



**More Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Teachers' Initiative**

*Pathways for Yolŋu Teachers:  
rethinking initial teacher education (ITE) on country*

## Acknowledgements

Academic writing conventions can recycle the view that an author is one who writes, indeed the only one who writes. Writing comes in many forms and this report and the extracted key messages have been shaped by multiple knowledge conventions. Neither would have been written without the co-contributions of Yolŋu involved in the project. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for Aboriginal people in remote communities is, and should always be, a work in progress. As such, the views presented here should be seen as another step in achieving better infrastructure and support for *Yolŋu Teachers* to live and work in communities on or near their ancestral country. This should also include the right to choose to leave their communities for periods of time and, if the matter arises, take up employment elsewhere within the national teaching system.

There is also the challenge of navigating Yolŋu difference publicly via Balanda writing practices. Difference has always been used as a strategy to divide (Dodson, 2000; Huggins, 1998). Therefore, respectfully navigating Yolŋu shared and different perspectives about becoming and being *Yolŋu Teachers* requires careful navigation lest the final text work against what it intends: appropriate pathways for *Yolŋu Teachers* on Yolŋu country.

Shepherdson College promoted the project to *Yolŋu Teachers* working in the College and *Yolŋu Teachers* who had retired but remained vigilant about the need for *Yolŋu Teachers* presence within the College/community. The Northern Territory department responsible for education changed name and structure a number of times during the project while remaining a constant partner. They supported the project knowing how important *Yolŋu Teachers* are to Yolŋu children's futures. The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Initiative (MATSI) provided funding for the project. Their appreciation of the project parameters and the challenges associated with metropolitan and remote community scheduling and planning practices was truly appreciated in enabling the project to engage over time with *Yolŋu Teachers*. Finally *Yolŋu Teachers* and their Balanda colleagues tolerated interruptions to their community, professional and personal lives in order to offer their insights about working in the national teaching system. *Yolŋu Teachers* have offered similar insights before. This time they seek some evidence that others have listened and acted on their advice.

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## Introduction

This project was initially funded by the *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Initiative (MATSI)* and evolved as a partnership between the School of Education (Charles Darwin University), the Northern Territory Department of Education (DOE),<sup>1</sup> a remote community school and people living in, or with connection to, a remote community in eastern Arnhem Land. Within this context Yolŋu<sup>2</sup> community residents have repeatedly offered, in good faith and with an expectation that their audience would listen, their views on how to position Yolŋu children to take their place in the best of Balanda and Yolŋu worlds (Wearne & Yunupingu 2011).<sup>3</sup> Yolŋu have done this despite repeated over simplification and critique of their responses as out-dated, unrealistic in the face of the challenges of modernisation facing remote Australia and not in tune with understandings of a dynamic and changing notion of culture.

To be useful for Yolŋu, the project had to address the persistent challenge noted above: the reconfiguring of Yolŋu views about learning and knowing to suit the structures, knowledge practices and organising patterns commonly associated with western schooling. Action Research provides one means of engaging with these issues, although there are many ways to conceptualise and undertake Action Research. In this case the approach emphasised the 'long conversations' (cf McCracken, 1988) – historically and with individual people – about people's experiences of becoming and being a school teacher on country. 'On country' was a term adopted with the intention of interrupting the way on which the term 'remote' established a particular kind of relationship between metropolitan and residents and those people who lived on or near country which had related ancestral connections. On country is best described as follows:

*When people are living on country, they are secure in their rights to be where they are.<sup>4</sup> The networks of gurrutu work to enable the equitable distribution of resources, collaborative economic enterprises (e.g. large scale food procurement such as fish traps and landscape burning), ancestral systems of conflict resolution and goal setting, implementation and review. (Christie & Greatorex, 2009, p. 9)*

1 During the time of this project the education department in the Territory experienced numerous changes to name and structure. The generic term 'the department' has been used to refer to the education system. Where quotations from reports and other publications are used, original nomenclature has been maintained.

2 In this report the terms Yolŋu and Balanda are used to indicate, respectively, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in and around Galiwin'ku where the project took place.

3 For other examples of work promoting the importance of education for Yolŋu children see Yunupingu, 1994; Marika-Mununggiritj, 1998; Bulkunu, 2010; G. Yunupingu, 2005; Dhamarrandji, 2011). It is a recurring anomaly that Yolŋu people have activated western scholarship practices (publishing practices often recognised as the primary form of western intellectual labour) to open Balanda minds to their knowing, and yet Balanda will still claim we were 'never told' and 'we didn't know' (cf Reynolds, 1999).

4 The original text continues via a footnote: "The residents of homeland centres comprise not only landowners but also significant other people related in particular ways to the landowners and there by their agreement." Nevertheless, the use of the term 'on country' is not without debate in this context. Beth Harris, a participant in the project, argued it can be another way of stepping around two cultures by using geographic descriptors that do not align neatly with the notion of metropolitan capture of ideas. Many Northern Territory townships are positioned as 'metropolitan' when considered in relation to homeland centres and therefore not 'ancestral country' per se for many residents.

The term is used here for the purposes of exploring ways to strengthen Initial Teacher Education (ITE) opportunities for Yolŋu people of Galiwin'ku, a township in Eastern Arnhem Land. It refers to a range of complex ancestral and cultural authority and knowledge practices that shape collective action in everyday life.

On the basis of early conversations with Yolŋu it was also clear that conversations about ITE suppressed a number of messages about the on country experience. Yolŋu believed the conceptual work they undertake within education has often been dismissed as 'experiential', 'emotional' and 'cultural'. It is of course all of these things. Nevertheless, consistent with Yolŋu philosophising (cf M. Yunupingu, 1994) it is also an intellectual endeavour to position Yolŋu knowledge within western schooling. Unlike accepted industrial classifications – Classroom Teacher, Assistant Teacher – the term *Yolŋu Teacher* had no recognised status. Nevertheless using this term worked as a strategic classification during the project to highlight the dissonance between Yolŋu employment as Assistant Teachers or Classroom Teachers and Yolŋu who worked (paid and unpaid, permanent or on contract) within a school.

Yet there was also a body of literature that was quite explicit about what was required to prepare Yolŋu to be teachers in schools on country and this was seemingly under accessed in debates about ITE on country (see Bat & Shore, 2013). This project therefore aimed to do two things:

1. Assemble (again) for the benefit of those who might not have listened previously the experiences of Yolŋu working in schools and as teachers on country; and
2. Explore how metropolitan thinking draws on geographic location and experiential norms of the metropolis to shape how *Yolŋu Teacher* experience is re-defined or discounted within the larger frame of what counts in becoming and being a teacher.

In a time of renewed attention to ITE, the aim was to draw more explicit attention to how metropolitan imaginaries of Australian schooling and higher education established a default setting for teachers the knowledge, relationships and accounts of practice required to be a "fit and proper" teacher (NTG TRB, 2012).

As a result of discussions between project partners a township – Galiwin'ku – in East Arnhem Shire was chosen in the belief that past experiences of teacher education and on country teaching would illustrate the argument circulating in early conversations with project partners: the tightly laced links between language, land, culture, family and learning were not just exemplars and illustrations of pedagogical connection, they were requisite features of and for on country pedagogies.

## Galiwin'ku

Galiwin'ku, where most of the Yolŋu Teachers in this project were located is situated at the lower tip of Elcho Island. A Local Implementation Plan (Commonwealth of Australia 2010) describes Galiwin'ku as follows:

*people from many clan groups now live in the township of Galiwin'ku and are known collectively as Yolŋu people. Together these Yolŋu clans formed a social system of religious organisation that differs from neighbouring systems. Yolŋu people identify themselves first by their family group, then by their clan and language, and finally by their family's country ...*

*Galiwin'ku is home to the Yolŋu people. Yolŋu means 'Aboriginal person' in the languages of northern Arnhem Land. ... Djambarrpuyngu is the most widely used and understood language in Galiwin'ku. Galpa, Golpa, Golumala, Gumatj, Liya'gawumirr, Wangurri, Warramiri and Gupauyngu are also spoken.*

Galiwin'ku township and surrounds has population figures that vary depending on seasonal and ceremonial responsibilities: in 2011 "approximately 2,2124 [sic], of which 1,890 were Indigenous (89 per cent). In 2011, 44 per cent of Galiwin'ku's population was younger than 20 years of age" (<http://www.eastarnhem.nt.gov.au/galiwinku/>). The Shire website for the area describes the East Arnhem Shire as follows:

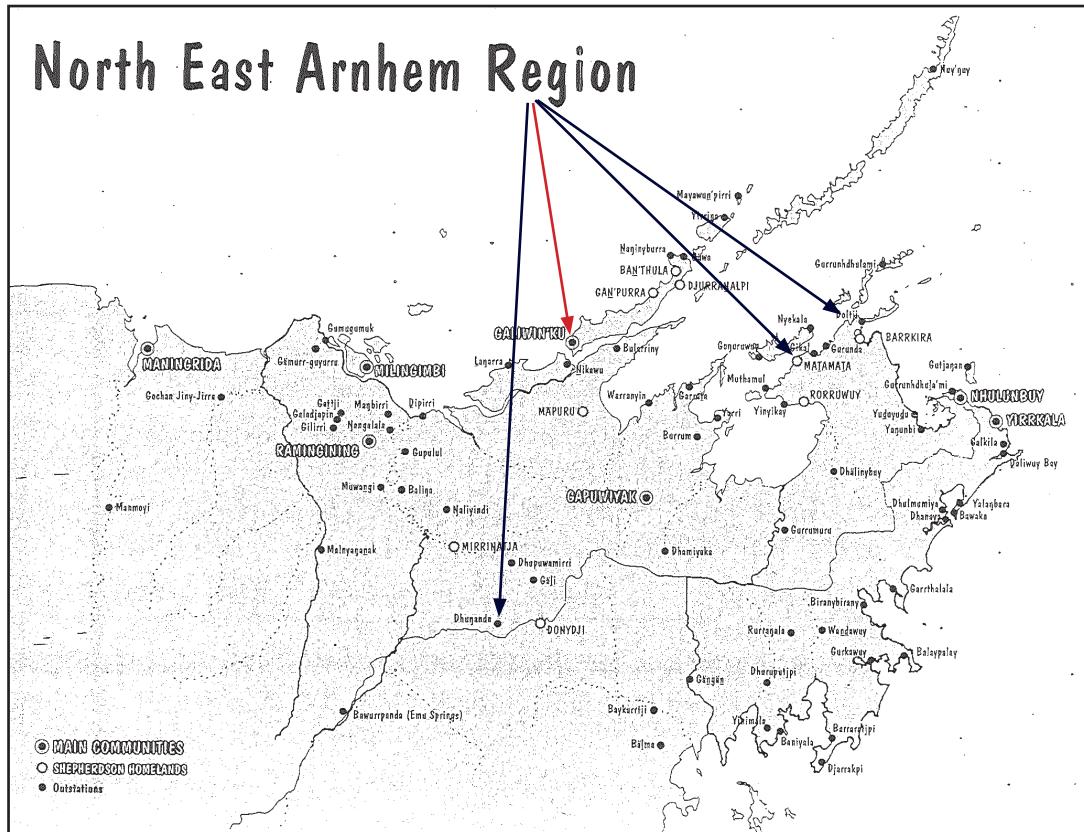
*there are many decentralised and small homeland centres scattered across the region - perhaps a hundred or so - where individual family or clan groups live on their traditional country in small estates. This area has the highest concentrations of homelands in Australia. ...*

*The key issue for many Aboriginal people in the region is developing the appropriate balance between the western and Aboriginal worlds. In many places, particularly the homeland centres, culture remains very strong, and Aboriginal children are raised with knowledge of kinship, law and ceremony. (Bush Tel, no date)*

After much discussion and advice about potential sites the project partners (School of Education, Charles Darwin University and the department) approached Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku because it had a rich historical and contemporary experience of ITE, yet Galiwin'ku township was not the only community associated with ITE pathways in the region.

