The Whole of Community Engagement initiative: Interculturality in remote Aboriginal education

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It is generally accepted by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners that progress in Indigenous education depends on working in partnership with Indigenous people, and that programs and services are best provided in partnership. The 2014–2016 Whole of Community Engagement initiative built a partnership of non-Indigenous researchers with researchers, teachers, education leaders and elders from six remote Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. In this paper we describe the features that led us to characterise the initiative and the remote community and school context as intercultural and complex. The former included methodology, staffing, meeting procedure and interpersonal communication, negotiation of meaning and decision-making. On the basis of this approach, we found that intercultural complexity was strongly evident in schooling in Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island, North East Arnhem Land, which was the community most closely studied by the authors. The paper contributes to the recognition of intercultural complexity in remote Aboriginal schooling, and the potential benefit that its recognition can have for educational outcomes in those contexts.

Keywords: Whole of Community Engagement initiative, remote Aboriginal education, interculturality, intercultural partnership, complexity

Introduction

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative[1] was conceived in response to issues of Indigenous higher education identified in the Aboriginal-led Behrendt Report (Behrendt et al., 2012). The initiative sought to understand the factors influencing student engagement with school and aspiration to further education in those communities, from local and social scientific perspectives. It approached six remote communities, identified on the basis of their capacity, to gauge their interest in participating. All six—Yuendumu and Tennant Creek in central Australia, Yirrkala and Galiwin'ku in North East Arnhem Land, and Gunbalanya and Maningrida in West Arnhem Land—agreed. The initiative took place in the context of Indigenous mistrust associated with colonial history and a history of research of doubtful benefit to remote communities (de Crespigny et al., 2004, p. 8; Hall, 2014), as well as long governmental neglect and recent intervention (the Northern Territory Emergency Response). The remote schooling context has also been powerfully shaped by the notion of "both-ways" education, which emerged in Dagaragu (d'Arbon et al., 2009, p. 19) and was further developed in Yirrkala (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012, pp. 311–313), one of the communities in which the WCE worked.

The initiative employed one or more Aboriginal researchers from each community, most of whom had formal teaching qualifications and had worked as teachers in the 1980s era of responsiveness by tertiary institutions to the needs of remote trainees. These researchers were based for much of the time in their own community, where they worked in tandem with a visiting campus-based researcher, most of whom were non-Indigenous. Each team conducted ethnographic research into barriers to and attitudes towards school and further education in its community over a three-year period. We return below to outline how the members of these teams, notably the Indigenous members, were intercultural people (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

The initiative itself was an intercultural endeavour. Each aspect of the partnership within each research team and with research participants implicated cross-culturality, which flags cultural boundedness, difference and statis (e.g. see Ober & Bat, 2007), and interculturality, which flags cultural intersection, identity multiplicity and dynamism (as outlined below). In this context, interculturality existed in the relations between individuals whose primary background was in one or other of the major cultural groups involved (Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian), but who at the same time bridged the differences between them, in part on the basis of other shared cultural affiliations. The project required the researchers to negotiate the intersections of culturally conditioned values, knowledges and habits of interpretation. Its aims and design were initially outlined in the communities, and the research conducted, in local languages and English. Its conduct demanded intercultural communication. Its governance involved intercultural decision-making. Communication in team meetings generated an intercultural relationship. Findings were reached collaboratively and feedback relevant to each community conveyed in locally appropriate and academic forms.

A result of intercultural partnership at various levels was trust between staff and with schools and communities. Trust—which, according to Dai (2009, p. 8) and Ting-Toomey (2005, p. 218, p. 220), is in intercultural encounters an indicator of successful communication—resulted in strong commitment to the research by staff and satisfaction among Aboriginal stakeholders with the initiative's address of long-standing frustrations. The relationships revealed that the Aboriginal researchers and community educators were aware of the growing complexity of their lives. Their attempts to deliver cultural and

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[1] The research was approved by the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HE14070). For further details of the initiative, see https://remotengagetoedu.com.au

standard curriculum and pedagogy (as outlined in the Galiwin'ku case study in the penultimate section) suggested their struggle for control of intercultural complexities. While many used the entrenched both-ways metaphor to appreciate their situation, that situation is also revealed as intercultural. The paper suggests that interculturality gives a name to community members' and educators' understandings, and, if operationalised in schooling as it has been in Galiwin'ku, can enhance children's ability to successfully negotiate their complex lives.

Conceptual framework

The initiative understood the communities, remote as they are, to be impacted by the global reality of intersecting cultures, which are not as bounded or distinct as they once were. This interpretation carried with it the realisation that reality in the communities is more complex than both-ways conceptions allow. Key concepts that facilitated understanding of the dynamics in the communities and schools were interculturality, complexity and partnership.

