the giver of all things, the Earth.

The philosophy of the Wiradjuri is to look after nature and all that is in nature, this is what the old people would often assert. Then all that is in nature is in a relationship with you and you with nature.
 (Heckenberg, 2013, p. 67)

Where better to be productive in exploring Aboriginal ways of doing, ways of seeing and ways of being than a project where Country and cultural practices come together and where place takes on the profound meaning that it has always had in Aboriginal societies of being the teacher, of being the classroom (Fogarty, 2012). This embodies an interdisciplinary approach where cultural practice and pedagogy coalesce in the environment. At the same time cultural learning and studies, cultural history, the politics of culture, art in cultural and political contexts, as well as representing First Nations people's rights to belong to the land, are all connected (Bourke, Bourke, & Edwards, 1994). This gives an encouraging place for Aboriginal cultural life in terms of knowledge and significance in contemporary Australian culture. Storytelling is a way of recording and talking about all aspects of cultural knowing, as is dance, visual art, song or musical expression.

All these expressions of cultural knowledge reflect Indigenous ways of seeing (Yalmambirra, 2006) and cultural making inside an authority of Wiradjuri research and doing within an Aboriginal society. These expressions begin to weave a story-line within an Indigenous standpoint. Being an advocate for Aboriginal rights, for myself as Wiradjuri researcher and author, the examples given here and the theory expressed is contiguous to empathic

‘insider’ ontology, where the researcher belongs with the researched.

Therefore, Indigenist research is driven by the same ontological premises of relatedness, informing its epistemological structure and axiological principles. In making the principles and conditions of Indigenist research explicit is to confirm its place within the research collective and to challenge claims of ignorance, misunderstanding or apathy as ethnocentrism or racism. It is another task of the Indigenist researcher to broker spaces beyond research models and methodologies of collaboration and participation as a means to address the inequalities of research. (Martin, 2008, p. 140)

Being an insider, however, does not mean that ethical practice is tardy. In fact, regarding protocols around gender, behaviour of researchers and participants in the Wagirra project has been managed with great scrutiny, not only by the researcher but Elders overseeing progress. Martin (2008, p. 140) observes that there is also the duty and obligation of dispelling myths and misunderstandings and to ‘broker spaces’. Contemporary Indigenist researchers are brokers expressing the voices of the community as authentically as possible. With this freedom comes the duty and obligation that the old people talk about, a duty to our children and our children’s children; and a duty and obligation to encourage a true rendering of the past and the traditional values that gathered the old people together to assure the freedoms of today. The artists who have designed work for the Wagirra Trail Yindyamarra project have realised the same implications of the duty and obligation of being story-tellers in both Aboriginal and western paradigm. They carry the responsibility to represent stories and the underlying histories so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can learn by interpreting the river narrative through their (that is, the artists’) eyes. This has been well considered and has reflected cultural norms in terms of respectfulness and responsibility to Wiradjuri cultural values and beliefs.

Within the balance are the teachings and the dignified way of Ancestors. To look at this from a more metaphysical realm of the Dreaming and traditional spiritual values, and immutable law, these beliefs and principles employ the teachings of the old people, and the laws of the ancients. When maintained in a contemporary context regarding pedagogy of place, the Dreaming beliefs have formulated the work produced. Eldership, care of country and waterways as well as totemic belief for Aboriginal people to live by, asserts definite spiritual power from ancient authority. This ancient authority embraces all and this is part of the reflective process which has strong performative currency in the making of the Wagirra Trail, and the formulation and execution of sculptural documentation that dot the riparian landscape of the trail. This is a powerful best practice example of learning in Country (pedagogy of place) with cultural authority driven by cultural rigor and devel-

oped only by the maintenance of proper protocols and the following of Wiradjuri Law. With this rigor, the ceremony will be practiced through material production, and the formality of proper respect and responsibility for the spiritual essence of the land are adhered to. The factors underlying the complex relationship between all things, according to Wiradjuri Law and as practiced in ceremony, ensures the proper protection and maintenance of cultural values.