*Most homelands centres that have schools associated with Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku seem to be on the mainland not on Elcho Island. This conversation about homelands centres brought home to me today a sense of complex relationships between homelands and outstations and Galiwin'ku that I simply didn't get from Darwin. Elcho has many homelands. ...there are a number of outstations on Elcho and homeland centres on the mainland. Barrkira is a homelands centre situated closer to Yirrkala. I've been told past Principals at the [College] would prefer Barrkira to be transferred as a homelands centre to Yirrkala. I'm sure it's not that easy to do: a simple paper transfer relocates your ancestral connection to country to another town.*

*That single word 'remote' as used in a city doesn't begin to capture the layers of living between remote, really remote and really really remote communities. [Sue Shore field notes]*



**Picture 1: Location of Galiwin'ku in North East Arnhem region and some associated homelands (L-R Donydji, Rorruwuy and Barrkira).**

Education is very important to Yolŋu and particularly so for their children. A recent report summarised findings of consultations with parents and communities and argued the existence of three 'clear and unequivocal' views:

1. Children need to be competent in both western and Yolŋu teachings, Yolŋu culture is paramount and western education must be embedded in a learning context that respects and affirms traditional cultural knowledge traditions and practices.
2. Mainstream education at all levels is essential if Yolŋu children are to have the same life chances as other Australians.
3. A culture of genuine partnership between schools, parents, communities and NT DET is highly valued by parents. (Wearne & Yunupingu 2011, p. 5)



Other Top End Aboriginal educators are of a similar view and have repeated this message often about education for children learning on country:

*As an educator I value the students' education and I intend to provide a safe classroom environment for students to learn in. As an educator I need to have the knowledge and skills to be able to teach in **both** Tiwi and English languages. As a Tiwi teacher my priority is to give the students the best education there is. (Orsto, 1998 p. 20)*

There is a more common message circulating: Indigenous people are *not* concerned for their children to acquire the habits of western knowledge practices. A systematic analysis of more than 60 related articles (Bat & Shore 2013), conversations with Yolŋu for this project and key messages from East Arnhem literature over a number of decades (Stage 4 Teacher Education Students, 1998; G. Yunupingu, 2008-2009) determined that Yolŋu want the best of both Yolŋu and western education for their children. Commentators for this project argued that an apparent disinterest in schooling stems from parental dissatisfaction with schooling that is disrespectful to Yolŋu knowledge.

Combined with this is an ongoing concern about representation of Aboriginal teachers in the teaching workforce. These concerns are reflected in Northern Territory Government (NTG) commitments to an ambitious program of support for ITE and ongoing teacher professional development:

*In 2008/2009 NT DET, as part of the work undertaken under the Northern Territory Emergency Response Enhancing Education package, over 500 Indigenous staff in the northern Territory Department of Education and Training were surveyed about their study and career aspirations. The main findings were:*

- *There were very low formal study enrolments and completion rates*
- *All respondents wanted to remain in their community and undertake study*
- *They required more flexible and innovative recognition pathways of their current skill sets*
- *Over 170 (approximately one third) indicated at the time that their career goal was to be a teacher.*

*From these findings, the Northern Territory supported*

- *The development of teaching resources*
- *Workplace based professional learning, mentoring and coaching*
- *Post-graduate scholarships*
- *The Indigenous Teacher Upgrade program*
- *Indigenous teacher pathways programs*
- *The delivery of external professional development opportunities and provision of training incentives. (email communication, Reaburn 2012)*

The above initiatives reflected a concern for more seamless integration of formal and informal learning, prior employment experiences and professional development.

Partner organisations in this project agreed that integration of experiences to better utilise learning was needed. However the terminology of 'pathways', 'remote' and 'career oriented teacher' presumed a metropolitan operating climate far removed from the aspirations and understandings of teachers living on country. Just to be clear, this does not mean teachers living on country are not interested in careers, mobility or streamlined routes to registration as fully qualified teachers in the Australian national system. Rather, these terms were caught in a loop of mis-understanding that traps the *problem* of remote Indigenous ITE within metropolitan imaginaries of teaching and teacher education. A 'grammar' (cf McConaghy, 2000) of the problem is constructed which locates it in lexical structures of western knowledge, national notions of ITE delivery, national professional standards and other grammatical patterns of national recruitment, retention and completion. According to these logics, the solution to the problem of remote Indigenous teacher education is one that will "attract, develop, recognise and retain quality teachers" (AITSL, 2011, p. 1). Such work, underpinned by extensive citation from the global literature on quality teaching, is of course important. However in the context of this project it needs to be remembered that the "attract, develop, recognise and retain" mantra, recycles concepts of what it means to be a teacher in imaginaries that originate in the metropolis. These imaginaries miss the quite different social relations between teachers, communities and employing bodies responsible for remote schooling including the following:

- English as a form of communication which is not required for life in the community of which the school is part, a number of languages circulate in the community and in fact English is only required if one wants to engage with Balanda and other non-Yolŋu Indigenous people;
- family dynamics of the houses surrounding schools, and by extension the relational politics of local government shaped through clan and family collaboration, impinge directly on school life;
- access to and control of service amenities such as electricity, water, and transport cannot be assumed as reliable and regular; and,
- a focus on access/retention misses an alternative grammar of relationships and collaboration (cf Bat 2010).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Schools in other parts of Australia – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth – may also reflect these qualities. The aim here is not to dismiss the particular characteristics of an ITE program that would serve their needs. Rather, this report is about Galinwin'ku. Concerns that other schools also meet the criteria of remoteness from major commercial centres miss the 'institutional capture' these comments demonstrate in seeking to group schools through similar features.

The aim then, was to begin from a different starting point: to draw attention to the assumption that remote Indigenous experiences and therefore remote Indigenous ITE experiences, were perpetually outside the metrocentric frame. In taking this approach the report illustrates, from the perspective of *Yolŋu Teachers'* experiences of ITE and ongoing employment in the national system, how notions of national standards, national curriculum, national registration and national identity, activate a form of 'institutional capture' over their accounts of being and becoming *Yolŋu Teachers*. In so doing, their accounts as 'informants' are re-constituted as institutional discourses and their engagement with the cultural authority structures of their community reconfigured "as the objects of professional or managerial knowledge" (McCoy, 2006 p. 110). *Yolŋu Teachers* are positioned within an institutional discourse of ITE that is driven by metropolitan imaginaries for Indigenous children's futures, not Yolŋu children's futures. While the original intent of the project was to map pathways to teacher education in remote Aboriginal communities – however conceptually problematic that mapping and terminology might be – the project took a number of turns once deeper conversations were undertaken with Yolŋu women and men and their Balanda colleagues. These conversations in turn prompted different and far more pressing concerns for Yolŋu involved in the project:

*What information should be presented to new teachers, teacher educators, researchers and those in the national teaching space that would prompt them to listen more closely to Yolŋu concerns?*

*What knowledge practices would interrupt the tendency to dismiss Yolŋu concerns as unimportant or unresponsive to modernisation agendas?*

Yolŋu do not contest the importance of education for Yolŋu children. Indeed much of the writing produced by Yolŋu emphasises the importance of both worlds education to secure their children's futures. What is problematic is the way in which, first, children's futures are hooked into western knowledge imperatives which then mandate that Yolŋu knowledge recedes in pedagogical and conceptual importance and second, the role and industrial classification of the *Yolŋu Teacher* is hooked into those western knowledge imperatives via national teaching discourses and standards. A subsequent marginalisation therefore occurs when the starting point for a national teaching award downgrades the importance of Yolŋu locality. Hence a third issue entered the lexicon of the project:

*To what extent can teacher education have as much concern and commitment for Yolŋu Teachers' careers as we do for Yolŋu children's futures and how can both of those concerns avoid assimilationist programs that over-ride Yolŋu identity? In light of this what kind of shift in listening and thinking practices would this involve?*

## Talking with Yolŋu, listening to Yolŋu

By many accounts *Yolŋu Teachers* the combination of Yolŋu and western education Yolŋu children require if they are to make their way in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century simply will not be achieved in the absence of *Yolŋu Teachers* in schools. Galiwin'ku has had a long history of engagement with Balanda researchers. There is substantial evidence that Yolŋu cultural structures and language practices have been incorporated into the school yet like many townships with a mission past these connections are fragile. A Yolŋu Matha Library and a Literacy Resource Centre contain many artefacts and publications documenting this history of past traditions and language practices.

As this project progressed two particular puzzles became apparent. First, the artefacts and related research literature focussed primarily on the Yolŋu child (Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute 1980), Yolŋu child development theories and associated pedagogies for teaching and teacher training. There were, however, few resources and artefacts that developed a better understanding of *Yolŋu Teachers* and their experiences of teaching on country although some material of this kind was available (see for example *Strong Voices* (Blitner, Dobson, Gibson, Martin, Oldfield, Oliver & Palmer, 2000; *Strong Teachers* (Murphy & Railton with Ross, Whitehead, Martin, Granites, Ganambarr-Stubbs, Anderson, Kantawarra, Mununggurr, Oldfield, Madiwirr, Blitner & Bulkunu, 2013) and *Ngoonjook* the journal published by Batchelor Institute). Second, Yolŋu advised they had often been consulted about the conditions of teaching on country. They argue that this information was freely available but that few policies and programs reflected this advice and if they did it was not embedded in way that was sustainable.

