



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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- they lived in a close extended three-generational family, and though outcast from the mainstream, they were nonetheless relatively self-contained as a family and close to country catching fish and animals.
- The children's confinement to the orphanage (though not orphans) at New Norcia and the drudgery ("slavery") and privations (lack of food, of warm clothing, but mostly of stimulation) of the workhouse where training for menial jobs substituted for education; although the narrator is critical of her Catholic educators, this section is quite balanced and nuanced, and she eschews melodrama and apports praise and blame judiciously; the account of how the nuns spruced up the children with shoes and good clothes when they were to be on show on high holydays or when they were temporarily fostered out for holidays was quite shocking and wryly told.
 - The account of her growing sexual awareness in an era when there was no preparation for puberty and no sex education (this book might provide some interesting stimulus material for such classes).
 - The dramatic story of the escape from the mission without any resources or money. In an era when it would be radically unsafe for a young woman of 14 to be turning up in unknown townships with no food, contacts, money or plan for survival really surprised me. That she met decent people, and many of them, and was not taken advantage of was even more surprising.

The post-marriage section is vitiated by Ms Ballard's inability to tell the whole story because of privacy concerns, and this is a shame. The narrative raises more questions than it can answer. Why, for instance, did the relationship with Peter fall apart when his extended family seemed so willing to support the young mother? And when the relationship seems to have continuing viability, not only for the children but also our central character. Cynthia's many attempts to return to her own family were also not able to be dealt with as fully as this reader wished, I suspect because of issues to do with shame, and alcohol seems to be the subtext of such (understandable) reticence, but it does make the narrative hard to tell. One wonders too about the disruptive effects of transient work at some distance from the last job, and the disempowering nature of educational deficits in the families she describes.

It is not at all predictable but the tale ends happily for Sin-E-Anne. The impossibility of such a young woman virtually alone coping with five children resulted in years of such deep depression that she was forced to put her own children back into the home she had escaped from in high dudgeon as a young teenager. However, her own grief for her old sad self forced her to rescue the most unhappy of the

children. However, it is real educational opportunities that enable her escape from the margins of life and into the mainstream of work – first as a kindergarten aid, and then as a health worker with her own people, and taking out university diplomas for good measure. The availability of state housing, TAFE and short university courses, and a new man were other elements in the recovery plan. Her children, needless to say, learnt from her experience and themselves got educated.

This memoir tells of a woman who begins life with advantages (of Indigenous sociality) that the mainstream does not value. In being consigned to the mission to 'get civilisation', she was short-changed educationally and emotionally, though she acquired skills which she was able later to capitalise on in seeking work as a young girl in kitchens. Just how she made the leap into education is an aspect of this narrative I was curious about, as it would be instructive. This CD-Rom added to my understanding of how an ordinary woman negotiated a seemingly rigid class and race system, and successfully overrode the internalisation of shame. I hope that excerptable sections of it will be used in schools, as it does Australian race history from an unusual perspective. It is, though, a narrative that although heart-warming and inspirational, could do with a sympathetic literary editor with a well-sharpened blue pencil. It needs pruning and grammatical and typographical emendation before it could be used in schools.

TREADING LIGHTLY: THE HIDDEN WISDOM OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PEOPLE

Karl-Erik Sveiby and Tex Skuthorpe
Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2006, xx+304pp,
ISBN 978 1 74114 874 9

Reviewed by Dennis Foley

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This is an easy-reading text that is absorbing in its presentation of one perspective of pre-European Aboriginal lifeways. It is a significant text for knowledge for there is much in common in this book's Indigenous content with many of the east coast and western plains Aboriginal peoples. The overlays possibly have many similarities and

comparative metaphors with other Indigenous Australians. However, it is a complex text with numerous examples of ethnographic importance that can easily be missed by the unwary or those uneducated in Indigenous ways. The narrative incorporates Indigenous voice and storytelling, yet it is recorded through the interpretation of a Finnish scholar and I will expand on this shortly. To an extent it will no doubt change the reader's historical perceptions and interpretation of the Nhunggabarra people and, for that matter, Aboriginal people in general. To complicate the academic accuracy of this work the authors highlight that the Nhunggabarra "language is not known, and not even the name of the country remains, except in the hearts and minds of the custodians" (p. 25). Perhaps an academic reference should have been included here to enable the reader to determine the validity of the Indigenous co-author's words.