Interculturality

The concept of interculturality is infrequently used to understand Aboriginal lives, policy or education. Before contact, Aboriginal groups were diverse, relatively discrete cultural blocs, while interacting with neighbouring groups and others such as the Macassans (Macknight, 1976), and with some commonalities (Moore et al., 2016, p. 46). Local distinctions continued with colonisation, alongside a developing notion of a single imagined community and political Aboriginality in the longer-settled southern and coastal regions. The extent of intersection has increased with urbanisation, globalisation, superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), symbolic technologies (Nowotny, 2005, p. 18) and the emergence of a single world system (Urry, 2005b). These phenomena impact on the smallest and most remote of communities. They mean that people identify with large cultures like the "Aboriginal" and the "mainstream" Australian, within which they learn values, expectations and behaviours, and form "master" identities. The context means that "Aboriginal" identity is often held with particular intensity and salience (see Collier and Thomas, 1988). They also identify with small cultures (Holliday, 1999), such as clan and language group, or profession, which also condition their values, perceptions and behaviours. That is, the same people identify with supposedly contradictory large cultures like religion or nation (as suggested by Noel Pearson's "tea, cricket and the rule of law", 2015, p. 16), and smaller cultures like those of sports clubs and organisations. In addition to affiliating with multiple cultures, they are categorised as belonging to, and treated by others as having the characteristics of, certain population sectors, and are ascribed the properties of a gender, sexuality, generation and other categories critical to their life chances.

Remote communities are intersected in these ways, even where obligatory kin relations, traditional languages and responsibilities to country continue. As difference from others continues, overlapping and intersecting socio-cultural meanings coexist, interact with and affect each other, putting all differences into perspective against others, incorporating and modifying them, and becoming more nuanced. Some of the meaning of this is captured in global theory (Martin, 2015, p. 7), and some in the Yolŋu metaphor of ganma, the lagoon where salt and fresh waters blend and change (Bat & Guenther, 2013, pp. 128–129; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012, p. 312). Some of the meaning is captured in Nakata's (2002; 2007) "cultural interface", which seems, though, to suggest "a thin layer that has properties that differ from [those] associated with the bulk on either side [and] gives rise to properties or effects that are the result of what happens between the two faces" (Nowotny, 2005, p. 20). The interface is of long standing and is now

comprehensive, and (even as they also live in other separate worlds) all people live in one world, as Sullivan (2016) alluded to when he said:

> The ABC recently published an article on Aboriginal child suicide titled "Lost between two worlds". [But] we should remind ourselves that "two worlds" is only a metaphor. There is only one world—they are part of our world, we are part of theirs. (n.p.)

This points to the increasing interpenetration of the Aboriginal and wider "worlds" and the fact that Aboriginal people are, after around 200 years, not mere sojourners in modern Australia. Moreover, it is not cultures that do things at interfaces, but people, acting from the logic of their many cultural attachments and individual psychologies. Everyone now lives at multiple "interstitial" (Bhabha, 1994) zones, and works within and across socio-cultural borders to negotiate their social location and maintain their own interests. At the borders, individuals interpret the influences shaping them and others' meanings, respond according to cues, reveal and hide what they wish of their own meanings, and otherwise manipulate the subtleties of shifting meanings to move interactions in directions they wish. They learn to see themselves as others perceive them and expect them to be, to act as they are expected to act (see Anzaldua, 1987), and to mimic, mock, unsettle or deny expectations. This sociality, which following Goffman (1959, 1967; Imahori & Cupach, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005) is known as "facework", is done so routinely that it easily goes unnoticed.

In summary, all who belong to a group are similar in some ways to others who belong, and different from them in other ways. They share much with fellow members while also being distinct from them. They also share much with non-members. Interculturality implies multiple, simultaneous and shifting sameness and difference. Aboriginal people are the same in this as others, and the nature of their samenesses with and differences from other Aborigines and other Australians varies around the country, and according to context. Given the prolonged, extensive and growing nature of interactional experiences between Aboriginal and cultural others, they can be known as insiders and outsiders, and as different from and sharing much with other Australians. They are "us" and "we" are them, and differences are often either indeterminable (as in Canada; see Ermine, 2007, p. 197) or exist in nuances of emphasis. The continuous negotiation of positioning can bring tension, as discursive, structural and institutional power saturates interactions (Shi-Xu, 2001). All this has to be negotiated, and the negotiation over time "jointly produces new meanings, new realities and new futures" (Shi-Xu, 2001, p. 288).