This theme of retelling a story again and again over many decades emerged at regular intervals in each conversation and group meeting. It was so pervasive that project partners initiated a review of published and 'grey literature' (Bat & Shore 2013)<sup>6</sup> to complement this report and video/audio recordings of *Yolŋu Teachers* involved in the project. This review involved collating and reviewing existing literature written by Yolŋu leaders, teachers and researchers in an effort to present some of the key themes they have articulated about strong schooling for Yolŋu children over the past 30 years. A second task involved talking with people to build a better understanding of how *Yolŋu Teachers* experienced their role within a school and within the Australian national teaching system.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'Grey literature' as used in this report draws on a number of meanings (cf White, Thomas, Weldon, Lawrence, Galatis, & Tyndall, 2013). First it refers to the way in which dominant discourses about teacher education position literature written by Yolŋu as well as Aboriginal teachers and Teaching Assistants from the Northern Territory as outside the national teaching space and apparently not in a position to conceptualise Australian teacher education. Second it includes literature that may not be easily accessible due to limited and localised print runs or publishing processes that are primarily focussed on an internal audience within an organisation (usually in the Northern Territory). Third it includes material written by Territory based people (Yolŋu and Balanda) involved in education in the Territory, which may or may not have a readily identifiable provenance. The purpose of the 'grey literature' review was multiple. In simple terms it responded to Yolŋu assertions that much had already been said repeatedly about the experience of teacher education on country. To say we have few resources about these issues is to dismiss the scholarship that already exists. The monograph (Bat & Shore, 2013) was written to assist researchers, teachers and administrators new to the Territory to assess the decisions made about existing Indigenous knowledge practices and expertise held by Assistant Teachers of Galiwin'ku.

<sup>7</sup> A more comprehensive account of methodology and associated 'data collection' activities is described in Appendix 1.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Yolŋu have told their stories time and again and have been exposed to quite astounding instances of selective exclusion of their concerns in final reports, or researcher amnesia, the good news, at least for this project, was that people were still surprisingly willing to once again tell their story of teaching on country.

In essence this report documents the ways in which Yolŋu intellectually frame the conditions of their work as *Yolŋu Teachers*. For too long Yolŋu believe this conceptual work has been dismissed as 'experiential' and 'emotional' and 'cultural'. It is of course all of these things. Nevertheless, consistent with Yolŋu philosophising (cf M. Yunupingu, 1994) it is also an intellectual endeavour to position their work as *Yolŋu Teachers* within western schools. We used the terminology, *Yolŋu Teacher*, a strategic classification to highlight the mix of conceptual, cultural and experiential contributions they offer to the work schooling.

The remainder of the report is an attempt to send *Yolŋu Teachers* stories of their experiences, once again, into the metropolitan space of schooling, this time with a request that readers listen to the necessary articulations *between* factors such as health housing and education to 'bring about real and lasting change. These are by no means autonomous fields' (Nicholls, 2009, p. 93). Telling the story to government and its decision and policy makers might decentre the white metropolitan imaginaries that still dominate the conflation between teaching on country and 'remote schooling'.

The remainder of this report has 3 sections:

1. **What is a teacher? What is ITE?:** This section explores opportunities for teacher education in decades past. This section is brief as the focus in this report is on Yolŋu reflections of how they experienced this time rather than a step-by-step history of program development. The section draws attention to issues such as short term funding cycles and national issues which have had substantive effect on *Yolŋu Teacher* education.
2. ***Yolŋu Teachers' work*:** This section documents the characteristics of *Yolŋu Teachers* work as they experience it, including opportunities for training, their understanding of pathways and the responsibilities and barriers they meet along the way. This section draws extensively on long conversations, workshops and interviews with Yolŋu of Galiwin'ku. The framing of this section is influenced by a notion of generous work and work knowledge (Smith, 2005) that seems to reflect Yolŋu views that teaching is about much more than a focussed engagement with children in classrooms. Understanding these sections foregrounds Yolŋu requests that the project interrupt the metropolitan notions of schooling determining that teaching on country is teaching in remote communities. In essence the section responds to a call by Yolŋu (cf M. Yunupingu, 1994) that we expand our imaginations.

- 3. We have told you this before:** The final section of the report returns to primary message of the report - language, land, knowledge practices, cultural authority structures and family connections are not bargaining chips to be traded in the process of becoming “fit and proper teachers” (cf NTG TRB, 2012). For Yolŋu this would imply they want to become the equivalent of Balanda teachers and that is not their intention. This section also opens up the potential for further research and refinement of current practice in areas such as the responsibilities of teacher education institutions, school responsibility for professional development for *Yolŋu Teachers* and the individual responsibilities of educators to work alongside and with Yolŋu.

## What is a teacher? What is ITE?

The concept of teacher has changed over time within ITE programs, Australian school systems and also at Galiwin'ku. Teacher education is not, however, new to Galiwin'ku. A brief analysis of changes to teacher registration requirements over the last three decades provides some insight into what teachers of Galiwin'ku have experienced.

Reburn's recent paper on Aboriginal Assistant Teachers in the Northern Territory provides useful background here. She notes of the 1970s: “72 teachers across Australia identified as Indigenous – led to a push to have 1000 Aboriginal Teachers by 1990, flow on effect of the post Whitlam acknowledgement of Commonwealth responsibility for Indigenous affairs” (Reburn 2012, p. 7).

Prior to current arrangements a range of regulatory practices existed to define an award for teacher education (see for example the rules of the Australian Council on Tertiary Awards [ACTA] 1986). Ian Stewart argued the presence of a dual qualification system – recognising teachers working in ‘remote’ communities and those working in the national system – according to those ACTA requirements:

*[A] Teacher Education Program at Batchelor College is based on two accredited courses of study: the 1985 Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools), a restricted award that is accepted only by the Northern Territory Department of Education for the employment of predominantly ‘tradition-oriented’ Aboriginal teachers to work in ‘remote’ Aboriginal community schools; and the 1988 Diploma of Teaching, an unrestricted award that has national registration with ACTA (Australian Council for Tertiary Awards). (Stewart, 1989, pp. 2/23 extracted by Ingram, 2003)*

In other jurisdictions restricted or provisional awards have acknowledged the disjunct between the national space and a ‘remote’ space, noting that provisional registration will not necessarily lead to restricted or provisional outcomes for children's schooling. Rather this form of qualification is in recognition of appropriate ‘graduate teacher standards’ for remote community children, to coin the language of contemporary regulatory practices.

The well-known *Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE)* Program offered by Batchelor College (now Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education - BIITE) in the 1980s was subject to many of the changes prompted by national tertiary award requirements. RATE was not simply about ITE or 'teacher training' as it was commonly known. RATE was a program that addressed the social, political and cultural functions of *learning* and *living* on country.

Reaburn notes that RATE fulfilled three primary functions:

1. The first years of pre-service Teacher Education for Indigenous educators who for a range of social, cultural and political reasons needed to remain in and of their community;
2. In-service training where professional development with a pedagogical focus was aligned to accredited training requirements; and
3. A forum to create curriculum as pedagogical exchange. (Reaburn, 2012 p. 2)

The programs contributed to substantial self-determination, individual and community capacity building and community development. The logic of this approach was that Indigenous teacher education programs played a particular role in remote communities: they were connected, via cultural authority structures, to the community in ways that were neither apparent nor necessarily possible within metropolitan spaces, but critical to the success of the individuals and thus the programs:

*Graduates should be equipped to assist in the overall development of their communities, both through their work as Aboriginal classroom teachers, and also as skilled and informed community members. Their understanding of these issues, that are perceived by them to be of concern to contemporary Aboriginal communities, should be enhanced through intellectual interaction while in the program.*

This does not mean that all graduates must return to country, live on country, and teach in classrooms. That would mean relenting to the white Anglo-imaginaries that govern the on country experience.<sup>8</sup> Rather, some *Yolŋu Teachers* hold positions of cultural and community authority and leadership which extend beyond classrooms and indeed well beyond the school grounds. Their decisions to stay or go cannot be made only on the basis of employment advantages secured through mobility.

The *Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education (D-BATE)* Program, an upgrade program which met the 3 year equivalence requirement, was an early example of a university-community teacher education partnership which started in 1986 (Reaburn, 2012) and enabled a four year program of study supported by staff (originally from Batchelor College). This program was critical in creating a workplace culture that *recognised* the substantial responsibility of Indigenous Teachers in promoting two-way schooling. Moreover the program produced a substantial amount of research literature about community-based teacher education during its period of operation, much of it written by students.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Nor does it mean that all remote experiences are to be conflated to the on country terminology adopted for this report.

<sup>9</sup> See for example various editions of the journal *Ngoonjook* the first edition of which appeared in 1988. Kevin Rogers noted in the Preface to the first edition: "I would especially encourage Aboriginal teachers to contribute to this Journal, so that their views and those of their communities can form the basis for a better understanding of how schools can be reshaped to reflect the aspirations of their communities" (Rogers & Ngukurr, 1988).

During the 1990s and into the 2000s Indigenous communities and tertiary organisations experienced substantial upheaval as a consequence of substantial restructuring of tertiary education policies and in the Northern Territory, also experienced as enhanced southern pressure to conform to national mandates. Australia moved to a national vocational education and training system and this had substantial implications for institutions such as Batchelor which balanced the challenges of dual awards. The Register of Australian Tertiary Education (also RATE – the agency) <http://www.aqf.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Register-of-Australian-Tertiary-Education-RATE-in-1995.pdf> advises about qualifications at the time of (Australian Education Council, 1991) as follows:

*Changes within tertiary sector supervision of education and training have resulted in some significant modification to award level criteria, in particular, signalling a move from time-based to competency-based criteria in courses where national competency standards agreed to by States/Territories and the Commonwealth have been established. (Australian Education Council, May 1991, p. 3)*

The expectation over a number of decades was that these and other changes (Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF], 1995; 2013) would free up the tertiary sector, and provide greater movement, less duplication and more flexibility between sectors and for students. All of these changes had implications for Yolŋu Teachers engaging in formal and non-formal education systems to gain recognition as teachers in their own communities.

During this time various 'upgrade' programs were common, given the changing regulatory environment noted above. One of these included a one year inservice program to address the gap between older 3 year qualifications and the shift to a four year Bachelor requirement for registered teachers. This program, undertaken by BIITE in partnership with the Department of Education (DOE), was called the *Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP)*. There was some recognition of the support that would be required for Yolŋu Teachers to successfully complete the upgrade program and the expectations of those supporting them (for example study tutors) if they were also to move to remote communities to live during their time of employment.

Drawing on Reaburn (2012, p. 13) we hear that during the 1990s the "Commonwealth provided funding for 20 RATE tutors to support Assistant Teachers on their journey to becoming teachers. DET provided housing [for tutors]". A number of Yolŋu Teachers who completed ITUP or the RATE (community-based) program also participated in the project described in this report and are still working at Galiwin'ku today. It should be noted though that in this particular community only one person achieved teacher registration: a recurring theme in discussions with participants about the extent to which exiting pathways achieve the ITE goal of a teaching qualification.



