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Relationships with the School: Listening to the Voices of a Remote Aboriginal Community

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Introduction

Whites see us as crows, sitting in the nest with mouths open, waiting for the mother and father crow to come along. Those government fellas pretend to ask, but really tell us. They've had their minds made up all the time (Yanni Lester, cited by H. Penny, 1982).

Aboriginal people need meaningful personal relations in order to work well with non-Aboriginal teachers and they seek signs of genuine interest from those whitefellas (Shimpo, 1978).

The relationship between school and community is of vital importance to schooling. It has profound effects on pedagogy, curriculum and the construction of classroom culture (Folds, 1987).

Is Western style schooling working out for Aboriginal people in remote communities? Is it imposed on communities rather than developed through a process of attentive listening to Aboriginal voices? Can education on remote Aboriginal communities be improved by creating meaningful personal relationships between school staff and the community? Schools such as Strelley, Yirrkala, Milingimbi and Murrupurtiyanuwu reveal successful relationships between community

and school and the Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal teachers, but the latest Commonwealth and State government inquiries indicate that schooling is not working out at all well for Aboriginal people on many remote communities.

In 1999, for my Master's Degree, I listened to Aboriginal people's ideas (on a particular remote Top End community) on correct protocol for consultation and establishing relationships between non-Aboriginal teachers and the community. In 2000, I have been doing research for my PhD on improving relationships between the school and community in the same remote community. I have spent some years as teacher and librarian, artist, counsellor, friend and relation on this community. The PhD project will offer an opportunity for members of the community to speak their experiences, their concerns and their ideas of how the school might better fit into the community and serve its needs. In the process it will attempt to engage in and provide in itself a model of listening, as well as documenting one particular informal initiative to facilitate such listening on the part of the teachers in the school.

Statement of the Problem and Aims

This paper recognises a number of problems which lead to the questions that this project proposes. Firstly, Western education, for Aboriginal people on remote communities is widely held to be a failure (Hughes, 1984; Groome and Hamilton, 1994; Groome, 1994;

Wooltorton, 1997; Foley,1999). As a group of East Kimberly women expressed this failure over a decade ago: 'They bin purrum in dem-da gadyakin skuling an it's not workin out too good' (Theis, 1987: i). It is important to note, as the recent Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (1999) points out, that this failure continues a widespread desire among Indigenous people for improvement in education for their children; despite the frequent, and popular, attribution of blame to Aboriginal failure to recognise or respond to the many benefits of education (Katu Kalpha: Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Katu Kalpha: *Report on The inquiry Into the Effectiveness of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians* (2000).

Secondly, however, schooling for remote Aboriginal people continues to be experienced as a vehicle of oppression, assimilation, intrusion and alienation (Eades, 1985; Christie, 1985; Mulvaney, 1989; Groome, 1994; Groome and Hamilton, 1994; Dodson, 1994; Combs, 1994; Smith, 1996; Morgan and Slade, 1998; Wooltorton, 1997; Jude, 1998; Budby and Foley, 1998). *The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education – 'Emerging Themes'* suggests Australian Indigenous people 'have become alienated from the school system'. (2000: 58). An important element in this is the sense that school is essentially an outside institution imposed on communities (Kukathas, 1992).

One factor in this general failure of schooling in remote Aboriginal communities is a lack of adequately trained teachers: 'only half the universities in Australia offer teaching courses that include Aboriginal or Indigenous studies as a core component' (*The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education– 'Emerging Themes*, 2000: 28) and there seem to be no formal arrangements between State governments and universities to provide appropriately trained graduates to teach in

Indigenous schools (*Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, 1999: 83). Likewise, *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (1999) admits that there is little cross-cultural preparation, nor preparation for relationship building. This, in spite of the fact that the Commonwealth Government's National Indigenous English and Numeracy Strategy (2000) identifies the need for competent teacher training and preparation for educating Indigenous students as a matter of some importance.