Within the Indigenous apparition of what seems to be a bottomless pit of poor academic work that consumes the academy on all that is the "Aboriginal", why have the authors not concentrated on substantiating "Nhunggabarra"? It is not on a map and is difficult to find a reference to. They aptly write "the story owns the storyteller, not the other way around" (p. xvi) and they state that this is "not a book about the supernatural or spirituality" (p. xx), yet they fail to convince the critic of the academic content. On pages 159–161 Sveiby does in fact attempt to seduce the reader with a tantaliser that is indeed supernatural and based in spirituality. Is this an indication that the Finnish author is interpreting Indigenous knowledge as the exotic?

This work is important and is recommended reading, however, we have witnessed in the "History Wars" some historians attacking well-known academics and destroying credibility based on sloppy referencing and innuendo. Sveiby and Skuthorpe to an extent have allowed the accuracy and potential positive outcomes of this text to be questioned. Their methodological approach of triangulation in story, written sources and site visits is a thinly-veneered academic epistemological interpretation. Far more use of primary source information needs to be clearly applied to ensure support for this text's credible content. Pages 214–245 go some way to indicate scholarly application; however, it would appear that it is not enough. At present Sveiby's argument reads like a quick visit to AIATSIS or the South Australian Museum to verify a few issues and a "that will do" approach. What I perceive as inadequate referencing by Sveiby detracts from the Indigenous content of the narrative as does the boast that the text is "the first serious attempt to use Aboriginal traditional stories for their original purpose; to convey knowledge from one generation to another" (p. xvi). There have been numerous attempts by Indigenous scholars to achieve this; perhaps these

are Sveiby's words, if so perhaps he should have read more widely whilst in the AIATSIS library.

Before I discuss the text any further, with respect to the people and spirits of the "Nhunggabarra", their land is to the western edge of what Western science currently refers to as the Kamilaroi Nation, their Nhunggal country is an area between the Narran and Bokhara Rivers on the border of southern Queensland and northwest New South Wales. The word *nhungga* originates from a tree that is common to the area (p. 18).

As mentioned previously, my initial reading of this text left me apprehensive as to the importance of its Indigenous content and the non-Indigenous overlay of the main author's voice. The concept is a text on Indigenous knowledge that has its foundation in the voice of the Indigenous partner and major stakeholder in the work, who is the traditional owner; a Nhunggabarra man – Mr Tex Skuthorpe.

Tex provides the story, his traditional knowledge, his culture, his heart, his images and understanding of the Indigenous cosmology that is lore and law, yet it is written, or should I say penned, by Karl-Erik Sveiby a Professor in Knowledge Management from Finland. This in itself breaks some boundaries as it is an anthropological-ethnographic text (and much more), yet it is written by a Finnish scholar. This leaves me wondering how much of the interpretation and real understanding of key points or subtle ones are lost in translation, misunderstanding or in the niceties of working with co-writers. I winced in my chair on an international flight when I reread the discussion on geomagnetic energy (p. 23). This is an issue in law that in some clans when discussed with people who have not done ceremony (initiation) would result in severe punishment and resultant illness. There are several other examples that for cultural appreciation I will not highlight. I remember an old man in the Kimberley who recounted to a Judge in the Native Title Court similar issues which the Crown's defence lawyers subsequently mocked. The judge and the QC acting for the Crown are alive and well I believe; the respondent passed away suddenly shortly after giving evidence.

When you record Indigenous knowledge in the written form you have crossed a boundary of control and protocol to which the punishment is intrinsic. Skuthorpe indicates his dilemma on one instance, however, from my Indigenous standpoint I question whether this is enough? Please bear in mind this is a personal statement by me having to question what I am allowed to read, let alone what others are allowed to read. I raise these issues as within decades we will lose much of the remaining knowledge that is Indigenous Australia with the passing of our wise ones. There will be young readers of both genders – are they possibly reading data that should be given to them by a

more experienced person or has Skuthorpe already allowed for this? Although all information is not told and some details obviously generalised, Indigenous authors still run the risk that readers will take the data without consideration to the cultural aspects and misuse it, or they are not sufficiently mature to understand it. The ownership of some of the Nhunggabarra Indigenous knowledge has now been put into the public domain. Should this text have had a preliminary warning introduction? Perhaps I am being pedantic concerning the risk factor. In the authors' defence with many chapters I heard my own Aunties and Uncles speak, Skuthorpe and Sveiby have repainted images in my mind of some stories that were misty and vague ... or almost gone. Tex Skuthorpe has allowed his interpretation to give clarity again to the Indigenous jigsaw that is my own knowledge; no doubt this will be replicated among its many Indigenous readers.