The above mapping of selective changes in national ITE indicates an important and complex period of higher education course development. BIITE operated at the nexus of that restructuring between VET and higher education, as did a number of other Aboriginal tertiary organisations. ACTA guidelines (1986) were designed to ensure that qualifications in the former Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were comparable with universities. AQF guidelines (1996, 1998, 2013) provided further institutional scaffolds requiring comparative matching of qualifications across areas such as 'volume of learning' (approximate time spent on learning), program content, assessment tasks and various references to cognitive levels of skills, knowledge and application of knowledge. The distinction between vocational sector and higher education methodologies generated further difficulties by valuing the 'practicum' in higher education and diminishing the opportunities to grant recognition of prior learning associated with Assistant teacher practice.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, although apparently recent, teacher registration regulations also impacted on the extent to which organisations and communities could engage in teacher education:

*Two states in Australia, Queensland and South Australia, have long-standing registration systems. The situation as of mid-2002 is that teacher registration has been introduced in Tasmania, legislation establishing teacher registration has been passed in Victoria and it is likely that a system of teacher registration will emerge in Western Australia in the near future. Teacher registration has also been the subject of recent debate in the Northern Territory and New South Wales. (Anstey & Manitzky, 2003)*

In the Northern Territory teacher registration was introduced in 2004 under the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act (<http://www.trb.nt.gov.au/registration>). Registration adheres to a number of national mandates with requirements for full registration listed as follows:

- holds the prescribed qualifications for registration;
- is a fit and proper person to teach as decided by the Board;
- is competent to teach as decided by the Board;
- has the prescribed professional experience and currency of practice for Full Registration; and
- meets any other prescribed requirement for registration

(<http://www.trb.nt.gov.au/registration/new-applicants/eligibility>).

<sup>10</sup> This limitation existed in the case of awards linked to teacher registration but it should be noted that in other cases, for example degrees associated with *adult and vocational* teacher education (Shore 1998; 2010), Assistant Teachers could receive substantial recognition for prior experience and occupational qualifications learning.

Successive sectoral restructuring has been difficult for teacher education – for example, the introduction of VET training packages, the requirement to deliver *nationally accredited* Diploma and Advanced Diploma curriculum; the Bradley review (2008) which advocated more flexibility and responsiveness to equity and disadvantaged students; and the introduction of the AQF that substantially reconfigured credit transfer relations between the two sectors. Each of these changes has required constant review of articulation arrangements and a need for lecturers and administrators to be abreast of course restructuring. Another effect of these changes was to successively frame consultation with community through a metropolitan notion of the ‘education industry’. In this regard Lanhupuy’s (2002) declaration of Yolŋu engagement at all levels of educational planning had the potential to be realised: “Through their involvement as teachers, lecturers, consultants and researchers, the education of our children and our young adults will once more return to our own people” (Lanhupuy, 2002, p. 42).

But the *political* overtones of Lanhupuy’s writing were submerged in a larger concern for alignment with the regulatory mechanisms of a national teaching space, or a localised Territory Intervention (cf Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), what some in this project called the ‘white is right, west is best’ mantra that diminished all knowledge other than that emanating from the white public space of the southern metropolis. To reiterate, Lanhupuy refers to two different forms of educational involvement: the tradition oriented practices that have always existed in communities and western governance practices built into tertiary sector course accreditation requirements (cf AQF 2013). As a result of increasing western governance practices the linkages between ITE accredited curriculum and Yolŋu knowledges as practised through living and learning *on country* and were more difficult to sustain.

Graduates of earlier programs were not simply graduate *teachers*. Nor was connection to community simply as respondees to community consultation. They were at the ‘vanguard of advocacy’ and change (Lanhupuy 2002). But being at the vanguard of advocacy also required careful positioning of local and national knowledge and an understanding of Indigenous desires for education. These changes resulted in constantly shifting benchmarks for teaching employment which seemed to be ever-reliant on the regulatory mechanisms of the wider white public space often at the expense of the cultural authority structures of the community. As Lanhupuy explained some time ago:

*Only when the cultural orientation of the school becomes Yolŋu, will schools become integral to the movement of Aborigines towards self-determination.*

*The decolonisation of schools in Aboriginal communities is the challenge for Aborigines now. This will be done through careful and prudent action by the Aboriginal community members themselves. It will not commence in the same way in the many different Aboriginal communities across Australia. People will respond to the challenge in ways compatible with the skills, training and experiences located in each community.*  
(Lanhupuy, 1987, p. 33)

Invoking a notion of self-determination here is complex. The Northern Territory Intervention would seem to deny the possibility of that in current times. Nevertheless Lanhupuy and others argue that the principles underpinning 1980s notions of self-determination are critical in the ongoing decolonisation of schools (and appropriate ITE programs) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are by no means irrelevant or outmoded responses to modernisation.

### **ITE tensions: projectisation and pedagogy**

Those who administer and lead in ITE are important players in the overall framework of shifting the cultural orientation of the school to one compatible with Yolŋu philosophies. The factors working *against Yolŋu Teachers* are multiple, and there are overlaps with other areas of development work and community capacity building.

The focus on provider approaches and models needs to be complemented by discussion on macro features and several factors that influence the nature of these institutional responses. Without some understanding of these macro forces that have influenced teacher education for Indigenous people, any analysis runs the risk of being critiqued as an instrumental evaluation and lacking an understanding of the broader dimensions of community-based provision. Several macro issues need to be considered and this includes an understanding and analysis of short term 'projectisation' (cf Appadurai, 2002).

Arjun Appadurai's work has highlighted the enervating qualities of projectisation as the use of fragmented and disjointed responses that emerge from top-down responses to poverty by donor agencies and government, rather than emerging from local collective action. According to Appadurai's research the use of short term project support to ameliorate long-term inequalities acts to frustrate and impede local action in poverty alleviation projects in India. As a result supposedly organised responses are often tokenistic, short term, underfunded and unable to make any real difference. Moreover they create false expectations. Similarly, teacher education for Indigenous people from remote communities has been reliant on a rolling sequence of what might be termed special projects, which fall outside other more permanent budget arrangements. Paradoxically such programs are also criticised as being expensive because many aspects of their 'special funding' are either hidden or fixed costs are invisible to core budgets but are factored into special projects. The projects are then seen as expensive and wasteful when in fact they can arguably be marginally cheaper. There is considerable evidence that this sporadic institutional response undermines local commitment. It also puts pressure on institutions to overstate success and redirect focus away from risk.

The selection of careers in teaching also needs to be contextualised within employment markets and the broader infrastructure available to people living on country. The question arises as to the extent to which teaching is an attractive career in relation to other careers in the private and public sector. Teaching is no longer the only option for employment and there is a need to respond to competitive pressures from other occupations. In metropolitan centres this manifests in the form of employment in the public sector in areas of law and justice, health and local government. There are also attractive careers in the private sector. A recent MATSITI national project discussed rights to transfer, housing entitlements and other rights to career mobility that differentiate Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

In the context of on country teaching these issues manifest differently. Many smaller townships such as Galiwin'ku do in fact have substantial employment opportunities, more so than many homelands centres. However the opportunities for professional work, permanent work, leadership positions in public service agencies (and services attached to preschool provision), as well as employment in Yolŋu controlled agencies is more constrained. Specific opportunities arising from local employment and the impact on pathways to teaching are discussed in later sections.

Added to the above, institutional infrastructure and critical mass of people employed in leadership positions are issues that sit at one step removed from many of the debates about pathways to ITE. Moreover historical precedents shape many of the industrial conditions for existing permanent and contract positions in education. Many of these conditions link back to the days prior to Northern Territory self-government and are embedded in the (ongoing) challenge of attracting and retaining (Balanda) education staff in the Northern Territory. Most notable are the different housing, relocation and living allowance conditions associated with local and non-local staff appointments. In this context Balanda and *non-local Yolŋu* permanent appointments gain access to industrial allowances, housing and relocation conditions which are not available to contract or 'local' appointments.

Teacher education is a long-term project involving at least a four-year minimum period of study. While few figures are available to support the claim, anecdotal experience of Yolŋu and Balanda in this project also indicate that full-time study is uncommon, indeed not compatible with the socio-economic and cultural responsibilities of Yolŋu on country, to say nothing of ongoing health, carer and family commitments. Discussion pathways to ITE and enrolment in ITE programs must take account of the issues noted above as well as a broader assemblage of issues that position many potential applicants as 'low paid workers' with all the associated hardships aligned with other low paid and contract workers (cf Masterman-Smith & Pocock (2008)).

While non-completion of teacher education courses may be the result of conscious decisions for change where there are more attractive employment options in the metropolitan context, the on country experience suggests that a combination of the above issues is exacerbated by two other issues: the commitment and capacity of a community to support teacher education within the school and the extent to which teacher education providers do not 'put aside' pedagogical issues of bothways learning inherent in on country teaching. Community-based teacher models noted as a feature of the Batchelor experience may make the assumption that there are capabilities within the community and townships that will support teacher education. Issues associated with infrastructure and community capacity need to be critically evaluated particularly with a view to noting how increasingly stretched community resources impede retention in ITE. Pedagogically there are still well documented challenges in implementing teacher education pedagogies that customise a national teacher education curriculum to on country experiences. These challenges come into sharper focus when using the particular analysis used in this report: that of a metropolitan white public space which is the default decision-making framework for ITE curriculum and implementation.

Finally, in relation to this project there is also a curious sense of uneasiness between the above ideas and national concerns with *more* teachers and *more* alternative pathways (DEEWR, 2013). In the case of Galiwin'ku, there were already many people who identified as *Yolŋu Teachers*, a classification previously described, which has no industrial significance according to the Territory employment conditions.<sup>11</sup> At the time of visits to Galiwin'ku there were approximately 23 *Yolŋu Teachers* working in various capacities in the school and attended workshops or interviews for this project. Many were classified as Aboriginal Assistant Teachers (ATs) and as we will soon hear, they believed this lack of recognition of an important part of their expertise constrained their role and influence within the school as well as their remuneration for employment vis-à-vis non-local teacher remuneration practices, regulations and policies (NTG DET, 2012). Hence the disjunct again between the generic national experience and the on country experience. A call for *more* teachers is understandable at a national level, however in the case of Galiwin'ku the challenge might be better framed as follows: what conditions would be required for the current staff of over 20 *Yolŋu Teachers* and a number of Yolŋu on scholarships to successfully upgrade their qualifications or enter ITE in order to be better positioned to attract a permanent position with a school. In the context of this project a substantial number of Yolŋu already working in the school in various capacities had the potential to offer important insights about the ITE on country experience and the pathways they had taken.

To understand how the conditions of *Yolŋu Teachers* work and study lives could be better aligned with their overall expertise we attempted to rethink the entry point to the commonly conceived *problem of remote ITE* as one of poor pathways and lack of completions. This involved putting aside the powerful mantra of “attract, develop, recognise and retain” (AITSL, 2011 p. 1) and listen more closely to Yolŋu descriptions of their teaching experience. The following sections illustrate how Yolŋu experiences of teacher employment and teacher education on country repeatedly returned to four distinct appeals to Balanda teachers, to the national teaching space and to teacher education institutions: *recognise* Yolŋu knowledge as teachers' work; *respect* the concept of Yolŋu Teacher and the substantial expertise those people have accumulated; *reconfigure* notions of 'shared teaching' as emergent exercises in knowing, rather than exercises in classroom management; and, *affirm* teaching on country alongside persistent assumptions of mobility that currently frame the national teaching workforce.