Throughout Aboriginal Australia religion was the mainstay of social existence. No distinction was drawn between the physical and spiritual universes so that the whole of the Aboriginal world was under spiritual authority. (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1998, pp. 213–214)

Within a white hegemony, however, Cartesian dualism (Weir, 2009) for a time opposed an Aboriginal/Indigenous way of being and seeing reality. Through projects such as the Wagirra Trail and Yindyamarra sculpture walk within the trail, these western value systems are diminished for the more profound philosophies of land and spirit. Mind, body and spirit are the holistic state of being, the traditional Aboriginal state of being. Everything relates to everything else (Heckenberg, 2010), our power to become part of a connection to the natural world, to the river and to nature elevates our experiences for the good of our spiritual wellbeing. As well as this, learning to work with the metaphysical world and enfolding spiritual beliefs and lore, used to be a normal way of life. This may be challenging in our present day lives, but old beliefs are not forgotten. We are still eager to be enfolded in the ways that we can.

Aboriginal customary law was not codified. Furthermore, it did not categorize legal rules so as to differentiate between mandatory rules which might be part of a separate legal system and rules of etiquette or standards of moral behaviour which in Australian law are generally seen to be quite separate. (Aboriginal Law Reform Commission, 1998, p. 224)

What the Wagirra Trail offers to the community is a conduit between the urban existence and living water and living culture. The Wagirra Trail is a medium by which community has a place to connect to and a place of healing (Atkinson, 2002). Within an Aboriginal way of seeing the world, the world is unified, moral values and notions of the environment are all tied in together, and this is another teaching point of Wagirra. ‘Belonging’ to community, means also ‘belonging’ to the land.

Process

The concept of respect does not carry much weight in Western thought patterns. Respect is still commonly perceived as deference to inherited status and traditional hierarchy; as driven by duty and honour and avoidance of shame; a means to avoid punishment. Respect is seen to encourage static and impersonal behaviour. Rarely do we regard respect in the Nhunggarra terms: the glue of society; as a powerful means

to create symmetry, balance, empathy and positive relationships between individuals. The value of respect could be a positive balance on individual freedom; it does not require legal intervention, because it works on an individual level. (Sveiby, 2009, pp. 20–21)

The Nhunggarra people of north-western New South Wales have values which powerfully resonate with those of the Wiradjuri, and respect is a common thread in terms of ethical behaviour. Respect for community values in community consultation is an important element of the process in ascertaining what kind of stories would best reflect the river narrative, from all its cultural vantage points. The vision for the Wagirra Trail has become part of Aboriginal community identity, and values. Local participation, invitations to schools to participate in workshops, many visits to the river and other cultural venues were identified as creative aspects of the story about the river and dutifully acknowledge and respect the many kinds of participation which build to the whole for Wagirra. The community determined it wanted a story about the river that respects Wiradjuri Country and embraces people from different traditional countries. The steering committee is made up of Wiradjuri Elders from the Land Council, Wiradjuri Council of Elders, City Council Aboriginal Liaison Officer and the Wiradjuri researcher and facilitator.

The community projections included artwork up and down the Wagirra Trail to represent different aspects of:

- Life of the river over a long time;
- Life of the river from high country to ocean;
- Cultural heritage;
- Living creatures and totems of the river;
- Environment; and
- Living on the river.