The WCE initiative was a site of these dynamics, and its success depended on their careful management. Remote schools are sites of similar dynamics, and students' learning depends similarly on their careful management. Staff and students share a world of fluidly interacting social and cultural influences and personalities. The "intercultural" refers to the intersection of multiple, notionally separable cultures or "worlds" at their interfaces, to individuals' interactions across the borders, and to the social, cultural and subjective transformations that result. Teachers in remote schools must manage this interactional context to generate "common meaning" (Leigh, 2004) and, so, learning. We present one such context—that of Galiwin'ku—as an exemplary case of an attempt to provide guidance for teachers.

Complexity

Interculturality implies overlaid and interpenetrating cultural perspectives, social orders, knowledge domains, visions of past and future, and selfhoods. It acknowledges a complexity that exceeds that which has been explained with cross-cultural and both-ways approaches to Indigenous education (see Bat & Guenther, 2013). In the sense of complexity theory adopted in the social sciences, those approaches and

concepts can be seen as consistent with the "positivistic research tradition [that seeks] control through deliberate [attempts to] unambiguously … isolate cause and effect relationships and [pursue] generalizable laws of behaviour" (Cooksey, 2001, p. 82). The attempt in those metaphors to reduce life to essentials and binaries has been useful in elucidating causality and in guiding policy and practice, but it is not sufficient. A complexity-oriented approach understands reality as "composed of complex open systems and emergent properties and transformational potential [with the] crucial corollary [that] knowledge is inherently local rather than universal" (Byrne, 2005, p. 97; Richardson & Cilliers, 2001). Rather than seeking explanation by focusing on the variables per se, a complexity-oriented approach focuses on the actions of agentic individuals, their motivations, choices and actions as they interact with others and negotiate the forces of history, social structure and natural environment (Byrne, 2001, p. 63). A focus on everyday, lived reality can identify the array of forces that constitute that reality.

Any complex system (like remote schooling) is "nested within, [has] complex systems nested within [itself], and intersect[s] with, other complex systems" (Byrne, 2005, p. 105). It is open to external influences (e.g. community conflict, cyclone), nested in other systems (e.g. the education department, provincial and national social policy), intersected by still others (e.g. the health system), and by those in the wider environment (e.g. post-colonial human and Indigenous rights discourses). At the interactions of the interfaces:

> New properties or phenomena emerge, that belong to [wholes] that have no recognised boundary. [They] … increase complexity by creating difficulties in understanding where [the] constituent parts come from, how they are interconnected, or how they can be traced. It is unclear where the phenomenon belongs and where it is heading. Since it is unclassified, it usually is also difficult to describe, since the appropriate language is not (yet) available, or different mutually incomprehensible languages are spoken on the other side of the divide. (Nowotny, 2005, p. 21)

The interfaces produce complexity and attempt to reduce it to make it manageable. The forces of production and reduction are not in equilibrium, and that, along with human agency interacting with infinite combinations of factors, ensures that systems are dynamic and nonlinear. They are adaptive to complex contingent causation, and local-level perturbations can have vast effects at unpredictable times elsewhere in the system (Urry 2005a, p. 7). Inter-connections between parts of the system and minimal central hierarchical structure mean that "determination [of system trajectory] runs in all possible directions, not just top down" (Byrne, 2005, p. 105). Iterative local level adaptations (Urry 2005b, p. 243) can feed back to affect the top and other levels, giving complex systems a self-organising or autopoietic capacity (Urry 2005a, p. 7), and relative order that can flip into dramatic change. Bat and Guenther (2013) identify these dynamics, and attempts to tame them, in remote education.

Partnership

Gaining more than partial knowledge of any one perspective on intercultural complexity requires the plural perspectives (Richardson & Cilliers, 2001, p. 17) to be defined and understood in partnership. We consider partnership as a relationship characterised by equality of power and trust, where trust implies that neither partner can or will apply coercion to have the other adopt certain positions or behaviours (Seligman, 2011). Though the initiative was managed by a non-Indigenous academic, it was initiated by Aboriginal interests. Also, the manager and other researchers demonstrated their commitment to equality in their efforts to maximise active community participation in all phases of the research, respect community meanings and directions, and embrace community voices, alongside and in collaboration

with the academic (see de Crespigny et al., 2004, pp. 11–12; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). As to be expected (Cargo et al., 2008, p. 905, p. 912), the balance of power was fluid, in the fact of leadership but also the sense that one partner had greater control in one context and the other in another. For instance, the project manager had institutional power while seeking to maximise community input. At the same time, the community organisation Yalu Marngithinyaraw (Yalu) was led by a Yolŋu manager with greater power than her non-Indigenous employees, while seeking academic input.

The WCE as intercultural partnership

The WCE initiative was an intercultural encounter in its methodology, staffing, governance, management, communication and ethics. It took a place-based, ground-up, participatory and "mutually respectful" approach (Moore et al., 2018). It was "critical Indigenous qualitative research" (Denzin et al., 2008, pp. 1–20, and passim) in the sense that it was:

- Localised: grounded in the meanings, customs, social relations, struggles, aspirations and politics of the particular time and place in each setting.

