



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



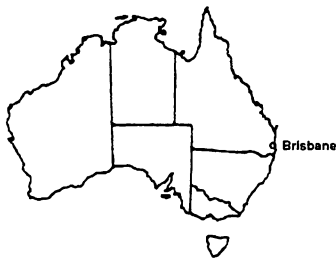
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

## Section B: Tertiary Education

*Diwurruwurru:*

### Towards a New Kind of Two-Way Classroom

John Bradley, Frances Devlin-Glass,  
Elizabeth Mackinlay  
Brisbane, Queensland



A project is currently underway at <http://arts.deakin.edu.au> which is innovative on a number of fronts. It has multiple beginnings: in the proactive, as culture dissemination work of a number of Yanyuwa and Garrwa women, who proclaimed in the white man's world that they were 'bosses themselves' (Gale 1983) and who in various ways have sought to bring their culture to the attention of the wider world. This has been accomplished through a prize-winning (Atom Australian Teachers of Media awards in 1991) film, *Buwarrala Akarriya: Journey East* (1989), of a re-enacted ritual foot-walk in 1988 from Borroloola to Manankurra 90 kilometres away. They also made another prize winning film called *Ka-wayawayama: The Aeroplane Dance* (1993) which won the Royal Anthropological Society of London award for the best ethnographic film in 1995. Since 1997 senior Yanyuwa women have been involved on a regular basis in sharing their knowledge of Yanyuwa performance practice with tertiary students in a subject called *Women's Music and Dance in Indigenous Australia* which is offered as a course in anthropology through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, they have also lectured in core

anthropology subjects in the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland. They have also engaged actively in work as language preservers and teachers at the Borroloola Community Education Centre (hereafter BCEC) and in the Tennant Creek Language Centre program called *Papulu Apparr-Kari*.

Behind much of this film work and language recording has been an understanding in the community of the fragility of their language and culture. Borroloola and the surrounding region, as mentioned above, has never been a closed community such as, for example, the communities in North East Arnhem Land. The Yanyuwa community have had over 100 year of contact with the European world and have been exposed to all the policies and legislation that has been developed for the "betterment" of indigenous people over that time. They have fought long and hard during two land claims in 1976 and 1992 proving that despite long term contact they still knew their land. They were in fact the first group of people to use the Land Right Act (NT) 1976. Over the last twenty years however the community has suffered the deaths of many senior men and women, some of these deaths have been unexpected and unfortunately fulfill the statistics we know all too well about indigenous health. During the last decade senior Yanyuwa men and women have worked tirelessly in full support, and cooperation with

Baker, Bradley, Mackinlay and Devlin-Glass to “put their culture down” for their own children and their children’s children and other people who may have an interest in their land and the identity they draw from it. History is vital in understanding why this website is being developed. Ultimately it can be seen as people taking control of cyberspace to preserve a long and ancient heritage, it is also an act of profound and abiding generosity.

Another related beginning was Dr. John Bradley’s (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Queensland) arrival in Borroloola as a neophyte teacher in 1980 and his monumental (600pp. Unpublished) study of their language (*Yanyuwa Wuka* 1992). In later years Bradley’s work (1997) has been extended to examination of cultural organisation as it is manifested in traditions and beliefs and ecological praxis in dugong and sea-turtle hunting, butchering, Dreaming traditions and distribution, and his ongoing work as an anthropologist on continuing land claims. A separate but related other beginning was Dr. Richard Baker’s (Department of Geography, Australian National University) involvement in an archaeological dig on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, which led to an oral history of all adult Yanyuwa people and the publication of *Land is Life* in 1999. A more recent beginning was Dr. Elizabeth Mackinlay’s (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland) work with the Yanyuwa women singers and her documentation of their fun-songs, and her discovery of finely discriminated song genres (1998).

The most recent beginning of all was that by Dr. Frances Devlin-Glass (Literary Studies, Deakin University) who sought to teach an exclusively Aboriginal-authored literature course and whose students wrestled to understand the film, *Buwarrala Akarriya* or *Journey East*. It seemed to her that the film was an important testimony of the Yanyuwa’s remarkable cultural survival. The group had not been in a ‘protected’ Reservation, had come into town somewhat reluctantly as victims of forces beyond their control, and yet were strongly committed to land, culture and language. It also seemed to be the case that it needed to be value-added to if unknowing European students were to make sense of it. Digital technology and the input of both the Community and

the researchers seemed ideal, because of the way it privileges the eye and the ear, and can be made to de-privilege print, except for those students who want it.