The practical processes of consultation, and carefully documenting the aspirational voices from the Aboriginal community for myself (as researcher) required restraint and clarity. Participating in a team to produce optimal outcomes as defined by the community, required acknowledgement of traditional ethical considerations informed by Indigenous ways of doing and being. The methodology has a fundamental approach to value respectful recognition and acknowledgement of Aboriginal knowledge and ways of being as well as cultural maintenance in this context. Sveiby's perspective, which is part of a larger work on sustainability, acknowledges how balance and symmetry are hand in glove with respect as a 'glue[s] of society' (Sveiby, 2009, pp. 20–21). Within Aboriginal protocols and notions of respect of cultural tenets, and traditional ownership of cultural knowledge (intellectual property rights) there is a process of proceeding carefully and with prudence in research. Yindyamarra, which requires Wiradjuri and those in Wiradjuri Country to 'respect, be polite, honour, do slowly' (Grant & Rudder, 2005, p. 335), accom-

panies the philosophy that Indigenous research parameters grow around the importance of respect, reciprocity and responsibility (Sveiby, 2009). This accompanies the philosophy that Indigenous research parameters grow around the importance of respect, reciprocity and responsibility (Sveiby, 2009, pp. 20–21) in behaviours towards people, and it is asserted to *include* places and nature. Significantly, the Wiradjuri Council of Elders endorsed the name Yindyamarra for the portion of the Wagirra Trail in which the final three-dimensional sculptures were installed.

Careful and Responsible Research

No two communities are the same, and so specific guidelines were formulated, based on local knowledge by myself, as the Indigenous (Wiradjuri) researcher for the Wagirra project (Heckenberg, 2013). The main methods which took into consideration the character of the Albury-Wodonga community are as follows:

- Adopt culturally safe behaviour;
- Be respectful on an individual level;
- Listen to people carefully and ask if it is okay to write something down;
- Consult with Elders of the community;
- Realise that Aboriginal Australia is diverse;
- Respect all people;
 - Respect the Traditional Owners, the Wiradjuri people and the Elders of Wiradjuri;
- Be conscious of people's cultural traditions and customs;
- Be conscious of people's spiritual and cultural views;
- Respect another person's cultural values;
- This includes respecting other people's totems and inherited beliefs;
- Be mindful that spiritual and cultural beliefs are part of a person's intellectual property;
- Mindful of research being sharing the history of the river;
- Respect the land, the bush and the river;
- Be inclusive of family;
- Recognise that everyone is entitled to an opinion;
- Any work will need to be useful for the community's aspirations;
- Reciprocity is part of sharing in research;
- The research project should have respect for cultural heritage;
- Practicing cultural heritage is a recognised human right;
- Outcomes are to maintain and protect culture and be useful for the community engaged in the investigation, whatever the topic;

- The community has a voice in decision-making that affect them; and
- That the community can express its own plans for a cultural future (supported by Albury City Community plan).

Yindyamarra

Indigenous researchers have developed theoretical frameworks which are responsive to an Indigenous viewpoint through a concept of 'relatedness' (Martin, 2008) and ceremonial aspects (Yungaporta, 2009). In a community sense, this draws people together into culturally safe story-places where sharing connection to the land and totemic relations tie together. This combined with Yindyamarra can be seen to be reflected in the Wagirra Trail project. The elements which these take into consideration have at their core the fundamental of respect which goes beyond people and includes beings from the natural world. Alongside, this are researchers such as Smith (1999) who discusses new ways of 'decolonising' not only certain ways of seeing, but incorporating Aboriginal ways of doing and performative research methods that reflect the contemporary fabric of research *manners* as part of research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). Smith's theories are about project work and cultural sovereignty, and inform practice for projects such as Wagirra, in which the motivation to feel optimism and to feel empowered is an important outcome, and this is about cultural relevance as well as cultural ownership (Smith, 1999).