- Participatory and action-oriented: initiated by (wider) Aboriginal concerns and sought action of benefit to the participating communities.

- Collaborative: sought dialogue between Indigenous and critical perspectives, and co-constructed knowledge that was both "reflexively consequential" for participants, and had wider purchase.

- Interpretive/constructivist: respected the existence of multiple intersected perspectives on lived realities associated with culture and social location, and encouraged dialogue between researchers and researched to shape data analysis and knowledge construction (Schwandt, 1998).

- Critical: informed by social justice concerns, deconstruction and redress of structured power and knowledge disparities; privileged Aboriginal perspectives and self-determination; and cautious in generalisation.

This framework is akin to others informed by critical race, culturally responsive, Indigenous standpoint and decolonising theories. It emphasised, for example, the cultural humility and critical self-reflexivity of researchers, the rebalancing of the power of the dominant discourse and the idea that research should be for the researched (e.g. Foley, 2006; Guenther et al., 2016; McDonald, 2003; Milner, 2007; Paradies, 2018). These and other features are evidenced in the following description of the initiative.

Most of the community researchers were senior in cultural terms, career educators and education leaders in their communities. They participated fully in the cultural life of their communities, as well as in roles beyond the community. In this project, they mentored junior community members as researchers. Most of the campus-based researchers were of Anglo-Australian cultural background. Some had non-Anglo migrant backgrounds. Two were urban Aboriginal women. Several had established relationships with their Aboriginal colleagues, and were currently or had previously lived in the communities concerned. All researchers came to the project, then, with several positionalities (Caretta, 2015) and identities. Each local partnership bridged "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. The outsiders generally came to the project with greater knowledge of social scientific research and, while seeking community meanings,

sought to translate research meanings to their community partners. The insiders came with expert knowledge of local meanings and translated them to their research partners, while adopting a social scientific approach. All shared aspects of each other's cultural outlook, including, for example, the value of formal education and research. In addition, they came with intercultural skills; they had, for instance, knowledge of their own and others' cultures and empathy for their partners.

From whatever starting point, each team undertook ethnographic/auto-ethnographic (see Frazer & Yunkaporta, 2019, pp. 90–91) field work, observing local protocols and adopting methodologies that suited local preferences for relationship and storytelling (Hall, 2014; Ober, 2017). They participated in everyday life, collected relevant documents and artefacts, "yarned" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and conducted semi-structured interviews where it suited (Smith et al., 2018). The community researchers interpreted cultural metaphors and other knowledge for their campus-based colleagues. The latter listened "carefully and deeply" (Shore et al., 2014) to their community colleagues' and participants' perceptions, concerns, needs and visions, and took direction from them about how the research was to be acted on in each community. Each team respected local ways of knowing and shared ownership of the research.

While the community researchers' role as cultural gatekeeper, broker, informant, translator and mediator was critical (see Caretta, 2015), the partners took advantage of each other's strengths across their several identities. The campus-based researchers working with their Aboriginal partners in the communities, and the community-based researchers working with the campus-based in Darwin, negotiated the "facework", avoided "freezing" each other into unitary identities, and negotiated a relational culture within which they came to celebrate and transcend their cultural differences (see Imahori & Cupach 2005, pp. 197–205).

Each team came to conclusions collaboratively and delivered them jointly at whole-of-team meetings and conferences. An explicit expectation of the project's ethics approval was that those meanings would be accurately reported back to communities, and that practical outcomes would be achieved. Accordingly, the teams took great care to ensure that community members understood, approved and found their reports helpful. Equally, the community researchers accepted the validity of, and sought to better understand, what the social scientific perspective offered them. They engaged with new meanings. In this reciprocal relationship, Indigenous voices were empowered and power differentials minimised. The initiative was phronetic in placing "a premium on Aboriginal insights" into education issues and in promoting "responsive and innovative ethical research practice linking action and change" (Bainbridge et al., 2013, p. 277).

Given the intercultural macro context for the project, it also demanded critical interpretation of what had been learned (see Nakata, 2012). It drew on Western knowledge systems and research methodologies that had synergies with the local, notably grounded research (Bainbridge et al., 2013; Guenther, 2015). Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members negotiated their interpretations of Indigenous cultural metaphors and other insights. They made the research accountable to its subjects by repeated "member-checking" of their interpretations against local perceptions. Only when they were agreed upon did they relay them to whole-of-team meetings for comparative analysis. Through this iterative process, knowledge that retained the fidelity of both knowledge systems was "co-constructed" (Bainbridge et al., 2013) for the community reports and the whole project.