Another related factor contributing to the failure of Western schooling in these communities is 'not listening'. The Collins' Review quotes Indigenous community members who state that they should be asked for their advice to address problems in the education of Indigenous children: 'Why should those people talk about our business. We should be telling the new teachers what we want them to know' (1999: 84). The inquiry observed that, 'where parents and community members play an active and decision making role in the school, students enjoy their schooling and feel optimistic about their future prospects' (March, 2000: 58).

This project recognises that 'it is time for Aboriginal people to speak for themselves because non- Aboriginal people can only talk about their own experiences of Aboriginality and how they construct Aboriginal people from their own perspectives and other people's constructions' (Christie and Harris, 1994: 2-3) and other people's perceptions of what they need and who they are (Nakata, 1998). Mandawuy Yunupingu addressing a remote community stressed 'The community spirit must drive the education policy – tell the school what you want from education – it's your school!' (*National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Final Report*, 1994: 6). Therefore, this project seeks to listen, explore one model of listening already suggested by Elders in one

remote community and to identify problematic areas and positive possibilities. The project will focus on one community to allow exploration in depth and in recognition of the importance of quality of relations for open communication.

Review of the Background Literature

Many conservative non-Aboriginal Australians believe they have done their best for Aboriginal people, but think Aboriginal people lack drive and initiative (Howson, 2000), resist being educated (Folds, 1987; Cowlishaw, 1989) and are centuries behind Western culture (Christie, 1995, Ryan, 1997; Gool and Patton, 1998). However, the Collins' Review established that there was 'unequivocal evidence of deteriorating outcomes from an already acceptably low [educational] base' and 'evidence of long-term systemic failure to address this problem' *(Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory,* 1999: 1). Yet Indigenous parents consider that mainstream education is the most appropriate means of gaining a social and economic identity (Harris, 1990; Keefe, 1992; O'Shane and Bickford, 1991; Jordan, 1992).

Notwithstanding, Aboriginal people find the Western education system intrusive and alienating (Kukathas, 1992; Bundarriyi, Yangarriny, Migalpa and Warlkunji, 1991; Foley, 1999). 'The present education system is limited, because it lacks cultural relevance and could lead to the loss of Aboriginal languages, culture and unique identity' (DEET, 1995: 94). Similarly, The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991: 336) commented:

> School based education systems in Australia have historically been unwilling or unable to accommodate many of the values, attitudes, codes and institutions of Aboriginal society.

Aboriginal lack of success in school is influenced by poor, prejudiced and discriminatory teacher relationships with students and Aboriginal families (Sara, 1997; Tesses and Polesel, 1996), a lack of teacher role models or an understanding of Aboriginal culture (Guider, 1991; Harris and Malin, 1994; Lee, 1993) and alienation from the effects of hidden curriculum (Ingram and Randall, 1997; Barry, 1994).

> A new teacher ... school should take courage from the fact that the longer they stay in an Aboriginal community and the more they relate to people in the community outside the classroom the more effective their teaching efforts are likely to be (Harris, 1984: 97).

Unfortunately,

> most teacher training does not adequately prepare new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in remote Australia and there is commonly a lack of local knowledge among teaching staff *(Recommendations: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education,* 2000: 44)

Although only half the universities in Australia offer teaching courses that include Indigenous Studies as a core component non-Indigenous teachers find it difficult to adopt culturally-inclusive, appropriate and effective approaches with Indigenous students without adequate training and preparation *(National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy,* 2000: 28). Teachers are unprepared for the children they will teach, the culture shock is severe and there is little preparation for relationship building (Ingram, 1981; Green, 1983; *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory,* 1999) and many 'who went to live and teach in a community which was 99 percent Aboriginal have never actually met an Aboriginal person before in their life' (Nicholls, 1999: 103). A decade ago Osborne stated that familiarity with the local scene and its protocols as well as fluency in the local language are vital ingredients for the culturally congruent teacher of Aboriginal students (1989a), yet a current senate inquiry is still recommending: Teacher training curriculums should include 'Indigenous culture, English as a second

language and basic training in identifying pediatric illnesses' *(Katu Kalpa: Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians,* 2000: 103-4). Although O'Brien, Plooij and Whitelaw (1975), de Hoog (1979) and Crawford (1993) offer recipe book cultural rules and protocol for non-Aboriginal people who work on remote communities to follow, current literature indicates that these reports are generally not studied by teachers and so far literature suggests that Western policy hasn't listened to Aboriginal people themselves. In fact Spivak (1990) suggests that researchers should stop trying to know the 'Other' and listen to the plural voices of those 'Othered' as constructors and representatives of wisdom and authentic knowledge.