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11 A reminder that in this project we activated this term to represent the cross-over of Yolŋu and western knowledge practices required to ensure Yolŋu children have the best chance of negotiating both worlds in later life.

## Yolŋu Teachers' work

Yolŋu and Balanda who talked for this project understood language, land, culture and family as central to their work in the school: who could be a teacher; how they became and remained working as a teacher; how they worked with each other and with Balanda; what 'good education' goals were; and, how they achieved those goals.

This entry point is important in understanding the approach taken in this project to *Yolŋu Teachers* and the work they do, and so also the pathways that would recognise, respect and affirm them as we all work together to build collective knowledge. As the project progressed it became clear that many of the naming patterns associated with ITE accreditation, educational qualifications and teacher registration did not reflect the work undertaken by the people who talked for this project. Assistant Teacher, Class Teacher, Senior Teacher, Tutor, Teacher – none of these classifications traversed the cultural authority structures of their community and the Balanda governance structures of western schooling to capture the breadth and intent of *Yolŋu Teachers'* collective practice for children's futures. The term *Yolŋu Teacher* came to be used routinely to condense complex social, cultural, ancestral and pedagogical knowledge practices. It was not an industrial classification. Rather it gestures to the epistemological and ontological dissonance that from the very beginning shadowed Yolŋu experiences of ITE, and so also this project.

### Yolŋu teachers ideas about their work

When asked what a *Yolŋu Teacher* was, descriptions came easily to workshop groups, predominantly across two areas of practice. The first was knowledge for integration of western and non-western education:

- *I have no Balanda degree but I am filled with the knowledge of this land. And most important I have connection to the (Yolŋu) students.*
- *our law and culture remains as it is, has been for many many years. We still hold it strong with pride and power.*
- *We Yolŋu Teachers have the keys for Yolŋu children to enter the western world.*
- *I give Yolŋu students hope and [guidance], values and protocols to their learning*
- *help our children reach their goals to understand both worlds*

The second area was associated with their role in bringing different people together:

- *respect, valuing other tribes and clans*
- *Yolŋu pedagogy for integration. [I provide] program links to the curriculum*
- *I am a role model/mentor to students and Balanda staff.*

In essence, while Yolŋu people may be individuals, the classification Yolŋu Teacher is collective. On completion of her qualification Golun envisaged working in her homeland classroom with a Balanda teacher 'sharing teaching', 'sharing knowledge'. This was a practice of teaching that fitted with how she understood learning. It was not as accumulation of knowledge but, as working together collectively to build children's capacity to know and operate in both worlds. This collective enterprise was increasingly aligned with those people in the school – Yolŋu Teachers – who were capable of bridging the gap which Gurrudupunbuy and Minyarama describe when speaking of the work to be done in the school:<sup>12</sup>

**J. Gurrudupunbuy:** *In the last meeting I talked about stepping into somebody else's dimension ... like, this Balanda person coming in, stepping into your dimension, yeah? It's like stepping into somebody else's property, you know, and [you] have to learn the background and whose property it is and how they can communicate with the person somehow. ... that's how I introduced it to the new staff last year about stepping into somebody else's land, adopted in – you must need to know what you can do and what you can't do, you know, which helps them [Balanda] and helps us [Yolŋu].*

*We just talked about mentoring together, like Balanda staff having a Yolŋu mentor and Yolŋu having a Balanda mentor as well. That way is working both ways, you know, helping each other be a better teacher. ... mentoring, it's something that I would like to learn from Balanda teachers and what Balanda teachers would want to learn from Yolŋu Teachers.*

**Sue (to J. Minyarama):** *Did you want to say something about that?*

**J. Minyarama:** *Same thing when talking about that. Balanda just come and go. We are staying here, we are staying here for life, you know? We live here, you know. So we need to support pathways to make a bridge for the kids... so we need more education to build our community, generation to generation, to grow up, to go through like Balanda.*

**J. Gurrudupunbuy:** *We need that strong foundation, scaffold, to bridge two cultures. Teaching together, they have their Western teaching, we have our Yolŋu, you know Yolŋu Matha, and that education should be bridging together, you know, coming together. That should be meeting together some way, but there's a gap in between... you know a big gap there. We trying to make a bridge across from our culture to their culture and the other culture is trying to make a bridge to our culture. ... And that doesn't meet. It's just ... a big ditch in between. And we need to see education bridging you know making that bridge. We have the stuff, scaffolds and all this but there's no way that we can bridge the two educations together.*

<sup>12</sup> Transcripts of everyday talk are never seamless and often reflect the lurching nature of spoken language: even more so when discussion occurs in English and covers complex concepts. Transcript excerpts used in this report have been edited for clarity and flow while retaining meaning. Speaking in English hampered many of the participants. Some workshop reports were undertaken in Yolŋu Matha and will be made available on a website to accompany the project resources.

None of the *Yolŋu Teachers* dismissed or minimised the need for Balanda teachers. Rather they focussed on the work they would do together – Yolŋu and Balanda – to ensure children didn't fall into that 'big ditch' between Yolŋu and Balanda worlds.

To get to the stage where they could contribute to that learning within the school, many *Yolŋu Teachers* had experienced long employment pathways through community and government agencies as well as their cultural authority pathways associated with learning about and from ancestral practices. During these times they also acquired substantial experience within the School. Some had been Assistant Teachers for periods of up to 30 years working and living, on and off country, to build strong schooling for Yolŋu children. We resisted the notion of talking about linear pathways as these seemed to draw Yolŋu employment experiences into notions of career structure and educational pathways that did not connect with the stories told in this project. Nevertheless it was possible to identify a number of examples of how Yolŋu 'arrived' as employees at the school and how these different points of arrival provide better understandings of becoming and being a *Yolŋu Teacher*.

### **Becoming and being a *Yolŋu Teacher***

In this community it was unusual for those living on country to enter preservice teaching direct from schooling. In fact it is important to remember that for many of the men and women associated with this project, they grew up in a time when there was no secondary schooling in the community. Children may have gone away to boarding school in Darwin, Canberra or Brisbane for example. Hence dominant metropolitan explanations about low Year 12 graduation numbers, gaps in academic literacies required to enter and be successful at higher education and lack of pathways from schooling to ITE do not have the same explanatory logic as they do in metropolitan settings. The view from Galiwin'ku was somewhat different.

Women, in particular, talked of their responsibilities to have children, grow up their family and carer responsibilities for older people. In addition, in some cases there was a conflict between the authority relationships assigned to *Yolŋu Teachers* in the school – with children, parents, and other Yolŋu staff – and the positions of cultural authority they held in the community. The pathway from school to higher education and back into the school meant men and women teacher graduates in their early 20s were navigating complex Balanda and Yolŋu knowledge systems at an age which was incommensurate with patterns of Yolŋu status and knowledge positions. In the stories told for this project, becoming a teacher involved navigating this conflict between 'having knowledge' recognised through the western system and have cultural approval. In many cases status acquired at a young age and 'community status' were incommensurate. It was also the case, as Gurrudupunbuy explains in describing his long pathway, that this extended experience was not always converted into a career structure that recognised and respected the knowledge he had acquired along the way.



Given the size and structure of Galiwin'ku, a range of jobs were available to people which meant some people had been employed within the community for 15 or 20 years prior to their current position within the school. Mulaliny was employed as a tutor at the time of the project, working in the preschool in the morning and then moving on to do volunteer work at the primary school in the afternoon. Her 'pathway' included work at the store and in childcare prior to her work at the school:

**Mulaliny:** ... After school I had a job at El Questro... doing operator work, then I went to child care. I had a job at child care and every evening – every afternoon I worked at the health club. I had two jobs at the time.

When I was working at the childcare I also went to Batchelor and [did] Certificate III at Batchelor... childcare, children services. ... I took my little boy [with me] and he was at the day care. I had only three weeks at Batchelor studying and we fly back, but I was still working at the childcare at that time. ... But when I was at Batchelor doing childcare, it was [employment] by Galiwin'ku community, not Shire. But it's now Shire employed childcare.

**Sue:** Can you tell me a bit about that ... I don't know the difference between how it operated with the Shire and how it used to operate with the community?

**Mulaliny:** Community operator was different... the Shire is now, it's too hard, you have to go and see Balanda first in the office and look for the job. Mmm, in the Shire [Office], you have to see the boss in the Shire, yeah. ...

**Sue:** And after the Certificate III in in Child Care?

**Mulaliny:** I was at home at the time. When my little boy turned four I took him to the pre-school. He comes here every day, every Monday to Friday. I was with him then [the School] they thought that they need one person, yeah, to do tutoring at the pre-school and they ask me and I was interested to be at the pre-school.

**Sue:** Yeah. Why do you think they asked you? What do you think they saw?

**Mulaliny:** Because I was helpful. That's why they asked me, I was helping, and all the kids was listening and share something with me, yeah, and I share with them. It was manymak [good].

Mulaliny's story is a common one especially amongst women and young mothers, and it includes fulfilling cultural responsibilities to have a family and to 'gather income'. Being a tutor has a number of dimensions. It involves some interpreting and translation in the classroom as well as support with resources:

*Like if Assistant Teacher not here and I help all the Balanda teachers transfer Yolŋu Matha songs, help them do all the paperwork, colouring, ... help them to cut. ... They need help and they always go and ask me to help them like they did to all the Assistant Teachers and it is manymak [good] to become a teacher or tutor.*

Mulaliny is also aware of the potential for children to fall into the 'big ditch' that J. Gurrudupunbuy describes above:

*Sometimes Yolŋu kids not listening and not understanding the Balanda way. Sometimes little kids not understand [Balanda talk]. That's why they need Yolŋu Teaching Assistants to be with Balanda in the pre-school.*

In discussion with other Yolŋu and Balanda similar patterns emerged, of a route into teaching which might appear to an outside observer to be indirect and drawn-out. Yet for many this pathway made sense given the cultural obligations they also balanced. When viewed from metropolitan frames the route seems costly for individuals and education providers, as well as being unnecessarily drawn out for those individual who would benefit from more immediate financial rewards.

At 19 Golŋ returned to her homeland outstation to have children and stayed there for a number of years. She describes her broad employment experience or prior to returning to Galiwin'ku and entering a Northern Territory Government Fellowship program. She returned to Galiwin'ku to work:

*I was working at ALPA Store [the Arnhem Land Progress Association] office for one year ... counting money and checking, you know, different [jobs in] the office. So they want me to stay there and when I went down to the register, and one Balanda came in who was the [homeland] teacher for about one, two years.*

*So she came in and saw me. I was just on the register. ... I was smiling ... Not just standing there [looking] bored. I always always talk to them [Balanda], only happy with them, then two men came and said: "Who that? Who wants to work in the school?" because kids are struggling on the Yolŋu Matha [Yolŋu language].*

*That's why I came there. Then I came back in 2011 and first they put me in the kids' centre and that's where I started. So I started to come to school ... and then I work after school, learning about teaching Yolŋu Matha, 'cause some are struggling with family and work. I learnt lots, like, different [Yolŋu Matha] dialects. Yeah, every dialect they can't teach you and break them into groups.*

*And then I went to school every day and then Kay, she's our principal since January, our assistant principal, I used to work with her. As a teacher, aid to teacher, yeah. She just said, "My God. You've got lot of knowledge. You should come and work with me." So I worked with her for about – couple of months, for two – maybe one or two and then Kay said to me, "Rhoda, you just wasting your time. You have to go to do scholarship". ... And now I'm here.*

Goluj took the initiative and built a relationship where Balanda learned to listen and acknowledge her value and potential. She had picked up skills along the way working with children and in the store as well as learning a range of Yolŋu Matha dialects. These skills stood her in good stead when she began studying.