Communication in whole team interactions was intercultural. The team (manager, campus-based coordinators and research teams) met for four day meetings at different times in Darwin, Tennant Creek

and Maningrida. In the meetings, each team presented their research to date and progress made toward action plans. Projects were discussed and analysed. Community staff negotiated intersections of cultural norms, such as brother and sister working in close proximity, and intra-cultural Aboriginalities. Everyone negotiated the discourse of colonial and recent policy histories that influenced perceptions and interactions. Aboriginal staff explicitly educated their non-Aboriginal colleagues about the sensitivities, but the discourse underlay all interactions, and moments of tension did arise. On one occasion a community researcher felt that he was not being treated by campus-based researchers with the respect due to him as the local custodian. Some excited discussion by staff members—who were aware of the danger of identity stereotyping, and had begun to see each other more as individuals—had interrupted him in his Welcome to Country. By "not sufficiently support[ing] his cultural identity" (Imahori & Cupach, 2005, p. 200), they had momentarily upset the delicate balancing act of recognising his cultural identity (i.e., his positive face) and his individuality (i.e., negative face), and in so doing breached the politeness system that had been built up (see Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2004, p. 27). However, all participants were aware of the communication challenges, and the tension was soon resolved, in this case through the intervention of one of the community researchers (RG). The earlier, mutually appropriate, effective and satisfactory intercultural communication was restored.

Over the life of the project, participants negotiated many intersections to co-construct knowledge (Collins & Markova, 1999). As in the Galiwin'ku case below, success required mutual compromise of values, attitudes and practices, and tolerance of small breaches of etiquette. As one of the community researchers said at the final whole-of-team meeting, "You [non-Indigenous staff] have taught us well, and we have taught you well."

In terms of data analysis, copies of the community presentations were taken and annotated. The dynamics and discussions were observed, noted, recorded and transcribed (other than discussions in language). NVivo software was used to manage the data, and assisted researchers to identify key themes. Analysis was based on an interpretive close reading of the everyday social reality that was appearing. This was informed by the interculturality and complexity framework, knowledge of history, power structures, discourse and ideology. Conclusions were member-checked with community representatives.

Governance of the initiative was intercultural, though less than was hoped. The steering group sought to bring together senior representatives of partner organisations (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Menzies School of Health) and representatives of the Aboriginal communities. Unfortunately, challenges of timeframe, design and implementation limited the effectiveness of this aspect. Delays in communication of data from the communities meant the steering group often had little information on which to base its work, and conflicts of interest made community representatives sometimes reluctant to discuss challenges faced by projects in which they were invested, on the basis that it might jeopardise the projects. Despite these limitations, which may be aspects of structural inequality, the initiative was managed on a day-to-day basis in a highly consultative and responsive way. Meetings were dominated by community researchers' use of cultural metaphor, humour and diagrams or sketches to convey meanings. One community researcher began to explain her recent work in English, but abandoned it, saying that words (in English) were no good for her, and continued by talking to sketches in the artistic language of her community. Though sometimes difficult for non-Indigenous staff to immediately understand, re-direction or requests for clarification were kept to a minimum in the expectation that the relevance to the research would emerge. The freedom contributed to the trust that pervaded the initiative.

The initiative's investment in intercultural partnership was important in eliciting the perspectives of community members and researchers, and their preparedness to engage in dialogue with a critical social scientific perspective. The investment uncovered three key interlinked desires: for schools to assist in building strong cultural foundations, acknowledge cultural difference, and provide standard training focused on numeracy and English literacy (Moore et al., 2018, pp. 17–35). Interpretation through an interculturality lens suggested that the concurrence of the three indicated that the people involved were aware at some level of interculturality, and trying to get control of it. It indicates, too, that they had definite ideas about how to go about gaining that control.

The address of interculturality in the Galiwin'ku case

The features of the WCE partnership noted thus far were exemplified in that between staff of WCE and Yalu (including the authors and others acknowledged) and of Shepherdson College (the local school) in Galiwin'ku. The approach facilitated the revelation of the depth of efforts being made to negotiate emerging intercultural complexity. Shepherdson College is a P-12 school with around 700 students. It provides standard syllabus and a bilingual program in English and the major local dialect. Formal English reading and writing start in year 4. It describes itself as a "Learning on Country" school that endeavours to bring cultural meaning to the curriculum. The usual arrangement is for a Yolŋu assistant teacher (AT) to work in a team-teaching arrangement with a qualified, visiting Balanda (non-Aboriginal) teacher, with rare exceptions. Yalu was created in 2000 by community members with the intention of providing developmental workshops in education and health and wellbeing. Before the WCE project began, Yalu had begun providing cultural awareness training for Balanda teachers in response to perceived problems in their interactions with ATs, and mentoring for students in response to disengagement, misbehaviour and bullying, which were understood as outcomes of differences between teachers' and students' cultural norms. In the mentoring, a senior mentor, retired qualified teacher and cultural senior (EM), and younger mentors provided calming activities and cultural activities centred on Yolŋu Matha (language) concepts, norms and literacy that helped the students learn traditional ways of behaving centred on respect for their elders, teachers and other students. They also provided remedial teaching in maths and English literacy. The program was the first of a series of attempts to manage the intersection of schooling and local culture, aiming to improve student engagement and learning. In 2015, a service agreement that envisaged a structured cultural awareness program and induction manual for new teachers was signed between Yalu, CDU (via WCE) and Shepherdson College.