Devlin-Glass and her web-designer colleague, Adrienne Campbell (Deakin Centre for Academic Development) initially assumed that they were building a CD-Rom. However, the need for the medium to be interactive and dynamically responsive to change meant that thinking on that score gave way to a dual-medium concept: the WWW will be used for public access and instruction, and will have some password-protected areas (for family photos and information about ancestors), and it will be supplemented by CD-Rom

which will be restricted to those groups in the culture which have the right to material that is restricted and unrestricted.

The designers have sought to set up the website so that it is useable first and foremost by the community, and the ultimate aim is for it to be taken over by the community. This is dependent on money being found for training purposes, though some of this is occurring as the project matures. The community is the final word in decisions about what may and may not be on open access. One important user group for the website is the children of the Borroloola Community Education Centre (which is quite well resourced for internet-ready computers), and we hope to develop a site within a site designed to capitalise on and celebrate their observational acuity. Much important cultural education is occurring at the BCEC, and especially at Wandangula outstation, and evidence of this will be featured in the website, especially under indigenous Language learning. The community, through its elders, known as Li-Wirdiwalangu Li-Yanyuwa, are keen to see the fruits of research done over two decades repatriated in cyber form to the community, and also intend to use the website to revisit family and historically significant photographs which are so damageable in the housing and climatic conditions prevailing at Borroloola, and to keep in touch with the Yanyuwa diaspora (remote because of the need for jobs or for medical treatment).

Other end-users include different cohorts of tertiary students in Literary Studies, Women’s Studies, Use

Planning and Cultural Tourism, as well as a more general public. Because of these multiple purposes, the website is being constructed as a giant database, a mini-museum of culture, with the separate disciplines using the site developing assessment tasks which require students to extract and interpret information on the site.

Because of the holistic and interrelated ways of knowing of this Aboriginal culture, some difficult category problems arise in the decisions *Li-Wirdiwalangu Li-Yanyuwa* make about the key sections of the website: should Performance, sometimes restricted and sometimes unrestricted, be separated from Land? How to show the intimate relationships? The key section of the site, known as Country, is constructed in the form of a giant database (not in the technical IT sense). Particular places can be known from this section in terms of the ceremonies and *kujika* (Dreaming song cycles) that occur at that site, the food and food-gathering that occurs there, the physical shape of the landscape itself and the stories which arise out of that, its European and Yanyuwa histories, its ownership and guardianship practices. The database is expandable and hopefully will never be finished. It is, in fact, limited only by the size of the screen and the amount of data which can be sensibly downloaded on a map in a reasonable length of time, and that of course will differ for each user.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, Richard. 1999. *Land is Life: Continuity through Change for the Yanyuwa from the Northern Territory of Australia*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Bradley, John. 1992. With Jean Kirton and the Yanyuwa community. *Yanyuwa Wuka. Language from Yanyuwa Country. A Yanyuwa Dictionary and Cultural Resource*. Unpublished document.
1997. *Li-anthawirriyarra, People of the Sea: Yanyuwa Relations with their Maritime Environment*. Ph. D thesis, Northern Territory University.
- Buwarrala Akarriya (Journey East)*. Deborah Sonnenberg, Jan Wositsky (directors). Video recording. Borrooloola, NT: Marndaa Productions, 1989.
- Gale, Fay. 1983. *We are Bosses Ourselves: the Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Ka-wayawayama: The Aeroplane Dance*. 1993. Motion Picture. Sydney: Film Australia in conjunction with SBS Television.
- Mackinlay, Elizabeth. 1998. *For Our Mother's Song We Sing: Yanyuwa Women Performers and Composers of A-nguyulnguyul*. Ph.D thesis, University of Adelaide.

## BIOGRAPHIES:

**Dr John Bradley** is a lecturer with the Anthropology and Sociology Department, The University of Queensland. His current research interests centre on ethnoecology, the resource management of dugong and sea turtles and the Yanyuwa language dictionary.

**Dr Frances Devlin-Glass** is a senior lecturer in the School of Literary and Communication Studies at Deakin University. She teaches Australian and Irish Literatures and Women's Studies and has research interests in cultural constructions of sacredness.

**Dr Elizabeth Mackinlay** is a lecturer with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland. Her research interests centre on women's music and dance in Indigenous Australia.