Many *Yolŋu Teachers* had been engaged in employment in the school on Galiwin'ku for between ten and twenty or twenty-five years and some for even thirty years. They had experienced a changing landscape of rules and regulations regarding what counted as teacher qualifications. During this time some had undertaken upgrade programs as the national teaching system continued to elevate qualification requirements. Others experienced differing levels of mentoring and professional development. A recurring theme in their engagement with the school was the passing parade of Balanda qualified according to metropolitan regulatory benchmarks to teach the community children. J. Gurrudupunbuy, a cultural adviser at the school, explained it so:

**J. Gurrudupunbuy:** *I'm the only person – only male that's been working here long, long term. Okay? I was a tutor. Yeah, but I did bit of study and then, you know ... try to do the ongoing training but, you know, didn't have chance and that new person came and then, like, every time new lecturer come in, and new teachers come in, and they don't know you, your background and... So, I leave them [the courses] without degrees; you know? ...*

*I been here for nearly 20 years now with the school and still not recognise by the school or by the people from the school, again because of [Balanda leaving] on and off. I still carried on working with the College as a teacher, not a qualified teacher but a, tutor and I been stable in that position for nearly 10, 20 years, you know? I haven't moved on. See, that's where I'm finding it hard because of people that come and go and don't want to know you. They – it's – they just want to please themselves and off they go, you know, and then I think about me being a full-time teacher on my land, because they come and go and I'm here for rest of my life until I die, buried here.*

**Sue:** *You are a teacher?*

**J. Gurrudupunbuy:** *No, I'm Assistant Teacher now. ...and I've got the responsibility of being a teacher and leader within the school and the community.*

Education department support and past ITE programs (such as D-BATE and RATE) were very important in positioning some Yolŋu Teachers within the school – but each program or upgrade had its challenges. In speaking of those times Yolŋu Teachers felt like they were on a constant ‘upgrade journey’ that was never complete. This should not be misinterpreted that they were not willing to undertake professional development. Or that they were not willing to undertake ongoing learning. They explained that that was indeed how knowledge and learning were understood in their cultural worlds. Nevertheless, the constant changes to programs across the VET and higher education sector, the internal restructuring of courses within universities and the economic, health and ceremonial responsibilities that travelled alongside their often lengthy learning journeys, would have hampered anyone’s capacity to complete in the timely frame of four years underpinning the metropolitan model:<sup>13</sup>

*A Yolŋu Teacher I spoke to today had completed a two-year diploma. For various reasons it took R a long time to complete the qualification and it seemed inevitable that she thought she would never finish. She recalled that content and assessment practices changed and it was hard to keep track of how to articulate her past achievements into updated courses.*

*Part of the problem was that previous units were not always awarded credit into the next course. The program content in the new award did not always align with what she had already passed and the ‘volume of learning’ (AQF 2013) changed to four years. All of these changes were part of the backdrop to an overall rejection of her prior learning into new teacher education courses governed by the Australian Qualification Framework.*

*R made one clear point: her previous success was not recognised. Her advice, clear and unequivocal, about pathways, was as follows: ‘What we should be telling people now who are doing teacher education is that they should stay on that pathway, stick on that pathway until you’re finished’. Her message to younger people was to complete their courses. If they partially finished a course, they would not get any credit for it, and then you would have nothing. [Sue Shore: field notes]*

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<sup>13</sup> It needs to be noted here that recent research in the area of teacher education indicates that these completion timeframes are not all that common in metropolitan settings either, where many ITE students undertake part-time study and come as mature age students with many responsibilities in addition to their study.

The Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP) was one such program. Delivered by BIITE, Yolŋu Teachers undertook a one year (full-time equivalent) upgrade program to add to a previous 3 year teacher education diploma. Those who completed the course requirements returned to the School as qualified teachers (Reaburn, 2012), after completing onsite workshops and strong support through face-to-face intensives that were a feature of the Batchelor ITE model. But they also experienced the feeling of being “sent back from Batchelor” with little support to be classroom teachers. While there was talk about mentoring and support, one woman’s recollection of this time was that she was largely on her own. In fact, in workshops and individual conversations there was very little in the collective memory of the women and men, of systematic and sustained mentoring to build their capacity once they had completed their qualifications. Yolŋu and Balanda alike reflected this was in part because there was limited professional development funding available in the system at the time. Others noted that, as Assistant Teachers, they had limited access to PD funds. Yet others noted that as contract appointments they were generally not offered access to PD opportunities or funding or provided with the information to take it up even if it had it been available. Many of the above comments are an enduring reminder of the ubiquitous presence of ‘project’ funding over many decades and the impact this has had on the sustainability of strategies that under different conditions may have achieved greater measures of success.

Successive regulatory arrangements for teacher education responded to the pressure for a national teaching system but Aboriginal community groups and students at Batchelor in 1989 expressed similar concerns about the extent to which reaccreditation processes responded to the needs of Yolŋu living and learning on country:

*The history of Aboriginal education and training has already shown us about the dangers of mainstreaming. From our studies we understand ‘mainstreaming’ to be a process that non-Aboriginals, Balanda, use to try to show that the most powerful and important ideas come from the Balanda “mainstream”. They think that their ideas about curriculum and learning are the very important ones and they don’t allow Yolŋu ideas to be considered properly. This is the way Yolŋu are made to do the same things, and learn the same things as Balanda. This is a way of turning Yolŋu into Balanda. (Gaykamangu, Gurruwiwi, Dhurrkay, Gundjarrangbuy, Ngandama, Garrawurra, & Gapany 1989)*

Some people who wrote this letter to the Advisory Committee for course reaccreditation were also involved in this current 'pathways project'. They were not objecting to change. Dhaykamalu, for example, was Principal of the school from 2000-2002. She had spent over 20 years teaching at Galiwin'ku prior to that and was not a stranger to change. Martha Sombo Kamara completed a PhD study of women and leadership in remote communities (Kamara, 2009) and captured the difficulty of teaching and leading at a time when, unlike today, Yolŋu held senior positions within the schooling structure of Galiwin'ku. Dhaykamalu was one of the participants. At the time Dhaykamalu held an Advanced Diploma of Teaching and a Graduate Diploma Education Administration (Kamara, 2009, p. 101). A key role for Yolŋu in the school was to promote the "interrelatedness of the school and community environments where schools are seen as extensions of language and cultural reproduction" (Kamara 2009, p. 249). The role of *Yolŋu Teachers* is in part to work the in-between spaces of complex cultural authority and western governance structures and with families, clans, language groups, School Council, Central Office administrators (in Darwin), Shire Councils and other agencies in the community. As in any school these relationships were negotiated according to emergent social, cultural and economic relations. What makes on country teaching more challenging is the purpose of two ways school governance. Dhaykamalu spoke of the changes she navigated between family, community and department, noting her successor would need mentors in two worlds to be an effective principal. Moreover being an effective principal in the western world was invariably associated with "a BIG BO-O-KI!" which represented "Departmental law" (Dhaykamalu in Kamara 2009, p. 186). English texts and regulatory arrangements provided important 'blueprints' for being a principal even then, but other blueprints were also in operation even if not necessarily established in print.

In talking for this project, Marcus explained how Yolŋu reflected back to past mission days and the legacy from past elders of other 'blueprints' they needed to follow:

*[elders] put a blueprint for us to follow, and every generation ... from the past we learn from the past to move into the future. And the further we go from the past, we have to always keep track of what has been done... if we don't learn from our Elders, we don't learn the law, and we move onto the future, losing that [law] ... it gets harder for us to maintain that [law]. But education, gives our children that sense of – when they are growing up, they know they belong in two worlds, not one world.*

While new teacher education programs are developed and professional development strategies may be in place the key message from Yolŋu in this project is that retention strategies have much to do with high turnover of Balanda staff and induction practices that often prepare them inadequately to deal with a job that involves far more than classroom teaching. These issues are exacerbated by a schooling system that remains stubbornly western in its governance structures and everyday practices:

*Our traditional names were considered either primitive or very difficult to pronounce. This made it easier for our teachers who were all Europeans. I was given the name Valerie and became known as Valerie Dhaykamalu. There was very little consultation with our families about names—after all getting an education was the most important thing, a big privilege for Aboriginal children. In Aboriginal culture when children are born a name is not pulled from a hat. Names are given according to clan groups. It is a key element in identifying people and relationships. (Dhaykamalu, 1999 p. 67)*

*Yolŋu Teachers* in this project remarked that change was continuous and appeared to have no logic: it started outside the community, bore down on them within their school and community and had major implications for their personal and cultural well-being, their employment tenure and careers and hence their financial security. As noted above they were quite adept at dealing with change, not because they lived in a remote region of Australia, but because change was a common feature of everyday life.

From the perspective of living and working on country what Yolŋu experienced as *remote* was national decision-making initiated in faraway places – for example Carlton South where teacher standards were published (AITSL, 2011a). What was remote, was change structured according to metropolitan imaginaries that didn't only clash with their understandings of language, land, culture and family (cf Dhamarrandji, 2011; Bulkunu, 2010), but actively sought to replace those understandings in educational hierarchies of knowledge.

This begs the question of the connections between national ITE programs, the strategies in place to “develop, recognise and retain” (AITSL, 2011a, p. 1) teachers in a national teaching system and the strategies required to respond to the kind of everyday life Yolŋu experienced.

Returning to the opening pages of this report, we need to be reminded that remoteness has many interpretations. The above section attempts to explain how the western notion of school was experienced differently by *Yolŋu Teachers*. They did not experience Galiwin'ku as many Balanda teachers did: 'environmentally and socially unpredictable' (Brasche & Harrington, 2012, p. 119). Yolŋu may well have been challenged by the seasonal challenges of the community, by the ways in which children sometimes behaved in class, by unpredictable resourcing. Nevertheless the community was *home* and so the children's learning styles, the seasonal challenges (which also brought connection to land and ancestral knowledge), the opportunities to bring community elders into the school to take “part in different activities, like cultural activities where the kids learn how to dance, how to paint themselves so they know they are Yolŋu children” (Dhaykamalu in Kamara 2009, p. 182), the responsibility of being a role model to adults, children and parents in the community: all of these practices constituted the substance of everyday life, and so also core learning opportunities rather than extra-curricular activity when there was a lull in the timetable.