Unfortunately, the workshops ceased with a period of instability that occurred when Shepherdson College had several short-term principals. A more stable period began in 2016 with the appointment of a principal and deputy who accepted the possibility that student behaviour problems were related to cultural difference. This allowed the WCE team to work with Yalu and the school to explore the difficulties Yolŋu teachers were experiencing with the earlier program. At Yolŋu staff meetings, ATs discussed their concerns, notably the quality of their relationships with Balanda teachers, and the relationships the latter had with students. A standout issue was the tendency of Balanda teachers to speak loudly when disciplining students, rather than the quiet non-confrontational discussion style that is normal Yolŋu practice. The teachers were violating local communicative norms. The Yolŋu staff also discussed how they might work more collaboratively with school leaders, Balanda teachers and local parents.

These discussions, and others with the Yalu manager (RG), her Balanda development advisor (SH) and a resident Bible translator (MM), established a receptive intercultural climate, and led to a number of

"modest" (Cilliers, 2005, p. 256) changes that reinvigorated the cultural awareness and mentoring programs. Yalu began providing weekly workshops for ATs, who took the opportunity to air the challenges they faced in their roles and search for strategies to overcome them. All staff were invited, more Yolŋu became involved in cultural awareness workshops, and the earlier set structure was abandoned in favour of following emerging situations of interest. Three presenters were used to ensure consistency, provide a range of opinion on cultural interpretations and give each other confidence. Two culturally senior advisors oversaw activities and provided support. It was also decided that, as many teachers were part of local family networks, knowledge of gurrutu (kinship systems) was an ideal basis on which to build Balanda teachers' cultural connection with ATs and students. It was hoped that the knowledge would lead to better communication and improved relationships between the teaching partners and with students, and so to better learning.

In addition, the student mentoring program was refined. The manager of Yalu (RG) and her predecessor (ELM) believed that Yalu had a leadership role in improving the quality of Yolŋu teaching after the loss of a cohort of older Yolŋu graduate teachers who had left teaching to pursue work in the community. In their view, current Yolŋu ATs needed support to become good teachers, so they set about developing a program based on the Yolŋu code of conduct known as raypirri. Raypirri is a set of guiding principles covering all aspects of Yolŋu life in East Arnhem Land. It is an expression of core cultural values and personal identity. The version developed for Shepherdson College sought to help local Yolŋu teachers commit fully to the role and model the behaviours expected of them as Yolŋu teachers. Through this, it aimed to ensure that they could provide students, particularly those at risk of disengaging, with support and guidance via their local cultural perspectives, to come back to the "right path". The following translations were provided by ELM and RG, though not numbered in the original as here.

1.   Yaka ŋaramurryi; yaka ŋarrtjur yothuny. (As a role model, you should not bring your outside troubles into the classroom; you must be in control of your emotions, like anger.)

2.   Ngayaŋuy manymakthu guŋga'yurr djamarrkuliny ga ŋayaŋuy dap'maram yuwalkkum. (Talk to the children with a good feeling, in a way that makes them feel close to you, not in ways that make distance; this is about having an emotional connection with the children.)

3.   Gurrupul yolŋu matha ga gurrupul nhanŋu dharanŋanmirr, nha ŋunhi mayali. (Use our language so that they understand the full meaning.)

The authors suggest that numbers 1 and 2 are expressions of Yolŋu values and expectations, but also of universal principles of teaching, as are others in raypirri, though with added intensity, as called for by the intercultural context. Number 1 refers to the need to separate home and work, that is, to adopt the impartial professional role at work in which every child is deserving of equal nurturance. It suggests that clan favouritism is not appropriate in school. Number 2 refers to the centrality of the teacher–student relationship to Yolŋu learning, and it wants Yolŋu teachers to compensate for an area in which Balanda teachers have some difficulty. Number 3, again, wants Yolŋu to know their Balanda colleagues' shortcomings and complement them.