In the perceptions of Aboriginal people every individual teacher carries the burden of race relations of the past (Calgaret, 1997). From an Indigenous perspective, 'the past is a living and resonant part of the present' (Marker, 1999: 17), consequently, 'socio-historico-political realities beyond the school constrain much of what occurs in the classrooms' (Osborne, 2000: 45). Reynold's (1999: 38-39) interviews with Aboriginal people suggest:

> The terrible past of violence and dispossession still haunts the living ... contact with migloos [is] still fraught with tension and anxiety. ... White man wielded power. A white man meant trouble.

But unfortunately 'racial abuse and vilification from teachers, negative comments about families, prejudicial treatment' (Grey, Hunter and Schwab, 1998: 18; O'Shane and Bickford, 1991; Malin, 1997; Ryan, 1997; Gool and Patton, 1998) and 'systemic and institutional racism' (Katu Kalpha, 2000: 50; Groome, 1995; Gool and Patton, 1998) still exist. Therefore problematic relations between the school and community are largely predictable, yet a good 'relationship between school and the community is vital to the success of schooling' (Folds, 1987: 99) and exemplar schools, such

as Strelley, Murrupurtyanuwu and Yirrkala Schools reveal that this two way exchange can be achieved successfully (Jordan, 1992; Buckley, 1996; Gardiner, 1996; Puruntaye-meri, 1996).

A number of studies indicate that the history of violence and dispossession of the colonial era lives on in the present. Rosser's account of *Dreamtime Nightmares* for instance, demonstrates, not only its own framing in the present but in the tone of many individual recollections he cites, the ongoing bitterness which accompanied white invasion and Aboriginal resistance in North Queensland. The Protectionist era, from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s still figures in Aboriginal memories and can be seen to exercise a powerful shaping presence now (Jordan, 1992; Huggins, 1998; Rosser, 1985). The report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families (1997) for instance, and some responses to it (Read, 1998; Dingo, 1998; Moriaty, 2000) indicate how acutely members of Aboriginal communities still feel about the weight of that era. Pearson's *Light on the Hill* (2000) demonstrates the extent to which the legacy still continues to colour contemporary Aboriginal responses to government policies.

With the advent of European culture remote Aboriginal people on missions and reserves were treated as objects of administration:

> White man with different hard life and government laws drove away all the good tribal ways of living [and made] us sad, quiet, frightened and shy – Tribal life wrecked, [we were] worthless and unwanted and altogether forgotten (Roughsey, 1984: 1-2).

Colonial administration has treated Aboriginal people as objects that 'were rarely seen or looked at: they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved, confined, taken over' (Said: 207) and now as objects 'of passive welfare

dependency' (Pearson, 2000: 1). Education became a tool to train Aboriginal people to become servants and 'domestics and take orders' (Huggins, 1997: 170) and 'to strip [Aboriginal people] of their culture' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, 1997: 552).

In this context, Trigger (1992: 7) in his ethnographic study of colonialism, resistance and consent in an Aboriginal community in north west Queensland claims that social relations between Aboriginal and White residents were typically strained, 'with little apparent intimacy and a great deal of social distance'. Trigger (1992: 101) continues, revealing that 'Doomadgee Aborigines exclude Whites as part of a defense against constant administrative intrusiveness and attitudinal ethnocentrism on the part of White Australian society'. 'The experience of many [Aboriginal people] is of harassment, fear and humiliation due to young and ignorant police and inexperienced school teachers' (Cowlishaw, 1988: 263).