Recently, at the funeral of the late Dr Yunupingu, Paul Kelly observed of the renowned band Yothu Yindi: “they were more than a band, they were a physical philosophy you could dance to”. *Yolŋu Teachers* don't stop dancing once they leave the school. They philosophise everyday about the need to ensure the school remains as an extension of the cultural authority structures of the community, for that is critical in governing Yolŋu children's futures. How then do *Yolŋu Teachers* understand this as 'teachers work', given that many of them held the role of *Yolŋu Teacher* despite industrial and official classifications that assigned them otherwise within the school? A further question of note is what this means for those of us who are in fact positioned in ways that make us 'remote' from this way of philosophising?

## Pathways into ITE

As a result of long conversations with *Yolŋu Teachers* and Balanda colleagues and reviewing material written by Yolŋu about community experiences, a number of patterns emerged as ways to become a *Yolŋu Teacher* – a person working within the school who helped to bridge the disjunct Yolŋu children experienced when they came in contact with western schooling. This disjunct occurred because a number of issues central in the children's lives – language, land, culture and family – were differently valued once they entered the school.

In addition to the above employment pathways that seemed connected to family affiliations and personal talents, a range of formal pathways were initiated in response to community requests:

1. **D-BATE and RATE:** More than 10 women and a smaller number of men had been involved either in the D-BATE program, a partnership convened between Deakin University and Batchelor or the RATE Program run at Batchelor during the late 1980s and through the 1990s. Many graduates of these programs are now community leaders: heading community organisations in Galiwin'ku; leading research projects for universities, government departments and community agencies; working at other organisations, for example the Health Clinic; undertaking translation work for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, and so on. They were highly skilled in Yolŋu Matha dialects and English, adept at working the in-between spaces of western and Yolŋu knowledge systems and in high demand from community and families. Only one person involved in this project gained teacher registration through the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITUP) at Batchelor and became a Class Teacher – the industrial classification assigned to accredited teachers. Others in the group were actively involved in the school, employed as part-time cultural advisors, or within particular school programs such as the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program.<sup>14</sup> One drawback for some was that they were often employed as temporary staff on contracts (as distinct from permanent staff), had demanding community/cultural roles and responsibilities and at times juggled serious health issues. Some appointments were through the education system and others were secured through positions identified as School Council appointments. For whatever reasons, many of the participants experienced salary payments as erratic, often not received on time and if on minimal contract hours, the payments sometimes disrupted the continuity of health or other benefits they might be receiving. While recognised as important contributors to the community and the school some felt as though their work was not adequately valued financially or intellectually. Of this group at least ten women, working at the school as Assistant Teachers had completed the RATE program with Batchelor and some worked primarily with children living at homelands centres and outstations.

<sup>14</sup> It needs to be noted here that recent research in the area of teacher education indicates that these completion timeframes are not all that common in metropolitan settings either, where many ITE students undertake part-time study and come as mature age students with many responsibilities in addition to their study.



2. **Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE):** while different in terms of content and process from the above DBATE and RATE programs, another strategy to build teacher capacity in Galiwin'ku involved a partnership between the NT Department of Education and Training (DET) and the School of Education, Charles Darwin University. RITE involved support for on country learning through support from the community-based School, a mentor teacher within the School and a lecturer from the university. RITE began in two communities in 2010: Maningrida and Galiwin'ku. RITE offered a nationally accredited award to students living on country. At least four people who talked to the project had been involved in RITE. Some had experienced severe interruptions to their study and as a result of our long conversations over some months, they expressed interest in re-joining the program in 2013. However the RITE program is no longer offered. Hence the two students who wanted to restart their study were required to enrol direct with the university (CDU). As is the way with university programs, the courses had been restructured: students had the choice of entering their prior program with restrictions on the length of time available to complete it, or transition to another program but with restrictions on their capacity to take leave from that program in the future. Both options required the students to familiarise themselves with new learning systems which provided 'generic' learning support as distinct from the tutorial support they have received previously; both options occurred in the absence of release times from school employment responsibilities. The outcome was that the closure of RITE and new options came together in a combination of disadvantages and shortcomings that reflected the features of 'projectisation' discussed previously. Neither of the students continued with their intention to re-enrol and hence continue their ITE pathway.
3. **Ships:** Territory support for teacher development also includes the NTG Fellowships Program. The conditions for 'Ships' recipients in this project varied but included paid study release and repayment of enrolment costs for their higher education program. The financial costs for each 'Ships' recipient varied according to their employment conditions. At the time of the project 3 people were drawing on 'Ships' support to complete a preservice teaching award. Yolŋu and other staff in the School recognised the commitment required for ITE 'Ships' students but often commented that the supports were based on metropolitan concepts of wage, work, labour force access and family responsibilities. 'Ships' also make a number of assumptions about existing academic literacies, IT capacity and access to infrastructure such as printing, high-speed computing, spaces to work and store required teaching resources and portfolio material and access to tutorial support.
4. **VET pathways:** Another group of people working in the School, in paid and in unpaid capacity included those who had completed VET courses – for example the Certificate III, IV or Diploma in Education Support. These were national VET courses which had operated as pathways to teaching awards in a time before current regulatory requirements such as those of AITSL, AQF and the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) were activated. These people often held Assistant Teacher, cultural worker or literacy resource centre positions.

5. **Yolŋu Studies Graduate Certificate:** An unexpected pathway emerged during long conversations. Some people had enrolled in components of the Graduate Certificate in Yolŋu Studies offered by Charles Darwin University.<sup>15</sup> Through building their knowledge base in Yolŋu Matha, they had improved their Yolŋu academic and literacy skills, as well as their knowledge about, and confidence and familiarity with the higher education system. This pathway did not provide them with teacher registration, nor was it recognised as a teacher oriented course, therefore some people advised that this was not a pathway at all. Nevertheless, given the conditions described by Yolŋu – ongoing dismissal of Yolŋu knowledge and expertise as critical to school pedagogies, constant interruptions that resulted in non-completion of qualifications, and the ongoing challenge of recognising and maintaining Yolŋu language in the overall school curriculum – this Graduate Certificate pathway paved the way for some to consider enrolment in a mainstream ITE program.

The pathways identified above supported people to stay in learning and at times to remain in employment. What was difficult for many Yolŋu though was the constant organisational and individual staff turnover they experienced as organisations merged or people working in one organisation transferred to another and took their corporate and 'pathways' knowledge with them. While the latter was a common theme amongst Northern Territory workers, the effect on relationships with Yolŋu was not always understood. At times it seemed as though the only stable entity was the travel clerk who made their bookings to attend face-to-face workshops at one of the metropolitan sites. These training dynamics are, in part, standard operating procedure for 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations. Nevertheless the effects of constant policy and program change, combined with the metropolitan and local labour churn, exacerbated delays in activating employment contracts and timely salary payments. In addition given that access to information about human resource services and the way they operated was mediated by Balanda working in community, or visiting from elsewhere (Darwin or another Territory town), and so also exacerbated by Balanda mobility, the delays generated cumulative effects as they impacted on Yolŋu as predominantly low paid workers (cf Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008).

The pathways noted above provide important entry points to the western industrial system of 'teaching', especially for those living and remaining on country to study. But it would be a mistake to give total priority to these routes. These categories of access draw Yolŋu into predetermined relations with the ITE system, and in so doing they position the priorities of experienced *Yolŋu Teachers* – a category we have already noted as not recognised by the official industrial system – as marginal.

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<sup>15</sup> "This course is designed to give an introduction to the life and languages of the Yolŋu people in north east Arnhem Land. The course concentrates on Yolŋu Matha (Yolŋu language) forms of Dhuwala, and focuses on the everyday community version of the language. ... Admission Requirements: ... Native speakers of a Yolŋu language who do not have an undergraduate degree, but who are recognised by the Yolŋu advisors to the school as having good literacy skills or experience in research or education, will be eligible for admission. People in regular contact with Yolŋu through their professions, and who can demonstrate significant knowledge of culture and language proficiency, may be considered for entry to the course". (Charles Darwin University search course website for Graduate Certificate in Yolŋu Studies)

## Local and non-local teachers: another pathway?

As the long conversations continued, another pathway – six in total – was discerned. This final pathway was hidden behind a wall of paper, hard to see, and not all that visible to Class Teachers, researchers and administrators new to the territory. Yet for *Yolŋu Teachers* it had substantial effects on employment and was activated and re-activated every time Yolŋu entered into transactions with industrial agreements, employment contracts or human resource units. For Yolŋu employed on recurring contracts this might occur a number of times throughout the year and it came to be called the ‘local teacher’ pathway, in effect an exclusive pathway for teachers living on country.

This pathway was predominantly associated with access to rental accommodation, remote living allowances and a range of other incentives offered to teachers to teach remote. The effects of these incentives is mentioned often in the literature (cf Brasche & Harrington, 2012) but rarely discussed in terms of the impact on local teachers. As such it is a pathway that remains largely invisible to the metropolitan centre, despite it being a predominant means of attracting teachers from the city to remote regions. Once Balanda are aware of the pathways however it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore the racialised dimensions of its rewards. These were evident in employment advice to new staff and illustrated the how the relations between local and non-local teachers weighted local knowledge and employment differentially:

*Northern Territory Public Sector conditions of service contain a wide range of incentives for employees in remote localities. Following is a brief description of conditions and the categories of remoteness to which they apply.*

### **15.1. Rental concession scheme**

*Employees relocating to remote localities renting accommodation provided by the Government will receive a 100% rental concession.*

**NB** *Local recruits are not entitled to rental concession or employer provided housing.*  
(NTG DET, 2012, p. 16)

For *Yolŋu Teachers*, daily life of Galiwin'ku sits within the community. While some *Balanda* teachers may experience isolation and disconnection from their families when they relocate to a remote community, *Yolŋu* argue that this is where they belong. This introduces very different layers of emotions and decision-making practices to those invoked by the notion of ‘choice about home’. Many *Yolŋu* do not ‘choose’ or ‘want’ to live on country as interpreted through western eyes: rather being a teacher on country enables *Yolŋu* to sustain language, land, cultural and family responsibilities as they also maintain sustainable country for *Yolŋu* children's futures. The fact remains however that living on country was challenging and caught up in a range of caring practices which we know face many ITE students who enter teacher education after long periods away from formal schooling.

## Caring for country, cultural knowledge, language traditions and family

This project held in high esteem the belief that living and teaching on country poses a different orientation to teacher education than that experienced in metropolitan settings. Living, learning and teaching on country involved a careful balancing act of caring practices, cultural activity and practical responses to scholarship and employment commitments: all in the context of Yolŋu being “secure in their rights to be where they are ... not only landowners but also significant other people related in particular ways to the landowners and there by their agreement” (Christie & Greateorex, 2006, p. 9).