This methodological approach regards Aboriginal philosophy and theory that can unify ideas, not only to do with an Aboriginal world view, within the identity paradigm, but also from a female-gender point of view, and the guidance of traditional women's perspectives. This has been another condition of the Wagirra project, the fact that due respect is given for gendered cultural practices, and the respectful management and protection of this knowledge. In projects where Indigenous intellectual property informs outcomes, and there are artefacts of material culture which can become part of the public domain, substantial contemporary guidelines are part of the duty of care to artists and informants. Within this context of Indigenous research and facilitation work, there is regard specifically to the management of Indigenous material as part of protocols and traditional law. The commentaries and reports of Indigenous lawyer Janke (2007) provide the most substantial guidelines in a diverse range of areas including, but not limited to, artists rights, intellectual property rights, cultural sustainability and economic sustainability; and the way the galleries should deal with artists. For example *Code of Practice for Galleries and Retailers of Indigenous Art* (Janke, 2007) provided a timely reminder and way forward for galleries (and others who publically display

Aboriginal material) to increase their duty of care and proper behaviour towards Aboriginal artists.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

As signatory to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the UN Declaration), Australia has moral obligation to adhere to the recognition of those rights set out in the UN Declaration. The nation's governmental institutions, including the country's education sector, has the responsibility to transform dialogues so that they reflect fair dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, the Murray Darling Basin Authority (2011, p. 37) has adopted the principles of the UN Declaration in its Indigenous engagement principles. The Albury City Council *Indigenous Cultural Sustainability Report* (Heckenberg, 2010) highlighted the importance of the Declaration's principles, and recent work with the community has resonated with Council's commitment to follow these as best practice.

In Article 31(1), of the UN Declaration sets out the core concept of maintaining, controlling, protecting and developing cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. It is these principles which resonate with the Aboriginal community's expectations for the Wagirra Trail.

Culture is seen as a way forward by not only those most active in this field, but by those who hold responsibility for young people. This means the community strongly feels the need for children to learn about their own culture. This can be anything practical, but also information that talks about history. Indigenous children are sometimes not aware of how rich their culture is, and how powerful history can be. Having knowledge of culture is good for self-esteem, and perhaps can cut down the lateral violence in this community. There are young mothers who as artists themselves, want to participate in any activities along the river. Community support is behind collaboration, the idea of collaborative work, doing things together. Maintaining and protecting culture, has been an essential topic of community conversation.

Articles 11 and 12 of the UN Declaration draw attention to manifestations of culture and the right to practice traditions in country and on cultural sites. These principles have been embraced by the way that the Wagirra Trail has taken shape and the manner in which it evolves. The Articles state:

Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites,

artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

Article 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned.

In being committed to more optimal outcomes for the Aboriginal community of the region, in terms of cultural life, employment and education, the Wagirra Trail project and the latest phase of a sculptural walk designed by local Aboriginal artists are building capacity, skills and connection to country. All of these are Indigenous rights in accordance with the UN Declaration.

Pedagogy of Place in Action

And, from the other side, I have wanted to show the generosity and inventiveness of the artists as they codify and maintain their own contemporary interpretations of their beliefs and society while communicating with the changing outside world. (Mundine, 1999, p. 243)

It is a preoccupation of Aboriginal people to pass on knowledge to those who come after, and the artists have big stories to pass on to the young people of the community and great generosity in being part of the sharing of knowledge. The idea of a 'pedagogy of place', where nature and the environment is affirmed through the compelling cultural characters of the artworks of Wagirra, along with the river and the riparian environment is ennobled by the artist's choice of their prudently thought-out designs and the carefully placed habitats of their creations. The 3.8 metre Wiradjuri Spirit woman, for example, based on the artist's own design from her grandma's Possum Skin Cloak, is positioned so the Wiradjuri Spirit woman sees the river but is reticent and unthreatening, more with the demeanour of a gentle nurturing matriarch and wise-woman. As Muecke (2004) asserts place can be transformative, the experience of understanding a spiritual point

of view of what might otherwise seem a commonplace experience, is transformative. This can build bridges and something is learned, something is gained.