Consultation, negotiation and the process of listening to Aboriginal people regarding their belief about the education of their children is vital (Bucknall, 1982; Theis,1987; Harris, 1992; Malin ,1994; Routh, 1997). Malin (1994: 111) accentuates the fact that many teachers of Aboriginal children haven't listened to the community – 'Even some who had experience in remote communities, do not understand or cater to the needs of the Aboriginal students'. 'Our vision of what is right for us is not listened to. We were always told, but never asked' (Pryor, 1998: 52). Sonny Flynn, coordinator, Aboriginal Task Force South Australia Institute of Technology also states:

> In my position here ... I meet daily the results of an inadequate, inappropriate and alien school system. ... Aboriginal people have been locked out of the decision making process in education. Decisions are made, usually by whites: policies are made, again

by whites, and finally programs are implemented by whites. Consultation is supposed to take place but doesn't because we don't have the qualifications.

The National Inquiry conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families 'did not ring the time, but just let them sit and talk' (Wilson, 1997: 393). In fact 'being listened to was vital to the mental health of the stolen generation' (Wilson, 1997: 393). Therefore, rather than imposing educational practices, listening to community voices will promote participatory democracy and social justice (Habel, 1999; Osborne, 2000) and Education Queensland is presently trialing pilot projects to listen to Elders (Queensland Department of Education, 1997) for community consultation and negotiation between principals and the community at Daylight Island and Cone Aboriginal communities (Education Queensland, 1999).

After one hundred years of intensive government controls, investigation has shown decades of defective teaching on communities (Kidd, 1997). 'Many Aboriginal parents have viewed schools as hostile environments' (Heitmeyer, 1998: 20; Groome, 1995), but in view of years of 'forced subordination' (Reynolds, 1999: 37) it has been proposed that if the influence of mainstream society and culture through the education systems is such that the members of Indigenous people believe they are being assimilated, then they are likely simply to opt out: one's integrity may be maintained by apparently silent tolerance of the *status quo*, while in fact letting the rest of society go on around, steadfastly and impassively refusing to be part of it (Ingram, 1981, Trigger, 1992, Reynolds, 1999).

Western educational methods and training is largely inappropriate for remote Aboriginal communities (Ingram, 1981; *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, 1999;

Katu Kalpha: Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *Katu Kalpha: Report into the Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians*, 2000) and teachers could learn more appropriate pedagogy from local Indigenous community members, because research suggests communities prefer to retain traditional institutions (Willmot, 1981; Craven, 1998, Katu Kalpha, 2000). Aboriginal participants are also more concerned with the human relationship and belongingness aspects of schooling as opposed to an emphasis on 'task efficiency and academic substance' (Malin, 1994: 108; Smith, 1997).

In her study: *Aboriginal Viewpoints on Education: A Survey in the East Kimberley Region,* Theis (1987) records a broad sample of surveys and questionnaires with remote Aboriginal people about their views on education. Theis allocates a chapter to the historical loss of Aboriginal parental control of education and a chapter to parental participation in education in schools now. The overwhelming comment by Aboriginal people throughout these chapters is the total lack of consideration by the Gadiya (1987: 52), or non-Indigenous people for the Indigenous people: 'They never asked me' is a typical comment by an Aboriginal person. As Theis (1987: 21) says, 'The European Christian teachings were enforced by stern and often cruel punishments for not conforming'. Nakata (2000: 222) has also said:

> When I'm struggling with my work I often think of my grandfather, I think of his generous nature, his bitterness and suppressed anger and confusion over the intrusions of white control into his community.

While, in general colonialism rules, it is not undifferentiated: that in part relations with white teachers might depend on particular local relations with specific institutions such as the church, missionaries and administrators and Memmott and Horsman, for instance,

show on Daylight Island, while the church did a great deal that disrupted the community, nevertheless there were more positive relationships in the time of Belcher and Wilson (1991). The Aboriginal people of Daylight Island lost control of their lives, relationships and education in 1920, but in the 1970s the Presbyterian Church developed a new policy that advocated self-determinism and cultural revival for Daylight Island people (Memmott and Horsman, 1991; Kidd, 1997). At the time the Queensland Minister for Aboriginal Affairs wrote:

> A civil rights attitude is developing at Aurukun and [Daylight] Island, apparently condoned by Mission Staff and ... the Missionaries' attitude does not appear to be favourable to governments and this appears... to be communicated to the Aboriginal residents (QSA TR254 6c/8, 21.11.69 Hewitt to ministers, cited in Kidd, 1997: 271-272).