The Yalu raypirri tells Yolŋu teachers not to be shy about their teaching, but to be forthright. It addresses some of the dilemmas that arise from interculturality, such as distinguishing between their obligations at home and those at work:

4.   Yaka favouritism – dhu go ŋorra teacher-wal; guŋga'yun walalany level-kum. (Have no favouritism; treat all the children equally.)

This refers again to the challenge of negotiating the divergent obligations of kinship and profession, and implies that, in school, the professional should prevail. Though it may not fully address the true nature of the challenge (in maybe interpreting the roles as more discrete than they can be), this dilemma stands as a metaphor for the challenge of bothness in remote communities.[2] The dilemma exists full time for Yolŋu teachers, and for Balanda teachers who are adopted into a family/clan and respectful of the implications. Even such contradictions can, though, be negotiated where there is forbearance on the part of others involved, as there invariably is when good faith is evident. The document finishes with another reminder of the complex standpoint demanded of a Yolŋu teacher in the context:

5.   Gumurr-watjarrmirr. (You have chosen to be a teacher, and should stand in the middle, be balanced, not take sides, as a role model to the community and school; you have a role in both.)

In this context, raypirri is a structured engagement with interculturality. It is an attempt to help local teachers develop the intercultural skills to successfully negotiate their relationships with Balanda teachers and Western learning. It gives guidance from respected cultural and educational leaders in how children should behave when their teachers are talking. It complements the cultural awareness programs that work to develop Balanda teachers' cultural knowledge, with the intercultural skills needed by Yolŋu teachers to work at the cultural interface (and help students learn at it). It is a strong basis for a philosophy of intercultural education in this context. Importantly, it suggests that an equivalent program is needed for visiting Balanda teachers who work at other facets of the same interface.

Yalu has claimed that the success of the program was evident in improved student engagement and behaviour, and a reduced incidence of bullying. To develop an additional element, Yalu appointed a retired teacher who had worked at Shepherdson College for many years, spoke Yolŋu Matha and was known to the teaching staff. She provided support for Yolŋu ATs completing a teaching degree with BIITE, and for activities shaped in consultation with Yalu and Balanda teachers. With EM, she led a series of workshops for all staff called "Learning Together". It was a biliteracy program that aimed to develop participants' capacity to appreciate both cultures (i.e., Yolŋu and Western), starting with explorations of Yolŋu Matha language terms and English idiom, looking to appreciate Yolŋu and other worldviews, and the nuances of meanings carried by different terms.

This case study recounts not a simple Yolŋu desire to secure their cultural heritage from schooling, nor to switch between notionally separate cultural worlds. It recounts a sophisticated attempt to be both Yolŋu and educated, to negotiate the intersections of Yolŋu cultural traditions and those of the West, in the knowledge that both are necessary to wellbeing. This is an established Yolŋu standpoint (Shore et al., 2014). The attempt is to secure threatened cultural foundations, and use them to build the ability of students and local teachers to engage with the Western world from a position of equality. In acknowledging the importance of Yolŋu and Balanda culture, and their interdependence, the program engages with the challenge of intercultural realities.

Like the WCE initiative, the program is an outcome of intercultural partnership. It is an accommodation by Yolŋu to Balanda worldview, culture and practices that depends for its effectiveness on reciprocal Balanda accommodation to Yolŋu. The success of student mentoring guided by raypirri depends on Balanda teachers' ability to accommodate to Yolŋu, which implies their knowledge of, and ability to integrate gurrutu in their classrooms. This is to build a better relational environment, which grounds

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[2] We use the term remote in its standard meaning of remote from larger centres and government administration, though we acknowledge the need to begin to understand the implications of the fact that "each community is not remote, for people are home where they are" (Bat & Guenther, 2013, p. 124).

learning in the Yolŋu world (and in education philosophy generally). For Yolŋu, a flourishing student–teacher relationship and, so, student learning, depend on connectedness; the prioritisation of curriculum outcomes, time segmentation and Western-style discipline undermines students' connectedness with them. That is, an approach that does not find a cultural synthesis can trouble Yolŋu students' emotional connection, relationship, and engagement and learning. Mentors shared with researchers that, without emotion and connection, there can be little respect for the adult and little learning. In remote Yolŋu contexts, Yolŋu culture is necessary to school learning. This is paralleled by the reality that numeracy and English literacy, and critical political literacy (as Nakata, 2012, argues for), are also necessary to cultural continuity. Culture and school learning are mutually dependent, and gurrutu and raypirri engage their interface.