Further along the river path, where a viewing deck has been built by the Wagirra team, the mundane art of creating a fish-trap takes on illustrious dimension, being 4 metres long and visually hovering in steel 'fibrous' ribbon, over a shimmering river. This spot is at a diversion in the trail, because of a billabong teeming with micro-organisms. This habitat as place is important to protect because of the significance to the tiny creatures to the food chain. Everyone in the team has sentiments about this careful diversion, and an understanding of the significance. The River Cod is the large creature at the apical end of the food chain, these tiny creatures are at the beginning; without the one, there cannot be the other. The fish-trap is designed by the Aboriginal men's shed (Elders and young Aboriginal men) and informs the viewer of the importance to traditional river life of the fish traps that populated the length of the river. The traditional Wiradjuri inhabitants of this part of the Murray River at Albury used wood to hold the traps, rather than stone, which was used by the Darling River people at Brewarrina (Dargin, 1976). The Wiradjuri of today, spend time at the river fishing as well not with fish-traps, but a line. The huge fish once everywhere in this part of the river have disappeared because of the western regime of river management. The billabongs, once the warm havens of the spawning Murray Cod, have been *shivered* into a different kind of life-story. The environmental flows of the river, when the colder water is let into the river, effects fish breeding. The remedy to this has been releasing fingerlings into the river to add to the fish population. Protecting the life of the little creatures in the billabong near the fish trap is more than symbolic, it is necessary. It is a real lesson about the land and river, and the story of the creatures of the waterways. Archaeological sites like fish traps and middens are evidence of permanent occupation and a steady supply of food, for a population the size of a village. Besides the fish traps, there were the billabongs and waterholes, which in times of flooding provided a form of aquaculture, especially when the river flooded, and the fish were caught in the waterholes.

Aquaculture is an ancient form of managing food sources in waterways, and in no uncertain terms the Wiradjuri would have been conscious of this particular way of trapping the fish. The Eel Farms of Lake Condah, Gunditjmarra Country in western Victoria attest to the knowledge of aquaculture amongst the traditional people. The eel farms were part of the trading regime, and would have meant that the Gunditjmarra were economically well off, as well as being well fed (Foley, 2010). The Wiradjuri of the Murray River in this region were wealthy with resources of every kind. Looking at aquaculture globally, the Hawaiian Polynesians, for example, worked with the river to create a management regime (Lee, 2006). A

giant 'billabong' or oxbow lake trapped the fish which were then separated from the river system and were part of a fish farm becoming a ready source for fresh fish.

Other important sources of nutrition as well as story are recalled as well. There is a strong continuing theme of the *Googar* (meaning Goanna) along Wagirra. The Googar is a strong symbol and totem in Wiradjuri. Stories relate to Googar in all parts of Wiradjuri country, with one Dreaming story from the Murrumbidgee River claiming the women Googar with their digging sticks, freed the river's flow for all to share. A fabricated goanna greets an ambulating audience to participate and learn from the river narrative at the beginning of the trail at Wonga Wetlands. Yet, the design here has a background which highlights another aspect of the learning journey for the community of Aboriginal artists involved: the interpretation of their designs into 3-D models through workshops and working with community mentors. This process has drawn together community gatherings as workshops, and peer support for skill sharing, as well as non-Indigenous mentors. Their level of expertise lends themselves to be part of strategies of capacity building and traction within the creative industries for local Aboriginal artists who they are empowering with practical knowledge. Another Googar four metres in length has been made from River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and appears like a giant wood carved toy, a reference to traditional toys remembered by Wiradjuri Elders. This is a practical way to tell this story, and its visible impact informs the viewer of the living culture of the Wiradjuri people today.

From research through community consultation come the stories of large numbers of Emus populating the Albury region at the time of colonisation, and the particular sensitive response to the reappearance of a single pair of brolgas. This highlights the necessity to tell the story of native flora and fauna and their previous habitation of millennia, before white occupation changed not only the First Nation's way of life, but the way of life of native species. A senior Wiradjuri artist has carved and wood-burned these important recollections into a series of vertical message sticks for the Wagirra Trail, which again references traditional knowledge with contemporary vigour. They appear along the trail adjacent to the Horseshoe Lagoon, a habitat for water birds. Indeed the Pelicans here are so prolific, they roost in the trees. Species being given proper names acknowledges their place as river Totems.