Having stated this, the subtleties of the text to the non-Indigenous reader are worth the journey through its pages. To the reader interested in understanding Indigenous knowledge in concepts such as land-use management and the inter-relationships between Indigenous people and the environment this text will tantalise your appetite. To quench it, I suggest that you do what Sveiby did not apparently do – research the AIATSIS library and read of the wonderful work done on these topics by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. The most unpleasant aspect of a very pleasing text was Sveiby's personal comments on the environment and other global issues which seems out of place from page 193 and beyond. It goes too far and detracts from the core content of the text. This is a text that has so many attributes. Indigenous knowledge and concepts on the Nhunggabarra are sacred; this is a personal outpouring of knowledge and concepts unparalleled in similar texts written from the non-Indigenous anthropologist or ethnologist who dominate this area of literature. Even though the writing is a compromise of cultures ... (perhaps!); there are still glimpses of brilliance in Sveiby's interpretation.

This is a book of Indigenous knowledge where the reader enjoys a visual traversal of story, of creation and of understanding the depth of what is Indigenous knowledge, a very personal story that can only be given from the Aboriginal Australian. Perhaps I am too critical of Sveiby in the first instance however I am still repulsed at what I interpret as poorly worded comparisons between the Nhunggabarra and wider world issues. To me it just does not fit within the flow of information which begins with the Nhunggabarra worldview and spiritual beliefs. Chapter 3 is important as it discusses the intricacies of four levels of knowledge (storytelling as Sveiby writes). Chapter 4 allows the reader to experience "learner-driver" education in the education of

children. Skuthorpe appears to understate the corroboree on pages 70–71. Chapter 5 is the gem in the crown of the Indigenous knowledge within this text in its explanation of what Sveiby refers to as "eco-farming". I found the references to Jarred Diamond grating and not used effectively. As an example, on page 90, the reference to granary storage systems is incorrect: western plains people did in fact store millet in hand-sewn skin bladders within water-tight stone surrounds, albeit for only possible short periods prior to large gatherings such as ceremony. Once again Sveiby should have spent more time in the AIATSIS library. Farming is a debatable topic that is subject to the vulnerability of definitions combined with the geographic inconsistency of Australia with its heat-cold and lack of water in most places. We know millet was sewn, yams were replanted and harvested, aquaculture in shellfish and diverse salt and freshwater species was practised and the concept of husbandry in the farming of kangaroo or dugong is also debatable as a consistent land-use practice for the semi-sedentary. No different to the European cow herder in many ways. Yet the debate is based on the application of a European word and practice over an Indigenous land-use methodology which is akin to hammering a four inch square plug into a two inch round hole. Sveiby needed to provide additional comparative information for the reader to crystallise this knowledge into understanding and fact. Chapter 6 discusses leadership and organisational structures. The marriage stones are of interest, in similar matrilineal societies this included a mathematical calculation by certain women that is an attribute incomprehensible by most Westerners as we Aboriginal people are assumed as not having math. Skuthorpe only alludes to this content which Sveiby portrays in a somewhat exotic approach on the "myth" surrounding the stones. Chapter 7 describes the spiritual fourth level of knowledge which is moving and ties together earlier given concepts. Chapter 8 soberly illustrates the Nhunggabarra land today and leaves you feeling as though you want to help to correct the wrongs of colonisation and environmental destruction from Western farming methods. Chapter 9 is also a powerful chapter. The diagram on page 180 summarises the Nhunggabarra knowledge-based strategies into a simple overview of what is a complex topic. Interestingly in some coastal and central Australian societies the three circles given by Skuthorpe are interpreted as the human, the sacred and the spiritual worlds within the Indigenous knowledge system. As stated previously, there are many comparatives and similarities with other Indigenous Australian societies.