Clearly, then, there are good reasons for exploring further the problems facing, and the possibilities open to, schooling in remote Aboriginal communities. There are evident gaps in the literature, as well as pointers to both general problems to be explored, the importance of the peculiarities of local contexts, and possible principles to inform more productive, positive practices. This proposed thesis will address some gaps, informed by the understandings already established in the literature.

Brief Statement of Theory – and a Statement of Rationale

In order to delve into the complex issues involved in the concept of interpersonal Aboriginal community-non-Aboriginal teacher relations this project sees critical social theory as most congruent with the concerns of the participants: the Aboriginal interviewees, the key Elders of the community, who have, firstly, initiated the idea for the project and secondly, who will inform the thesis. The views of this project are geared to transformative practice and empowerment of community members

and Indigenous researchers agree that 'all academics must work towards the empowerment of Indigenous people .. [especially Indigenous] families and their community' (Gilbert, 1995: 62).

This project is informed by:

> thought that is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted ... [in which] certain groups in society are privileged over others [and that there is a realisation] that mainstream research practices are most often, unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression (Kinchloe and McLaren, 1994: 139-140).

Indeed institutional racism, which operates through a key institution like a school is part of a pattern of the distribution of power, which regularly and systematically disadvantages Aboriginal people (Pettman, 1986: 7).

In terms of critical social theory this project recognises that there is a vast cultural gap between school and community in terms of what schools symbolise as institutions. Schools as hegemonic establishments are colonial institutions, and they have a literate, rationalist and materialist culture in which 'schools operate as economically efficient... factories to train a work force' (Giroux, 1992: 10-11) rather than places within communities which educate citizens. Schools use Western practices of time and are government organisations. In terms of power the school and the teachers have a privileged position, whereas 'the traditional Aboriginal does not publicly display their overall position and power' (Dingo, 1998: 14). The community presently stands outside the school, but according to the interviews that the researcher has already conducted this was not always so when some of the Elders were teachers and when one particular headmaster worked in partnership with the community in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Presently the school is an instruction site which legitimises certain forms of culture and disclaims others (Freire, 1985; Christie, 1995) and this project seeks to listen to community members talk about relationships with teachers where the humanity of community members who are seen as Other to the hegemonic culture is 'ideologically disparaged and ruthlessly denied' (Giroux, 1992: 33). Indeed the literature reveals that this community has challenged this prevailing relationship of power since 1969. However it has only been in the last two years that Commonwealth and State inquiries have challenged this hegemonic educational power and enabled the voices and visions of the Aboriginal people of these remote communities to be heard as part of a struggle to change the social and material relations of their people and this project will be part of the struggle that empowers the remote Aboriginal people as democratic political communities. Though the researcher cannot speak inclusively as an Aboriginal person this project will record the voices and observations of these people to deepen other Australian educators' understandings of the complexity of the 'traditions, histories, knowledges and politics' (Giroux, 1992: 35) that the community brings to the teachers and the schools and to bring about positive social change (Carspecken, 1996).

Outline of Methods

This project will be using in-depth unstructured interviews with twelve self-elected participants although if more community members self-elect to join in the researcher will record their voices. The researcher has already conducted some fieldwork and has found that many people will add their voices to one particular interview. In this regard Indigenous researchers encourage other researchers to 'encourage participation, input, collaboration, debate and criticism' (Collard and Pickwick, 1995: 33).

The emphasis in the interviews will be on listening rather than questioning for two reasons. Firstly, listening to people is a standard technique in qualitative research. Repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and [participants] directed towards understanding the [participants'] perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: 77) rely on listening in an unstructured situation. Secondly, the methods proposed are in line with standard and culturally appropriate protocol in a traditional Aboriginal community. Senior people in a community expect to be listened to (Smith, 1996; Buckley, 1996) and this project recognises this position. In this respect unstructured interviewing is an ideal method in that the researcher can spend a greater amount of time with the participant; the participant can control the flow of information; the participants' perspective is central; the participant uses language that is natural to them and the participant has equal status to the researcher in the dialogue (Burns, 2000). Aboriginal participants on a remote community prefer a great deal of flexibility of time and place to communicate freely and recall events in a relaxed and informal fashion. The informants must have 'time to listen and time to finish' (Burns, 2000:427).