The River as 'Living Water'; Artwork, as Cultural Practice That is a Living Cultural Map

The river has gone through a great deal of change, just as the river people have. Cultural activities that can contribute to the cultural life of Albury-Wodonga Aboriginal

community, especially standing on Country and standing in the Law strengthen our human fibres. The features of Wagirra as a place of learning reflect the contributions of the artists with strong association with Country and the life blood, water, so captures associations with river country. Within a broader Indigenous perspective, the Wagirra sculptural trail provides a living cultural mapping that nourishes the spirit and informs through cultural expression with kinship and affiliations to totems through story-making and representation of sense of both Place and relationship to Nature. The Wagirra Trail is a pedagogy of place for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but its strength lies in the community ties it has that relate back to story and the river narrative that can be shared for futures generations of Aboriginal children, who inherit the story.

The community sense of history reflects how the river can still be part of an aspect of traditional life as teacher and healer. The Millawa Billa (Murray River) was and is a source of trade, cultural exchange, cultural activity, story, good health, community togetherness and so on. The natural history of the Murray River, also has informed the art practice and the ways of learning about the river, and tells us much about the way communities from Antiquity to the present day live alongside and on the Murray River. This is the other history of the river, which is not so much about only the *maayin* (meaning the people), but the river as an organism. The species of bird-life, plants, little and not so little vertebrate creatures and invertebrate life populate the river with sources of food for *maayin*, and are sources of many stories. The natural history of the Murray River is another important part of the narrative of Millawa Billa. Within the designs of the Wagirra Trail Yindyamarra sculptures the creatures of the river congregate and swarm, lie low like a lizard drinking, populate river red gum vertical message sticks and create ornamental forms on children's quiet spaces. Each form invites further discussion and story. Each form celebrates the life of the living water and invites participation in the narrative of the river. Other forms examine the philosophy of cultural practices, highlight Aboriginal technologies and pursue the meaning of life.

Conclusion

When you ask 'What does the river mean to you?' to some people, the river is everything. To me the river is my home, my playground and my classroom. Wiradjuri and Aboriginal people of other nations were born on the Murray River. Indeed some were 'born under a tree near the river'. The sentiments regarding the love and attachment to the river run deep. The Wagirra Trail and the influence of the *Yindyamarra* philosophy including the manifestations of cultural knowledge as presented in the sculptures dwelling along the river present the community with a way to incorporate place based learning and the love of the river within

the fabric of community inspired and celebrated cultural expression. The ecological and environmental perspectives embraced through the development of The Wagirra Trail has facilitated the Millawa Billa (Murray River) to become a classroom to a broader audience, and to inspire concepts of reconciliation while celebrating the fact that nature itself teaches through direct examples and spiritual conversations where the river babbling and the dragonfly buzzing informs us more about sustainability, cultural and physical connection to the environment, and the sciences and humanities than can be learnt in doors. The Wagirra project resonates with the philosophy of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in supporting an initiative that encourages the value of Indigenous ways of being and doing; optimistically this is to the nurturance and value of the cultural and economic futures of our communities, and manifestly, of the future of our environment.

The River is everything;
The River is my home;
The River is my classroom.