I feel the book should have concluded here at Chapter 9, as Chapter 10 reads as a political statement that detracts from the quality of Skuthorpe and Nhunggabarra knowledge. Another critical comment

is that I found the images at times a distraction as the paintings could be interpreted by some as a novelty. It was not until my second read that I fully understood the importance of many of the images. The images are contemporary interpretations utilising painting methods that have been commercialised from other Indigenous Australian societies using standardised imagery such as hands and animal outlines. Do Nhunggabarra traditional images exist? Perhaps a blend of historical appreciation of tree carvings and other cultural remnants could have been used, more effectively, to portray the traditional knowledge. This book is about place and knowledge yet it is only the mysticism on page 160 that is provided in an image. The reader will feel as though they want to experience, to see, to touch, to feel place. From an arm chair or a classroom a simple black and white photograph can allow the reader to experience the land that Skuthorpe walks. This is an intimate journey, yet the reader is denied the experience to witness the construct of place within an image. We need to sight to "see" it, to understand the lake, the river, the fields or Baayami's track.

In conclusion, would I recommend this book, would I buy it – Yes! Despite my criticism this book will be a wonderful teaching aide from K-12 and even university for Skuthorpe's story needs to be told for all Aboriginal Australians. Non-Indigenous Australia needs to be educated; from the Indigenist position we know this and this text will help. The Indigenous Australian should also read this wonderful book. This work is suitable as a reference for many disciplines, and should be on the shelves of all Australian school libraries.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Laurel Evelyn Dyson, Max Hendriks & Stephen Grant (Eds.)

Information Science Publishing, Hershey, PA, 2007, x+346pp, ISBN 1-59904-299-1

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Indigenous people in Australia and throughout the world have been actively participating in networked information technologies and their precursors for several decades. However, very little literature has been generated on the topic to date and for many populations IT has simply become part of the background to contemporary life, often without much consideration of its potential to transmit the dominant cultures from which it originates. In this context Dyson,

Hendriks and Grant's volume *Information technology and Indigenous people* is a significant contribution to this otherwise sparsely documented field, particularly in relation to this country.

The editors are three academics from the University of Technology Sydney who have a wealth of experience between them, particularly in encouraging the uptake of IT as an area of study by Indigenous students. They are also, unsurprisingly, largely positive and optimistic in their appraisal of IT and its potential for Indigenous peoples as are many of the authors. By comparison, some contributors are not so enthusiastic in their approach and their cautionary tales provide welcome balance in the book.

Contributions to the volume are of two types: chapters and case studies. There is substantial variation in the styles of each, from quite formal, theoretical and sometimes heavily technical articles to dialogues and more anecdotal reports that document the lived experiences of community members dealing with technological innovation. Consider, for example, the disparate potential implied by titles such as "Indigenous language use in a bilingual interface: Transaction log analysis of the Niupepa web site" and "My life with computers on a remote island". While this could be a little unsettling at first to those expecting a rigidly academic publication, it ultimately provides an effective system of counterpoint and, following a strongly Indigenous ethos, allows each author to contribute according to their own potential. The result is an evident grounding of the book that keeps Indigenous communities and their concerns at the forefront, and ensures it remains accessible and of interest to the widest possible audience.

Contributors hail from and report on a broad range of locations, including Canada, New Zealand, Malaysia, mainland Australia and the Torres Strait, Fiji, Africa, the United States of America, Spain, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Japan and Thailand. However, most articles and reports are by or about Australians which is both a refreshing change and makes the book of special relevance locally.

The volume is divided into five sections addressing general issues: education, culture, change and communication. As might be expected, some articles could easily be allocated to a number of these rather broad categories and, at times, their distribution does seem a little arbitrary, possibly motivated by the need to physically balance the sections. But, if this and the annoying refusal to capitalise "indigenous" and "aboriginal" in specifically Australian contexts are its greatest flaws, there is little that seriously detracts from the book or limits its worth and relevance.

The sheer number of contributions (over 40) make it quite difficult to do justice to either the breadth or depth of the volume's content in a review such as this. What follows is an attempt to provide a very brief