Fundamental to the success of the interviews will be the established rapport between the participants and researcher and the fact that the interviewees have initiated the projects and may decide to re-negotiate and re-structure the questions. As acknowledged by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) distance has been reduced and trust has been built up between the participants and researcher over a number of years. Ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal people (Brady, 1993: 107) states that a:

> self-critical, active non-Aboriginal researcher who works with Aboriginal people to ensure empowerment, and their own degrees of disempowerment is most welcome to join in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

The interview questions will be framed in language appropriate to language style and fluency appropriate to the participants. The unstructured interviews will take the form of a conversation between informant and researcher but guided by a set of broadly pre-determined issues. The researcher has found during interviewing that while some people speak freely when they are asked about their relationships with the school and community other participants are reluctant to speak. In this case the researcher has used some of these questions:

- Tell me about your relationships with the teachers.
- What is your formal relationship with the school?
- On what formal occasions do you interact with the school and the teachers?
- On what informal occasions do you interact with the teachers?
- Are there some occasions, contexts or sites of social practice and discourse that you interact with or see teachers more?
- On what school occasions do you see teachers?
- On what community occasions do you see teachers?

The researcher has already conducted one set of interviews and has listened, without interruption, as many of these people remember events that they have not thought of in many years. Many of these Elders, especially women, were teachers. Burns (2000) suggests that a major disadvantage of open-ended interviews are that they are open to the vagaries of the informant's interpretation and presentation of reality, but adds, as the researcher has found that the participants genuinely perceive events and their experiences as they present them. Even though Burns sees this as a problem of validity ethnographic context and frequency of recurrent perceptions of participants validify those perceptions.

This project will analyse the interviews searching for recurrent key themes and the frequency and salience of these themes. Ethnographic observations will help to analyse the interview texts in terms of meanings, rules, social relations, subjectivities and multiple perspectives within them. Critical analysis will be used to study structured systems of social relations which may have sustained unequal positions of power, the practices where the Aboriginal participants interpret the actions of non-Aboriginal teachers and interact in social situations and lastly the participants' construction of subjectivity.

Thematic analysis as a method of analysis is informed by critical social theory in that it will help this thesis to examine the practices that limit and marginalise Aboriginal students with the intent of alternative reflexive practices (Allen, 199: 31). In fact, in the views of the Aboriginal participants who have already spoken to the researcher, critical social theory matches their concerns. The issues of oppression as a social justice issue, exploita-tion, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism; stigmatisation, ridicule, inferiorisation and assimilation have been widely voiced by community members.

Outline of Ethical Issues

As this project revolves around Aboriginal people, ethical issues are absolutely vital (Drysdale, 1995; Bourke, 1995). Participants have been elected by the community for their specialist knowledge, experiences, age and perspectives. This project is based on the recognition of the value of Indigenous perspectives, experience, knowledge and their contribution to educational research (AITSIS, 2000). This project recognises the diversity and uniqueness of the community as a whole and the views of individuals and groups within

the community.

The methods proposed accord with standard and culturally appropriate protocol in an Aboriginal community in that senior members expect to be listened to. Project methodology is also in accordance with the ethical consideration that 'communities must use their collective participatory and collaborative decision making processes to ensure that power and control is exercised by the community and in the interests of the community' (Williams, 1993: 91). This project is using critical social theory which has been identified by Indigenous researchers as an ethically appropriate paradigm (Gollagher, 1995: 68). 'Critical sociology encompasses theory that identifies insitutionalised practices and ideologies that oppress groups of people and ethical concerns for social justice can be grounded in this theory' (Gollagher, 1995: 69).

Ethically, this project will be informed by the history of the community and will note the following recommendations (Unicorn, 1999: 35):

> If governments have learnt anything... it is that the particular histories of Aboriginal communities in relation to their experiences with white communities, economies, government agencies and local permutations of government policies, must inform approaches to education ... but implementation must differ according to local community desire and determination.