References

- Albury Art Gallery. (2012). *The journey forward*. Albury-Wodonga: Murray Arts & Albury City Council.
- Albury City Council. (2005). *Reconciliation statement*. Albury, Australia: Albury City Council.
- Atkinson, J. (2002). *Trauma trails*. Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press Pty Ltd.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). (2012). *Guidelines for research in Australian Indigenous studies*. Canberra, Australia: Author.
- Australian Law Reform Commission. (1998). Traditional Aboriginal society and its law. In W. H. Edwards (Ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal society*. (pp. 213–216). Melbourne, Australia: Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd.
- Bourke, C., Bourke, E., & Edwards, W.H. (1994). *Aboriginal Australia: An introductory reader in Aboriginal studies*. Brisbane, Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Dargin, P. (1976). *Aboriginal heritage: Aboriginal fisheries of the Darling-Barwon rivers*. Dubbo, Australia: Development and Advisory Publications.
- Du Cros, H. (2002). Trouble with bones. In *Much more than stones and bones* (pp. 117–141). Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.
- Fogarty, B. (2012). Country as classroom. In J. Altman & S. Kerins (Eds.), *People on Country: Vital landscapes; Indigenous futures* (pp. 82–93). Annandale, Australia: Federation Press.
- Foley, D. (2010). Enterprise and Entrepreneurship are not un-Aboriginal, *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 13(4), 85–93.
- Gilbert, K. (1994). *Because a white man'll never do it*. Sydney, Australia: Angus & Robertson.
- Grant, S., & Rudder, J. (2005). *A first Wiradjuri dictionary*. O'Connor, Australia: Restoration House.
- Gruenewald, D.A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(2), 3–12.
- Heckenberg, R. (2010). Holding heart: Aboriginal breathing space in research epistemology. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5(9), 107–118.
- Heckenberg, R.F. (2010). *Positive futures: Indigenous cultural sustainability consultation with the Aboriginal community of the Albury region*. Albury: Off Campus Learning Centre, Monash University.
- Heckenberg, R. (2013). *The Wagirra Trail project: A history of the Murray*. Albury, Australia: Albury City Council & Monash University.
- Janke, T. (2007). *Code of practice: for galleries and retailers of Indigenous Art*. Melbourne, Australia: City of Melbourne.
- Kabaila, P. (1995). *Wiradjuri places*. Jamison Centre, ACT: Black Mountain Projects.
- Lee, E. (2006). *The Hawaiians: reflecting spirit* [Motion Picture]. USA: Film works.
- Lovett-Gardiner, I. (1997). *Lady of the lake*. Melbourne, Australia: Koorie Heritage Trust.
- Martin, K. (2008). *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders*. Teneriffe, Australia: Post Pressed.
- Muecke, S. (2004). *Ancient & modern: Time, culture and Indigenous philosophy*. Sydney, Australia: University of NSW.
- Mundine, D. (1999). The land is full of signs. In H. Morphy & M. Boles (Eds.), *Art for the land*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia.
- Murray Darling Basin Authority. (2011). *A yarn on the river: Getting Aboriginal voices into the Basin Plan*. Canberra, Australia: Author.
- Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal*, 28(5/6), 281–291.
- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). (2007). *Keeping research on track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics*. Canberra, Australia: Author.
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies*. Dunedin, FL: Zed Books.
- Sveiby, K.E. (2009). Aboriginal principles for sustainable development as told in traditional Law stories. *Sustainable Development*, 17(6), 20–21.
- Taylor, K., & Neidjie, B. (1989). *Story about feeling*. Broome, Australia: Magabala Books.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2008). *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Author.

Weir, J. (2009). *Murray river Country: An ecological dialogue with traditional owners*. Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Yalmambirra. (2006). Knowledge and Wiradjuri: Who is telling the truth? A Wiradjuri perspective. *Proceedings of*

the 12th ANZSYS conference- Sustaining our social and natural capital. Katoomba, Australia: ISCE Publishing.

Yungaporta, T. (2009). Aboriginal pedagogies at the cultural interface, (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Cooktown, Australia: James Cook University.

About the Author

Robyn Heckenberg is a Wiradjuri woman who is active in education, visual art and community economic and cultural sustainability research projects. She has many years experience teaching Indigenous Studies across a range of subject areas. She undertakes primary research that includes community consultation and community development working in Country. She has curated major Indigenous exhibition work, created reports based on community voices to inform government policy and is active in her own art practice. Her art practice is an expression of Wiradjuri cultural and environmental sovereignty and knowledge. She has published broadly within the areas of education, the humanities and the arts. She is completing a PhD at Monash University's Caulfield campus.