The Galiwin'ku case illustrates interculturality and complexity in other ways. The program evolved as those involved adapted it in response to changes in the environment, as when large (e.g., Yolŋu) and small (e.g., school) cultural imperatives intersected, government policy changed, funding opportunities arose, education system requirements changed, and people came and went with their varied relational abilities. As a complex system it was always dynamic, vulnerable to the consequences of small changes, and nonlinear (see also Bat & Guenther, 2013). The larger partnership depended on others within each organisation, governed by internal structures. In Shepherdson College, this meant changing relationships with different principals, teachers and trainers, and, in Yalu, those of manager, development adviser, translator, mentor and campus-based researcher. Managing the relationships required that each partner watch for relational shifts, listen respectfully and mindfully, and judge how strongly to press for and give ground, ask for trust, or claim past loyalties, etcetera. Yolŋu trusted that Balanda acted not as archetypical Balanda but as individuals, and vice versa. Relational stability was produced by collaboration but always temporary. For instance, the early cultural awareness program stalled when the balance of cultural style appeared to Yolŋu to favour Balanda logic, then flourished when Yolŋu logic prevailed to a greater extent. The program had initially taken for granted what was felt to be Balanda logic of education, and Yolŋu ATs found it to be non-negotiable. To them, it went too far in the Balanda direction, and they disengaged. The partnership recovered when a more fluid structure more amenable to local exigencies was adopted. (Presumably the program would also falter were the terms to be too favourable to Yolŋu, and the school would withdraw.) This fluidity had to be constantly worked at.

Further, the balancing act persisted over time because of the chance alignment of people with cultural knowledge and intercultural sensibility and skill—three criteria which Ting-Toomey presents as key to identity negotiation competence (2005, pp. 226–227). Key outsiders had long experience in the community and Yolŋu Matha fluency. They respected the paramountcy of Yolŋu control and the school's equally inescapable responsibilities. They worked in trusting relationships with Yolŋu partners attuned to the intercultural complexities. Each was aware of the other's categoric characteristics that suggested potential strengths and weaknesses, knew the biases that colonial and recent history introduce, yet related to each other as individuals.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that the Galiwin'ku program enhanced student interest in school and led to improvements in behaviour and learning. That success was portrayed as an outcome of successful management of an environment in which individuals' multiple, overlaid, intertwined and subtly different imperatives dynamically intersect. The reference to subtle differences is important, as it is the contingent expressions of universal human concerns that often go unnoticed, but must be noticed and

managed. For example, Yolŋu say that emotion and connection are critical to Yolŋu students' learning, and so is discipline, as in raypirri. But the Western heritage of school culture also recognises emotion, connection and discipline. There is no radical departure in this. It is the variance in emphasis and application of universal human concerns that demand attention. Once a basic appreciation of cultural difference is gained, it is the fluidity and nuance of coexistent sameness and difference that most trouble intercultural relations, intersubjective connection and learning.

This paper suggests that research in remote settings such as Galiwin'ku requires equal respect for the meanings of the Indigenous and other research partners, and participants in the research, but that, for the full benefits to accrue, that respect must be critical. That is, neither can be accepted without critical appraisal. Equal respect is necessary to the subjects' preparedness to reveal their everyday lived perceptions and to researchers' fully engaged listening. It is necessary to the capacity to examine the local perceptions in the light of the social scientific, and so to the creation of productive new knowledge. These conditions allowed the revelation of the Galiwin'ku program.

The paper also suggests that interculturality must be addressed if school and further education is to be effective for remote Aboriginal students. In this respect, it reiterates calls in the work of a number of scholars, including d'Arbon and colleagues (2009), Frawley and Fasoli (2012), Bat and Guenther (2013), Bat and Shore (2013), Shore and colleagues (2014), and Guenther and colleagues (2016). Their work suggests changes to accommodate intercultural complexity, beginning with the adoption of a "red dirt" way of thinking (Bat & Guenther, 2013; Guenther et al., 2016) and listening carefully to community voices, so favouring a ground-up collaborative approach over the usual top-down linear approach produced by metropolitan imaginaries. This paper adds the notion that a valid vision for schooling and guide for reform would be to invest in producing interculturalists like the Yalu mentors (RG and ELM), WCE researchers and others involved in Galiwin'ku, since they have the attitudes and skills to celebrate their cultural particularity and to exceed it, to transcend ethnocentrism.

This establishes grounds for more research into interculturality in remote life and schooling, the impacts of inappropriate communication on student learning and the ways in which educators can negotiate intercultural communication more effectively. It also implies training that can lead them to become something like Watkins's "therapeutic selves" (1978), who watch their students intently, listen to their every utterance, observe their every nuance of postural and gestural change, perceive slight inflections of voice and changes in associations, listen to the unconscious implications underlying their overt statements, and record their tinges of anxiety, insinuations of hostility and subtle denials of stated belief (adapted from Watkins, 1978, pp. 251–252). That implies training to have educators become interculturalists, insofar as they can manage the facework dynamics of the intercultural encounter that is remote schooling.

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