Standard confidentiality procedures will be followed and although consent forms can be signed the researcher has and will be explaining the consent form orally to each participant. A copy of transcript will be given to and read to each participant. Whilst ethnographically interviewing Aboriginal participants the researcher will be conforming to the research and ethics views of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres
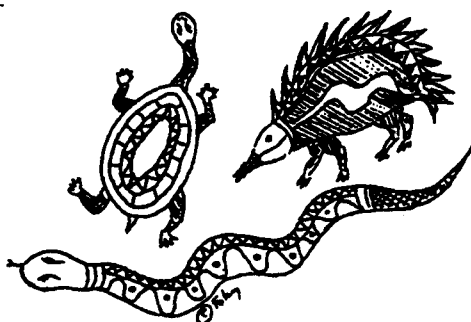
Strait Islander Studies and the project will work towards empowerment and self-determination of the people. The processes and structures of my field research will be that of ongoing listening, observation, communication, consultation, negotiation and review of the research.

Conclusion

After spending four weeks (for the first round of interviews) listening to the voices of the Aboriginal people in this remote community the findings of the literature review have been borne out. It is vital that education be improved through a process of attentive listening rather than an imposition of inappropriate pedagogy, curriculum and lack of meaningful personal relationships with the community. Two statements by community members speak for themselves:

> I think when the new teachers are coming in they should be aware there's some Aboriginal ways of doing certain things. There should be a small committee so that when the new teachers come they can brief them about our culture so they will be aware and then about how we want them to treat our kids and how they should love them. So, they should be taught this knowledge. Also one of the things that is breaking down is the relationship with the teachers and the parents because when they come here, as far as I know, they only stay in their classroom and in their houses in the teacher's area. That's all. They are not getting to know the children's parents and families (Elder, personal communication, 2000).

> [To have a good relationship with the Aboriginal people in the community] you got to go and sit among the people; walk around to different homes and have a little chat to people. Say, 'Hello' and see how everyone is; whether they're sick or well. Those kind of relationships are good and later life they'll trust you. They'll never forget about that. We want to know about the teachers, you know. They might want to tell us more about the school: what they need to be done, ask how we feel about things: all these kind of things. Now, they're [the school] only taking us [the Grannies] in for breakfast (Granny

M..., personal communication, 2000). These statements provide an insight into the social world of Aboriginal people on remote communities. These people are bush people, not city people. They only want teachers who have previously lived or mixed with Aboriginal people, have been educated about Aboriginal culture, perhaps come from the bush or a caring, extended family; are mature, and are humble enough to listen to the community and allow the parents and community to determine school policy. Jordan's (1992: 75) comments on the Strelley Community School are very apt here:

> Just as tradition-oriented people have accommodated to the white man's law, so they [the community] expect their white employees to accommodate to their Law. For the white staff, the acceptance of a job depends upon the acceptance of the aims and objectives of the [Aboriginal] group, and a loyalty to the group in its endeavours. All members of the staff and their children are integrated into the community in a flexible but clear way.

Biography

Hilarry Colman-Dimon has a Bachelor of Arts majoring in History, Literature and Organisational Behaviour; a Graduate Diploma in Teaching; a Diploma in Jungian Psychology; a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts (History); a Masters of Education in Guidance and Counselling and is presently completing a PhD in Education at James Cook University. She grew up on a remote community with Gangalida, Lardil and Waanji-garrawa people and has taught and lived for years on remote Indigenous communities. Her great-great-great grandmother on her father's side belonged to the Wirradjuri Nation. Her e-mail is Hilarry.Dimon@jcu.edu.au
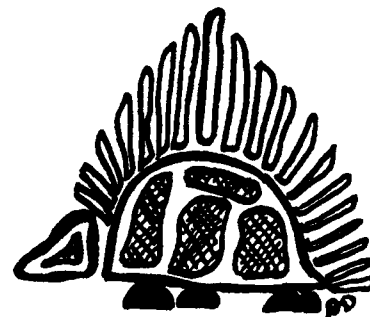
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