‘On country’ was not a term coined to collapse community living once again to a relatively homogenous life in remote communities. As Dhaykamalu explained, her work as a principal in the late 1990s and early 2000s involved adherence to community and family authority structures and accessing the skills to balance that adherence across diverse clans, families, languages, relationships and the accompanying cultural structures that held those diverse relationships in place. One of the biggest challenges for Yolŋu working in white public spaces – even those that have been reshaped by the cultural authority structures of a community such as Galiwin’ku – was the pressure to constantly explain their absence from the school, or any other smaller matter that appeared to tip their allegiance unevenly towards community, within a framework that takes as its default starting point metropolitan understandings of teaching.

*Yeah, like some of us couldn't make it like, you know, for – because we had to attend a ceremony or something you know, so that – that puts a [pause] – we had to deal with it. And that's life for us as Yolŋu. ... There's certain protocols that we have to follow here as well because we are, um – the relationship, the [Yolŋu Matha word], you know, the families that are working here, you know – there are people here that I can't talk to for a cultural reason. And there's certain people I can interact with and not interact with.*

Viewed from a metropolitan perspective these storylines are often given surface recognition, sometimes spoken of in slightly sceptical tones. Attendance at school and attendance at ceremony are set in juxtaposition – as if always and ever opposed.

In this project Yolŋu speak these experiences as one: due recognition and respect for responsibility to cultural authority structures of their lives and to the regulatory and authority structures operating in the school. A pathway that enables is a pathway that takes seriously an integrated education for Yolŋu children. However, more importantly, it takes seriously a pathway for *Yolŋu Teachers* who can make that integration happen for Yolŋu children.

This is also a pathway Yolŋu have to navigate every day with due recognition of the multiple language and behavioural practices involved. Ability to communicate in Yolŋu Matha with children is a central principle of *Yolŋu Teacher* and Assistant Teacher employment in schools. A range of literature supports a focus “on developing and training local Indigenous teaching staff who are more likely to stay in remote locations over the longer term” (Charles Darwin University, 2013; Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 23; Silburn, Nutton, McKenzie & Landrigan, 2011). Longevity is important but even the *Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities* recognises that *language* is a critical factor in early years learning and is the motivating force for promoting, in this case, *Yolŋu Teacher* longevity:

*Cultural heritage and knowledge is passed on throughout each generation by language. Language is integral in affirming and maintaining wellbeing, self esteem and a strong sense of identity. Languages contain complex understandings of a person's culture and their connection with their land. There is a wealth of evidence that supports the positive associations of health, education and employment outcomes as well as general wellbeing with language and culture. Indigenous languages keep people connected to culture and this strengthens feelings of pride and self worth. (HRSCATSIA, 2012, np)*

Not surprisingly the point was also made by *Yolŋu Teachers* in this project:

*the optimal time for beginning formal academic work in a second language is about the middle Primary grades, that is Year 3 or 4. Even though for various reasons they may have not sufficiently developed conceptually and academically in Yolŋu Matha (their first language), or orally in their second language (English), because of system constraints our children on reaching Year 3 are considered ready to transfer their literacy skills to English.*

*As they move up through the school, the children receive more and more instruction in English, and lesser amounts of instruction in Yolŋu Matha. (Yolŋu Teachers at Shepherdson College, 2001).*

Land, culture, language and family were not depicted as barriers to becoming a teacher. Of course multiple commitments meant some people felt tired and over stretched, but overall these things provided *strength* and purpose to the learning journeys rather than erosion of them. Marcus describes a common event in the annual calendar for many schools: culture week which promotes emergent learning from Yolŋu culture.

**Sue:** *Um, what would a school look like if every week had that?*

**Marcus:** *Well you – you would have, um [phone rings], ah, the flow of Elders coming into the community, um, from the community to the school. And especially, the children will turn each classroom into their homeland, basically. So they'll be actually teaching and learning where they really come from, where their foundation is. There's over 30 clan nations in Arnhem Land, and they're all [one of two moieties] Dhuwa and Yirritja. We come from our own specific estates, you know, and within the estates there's – there's our own embassies – and we have our governance structure there within our own ringitj, what we call ringitj, a boundary of – boundary of governance, ah, governing a particular clan, clan nation. Now, when you see a community, just imagine all the different clan nations from the governing states living in one particular clan nation's estate. ... across Arnhem Land, we are multicultural, living multiculturally ... always striving for a brighter future, always, um, always in that, not a chaos but it is a lot of complexity, lot of decision-making.*

Longevity is an important issue in building sustainable teaching cultures in schools but a focus on staying longer misses the point of the language, land, culture and family nexus that Yolŋu Teachers bring to the school. It is this complexity *not* chaos, as Marcus reminds us, that is so central to Yolŋu children's lives and futures.

### **ITE on country: unexpected barriers and speed bumps along the way**

Many of the issues that stumped Yolŋu enrolled in a program were of the same order as those issues hampering metropolitan preservice teachers: limited prior awareness of what was involved in higher education, limited family contact with higher education study patterns, study dispositions and being attuned to the enrolment practices required to enter and stay in a course.

Unexpected industrial barriers were also explored. For example, many Yolŋu involved in this project were employed on temporary contracts. Term by term activation of a contract brought with it all of the complications and glitches experienced by other low paid contract workers (cf Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008). Financial difficulties were exacerbated by the usual difficulties Yolŋu encountered when inserted into Anglophone naming systems: names were invariably spelt incorrectly; contracts were often not activated until 2-3 weeks into the teaching term; despite working at the school for more than 15 years and employed on temporary contracts for most of that time Yolŋu *still* experienced the same naming delays (despite their longevity 'in the system'); computer access to their employment details was often impeded by these 'spelling errors and typos', as well as phonetic and other linguistic changes to Yolŋu spelling practices over these times. Many of these issues were the domain of senior school managers who may have been new to the system themselves, had limited experience navigating HR issues from an on country perspective. Some were the result of miscommunication about the substantial implications of differences between such words as permanent and temporary contract when the generic word 'contract' was the focus.

There were also the usual challenges experienced in some 'on country' communities where remoteness from metropolitan centres aligned with unpredictable access to water, electricity, internet and the lack of controlled climate conditions (dry air, air-conditioning, working fans and so on) that meant Yolŋu had to be constantly vigilant about storage of their study materials and teaching resources. In contemporary times the onus of responsibility is increasingly shifted back to students to monitor a raft of ever-changing policies (often not that well written), maintain records of their preservice correspondence and learning and build a permanent repository of resources. This is increasingly challenging despite the ease of access to Google docs, wikis, blogs and various 'cloud' options.

Christine Nicholls reminds us that these are ever-present issues: Yolŋu and Indigenous people in many other locations encounter serious drawbacks to education associated with where they live:

*The issues of housing, health and employment need to be equal, simultaneous and concurrent foci of government and private attention before education can bring about real and lasting change. These are by no means autonomous fields. (Nicholls, 2009 p. 93)*

Within the school, Assistant Teachers may have access to a desk and possibly a shared computer, but these resources were rare in homes. Despite the fact that all 'Ships' were provided with computers, and at some point in the past many Assistant Teachers had received computers as part of their employment, after hours study often required a trip from home to the school. Bear in mind that a 'walk back to school to do my work' might involve 33°C heat, dust and dirt or 33°C heat, rain, mud, with no sustainable infrastructure such as covered walkways and hence no protection against the weather regardless of the 'wet' or dry seasonal calendar.

Despite these challenges programs in similar regions and operating under similar conditions have demonstrated some degree of success in balancing the challenges of increasing regulation combined with repeated assertions that local teachers are best placed to teach children living on country:

*Local Indigenous teachers are best placed to deliver and plan the curriculum around Indigenous languages and culture that best serve the needs of their students. In addition these Indigenous teachers are more likely to stay working at their local school than are non-resident contract teachers and they thereby ensure the continuity in education delivery and the links with the community. (Charles Darwin University, 2013, p.3).<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> See also a number of submissions to the House of Representatives Senate Committee Aboriginal and Torres Strait Inquiry (2012) and Silburn, Nutton, McKenzie & Landrigan (2011) amongst others for arguments supporting the notion of local teachers as crucial in connecting children's western schooling experiences to their local language, knowledge of country and culture authority structures, as well as being 'stayers' on country despite the dominant metropolitan logics of mobility circulating in contemporary research on the national accreditation of teachers.

The goal of such programs was to combine classroom practice, lectures and delivery of components of the ITE course and incorporate a range of support mechanisms on country. They operated as partnerships albeit with differing degrees of support and orientation. The NT DET – *Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) Program* – was undertaken in partnership with the School of Education, Charles Darwin University and another, the Catholic Education Office (CEO) *Growing Our Own (GOO) ITE initiative*, also operated in partnership with the School of Education at CDU.<sup>17</sup> Both programs operated as onsite and online ITE for Aboriginal people living in remote communities. Both deliver courses that meet the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011b) and Northern Territory Teacher Registration requirements (<http://www.trb.nt.gov.au/registration>). There is however limited published research about the student experience in these programs: a point that differs from those programs operating in the 1980s and 1990s. Anecdotally there is also evidence of a recurring set of questions about the ITE experience in remote communities: How many people graduate from these courses? Do they receive a nationally recognised qualification? The former question is understandable and possibly the result of curiosity given the known difficulties of completing any higher education award from on country. The latter question illustrates the difficulties Indigenous people continue to experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in having their qualifications and labour recognised within the highly racialised white public space of Australian higher education.

Elliott and Slee (2009, p. 81) note that “Growing-Our-Own began in February 2009 with 26 students enrolled in the School of Education’s Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (BTL) course”. Three years later Maher (2012, p. 354) writes:

*41 students ... started in the Growing Our Own project, 17 have graduated with the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning, two with the Diploma of Educational Support, 18 are continuing with their studies, and four have not completed. Of these four, two wish to return to higher education study later, one when he retires from a football career, and one when her family circumstances allow.*

Engaging in long conversations provided a way of listening to a disjunct between efficient ‘pathway’ explanations of progress and an understanding of ‘speed bumps’ that create slow down conditions. It also revealed the deeper disjuncts between metropolitan accounts of teaching and first hand experiences of being *Yolŋu Teachers*. As noted previously there are few records of student accounts of experience in these programs (see Callahan, et al. (2012) for one example).

<sup>17</sup> Both of these programs have been documented through ongoing research (Maher, 2012; Elliott, 2009; Elliot & Keenan, 2009; Giles, 2010; Reedy, Prescott & Giles 2011; Rhodes, Prescott & Giles, 2010; Callahan, Kersten, Baker, Jinmarabynana, Wauchope, Eather, & Egan, 2012). While the focus of this project is on the strategies and practices in one Top End community – Galiwin’ku – a more focused effort at building ITE to respond to remote community conditions is also occurring through the Central Australian Teacher Education Programs (CATEP) project based in Alice Springs (see for example Bat et al., September 2012 – currently under embargo). It does not escape out attention that CATEP too was another ‘project’.



## Working the in-between: Yolŋu and Balanda knowledge systems

One of the recurring themes in conversations with *Yolŋu Teachers* was a hope that they would be recognised and respected for their knowledge. Elders, seasoned *Yolŋu Teachers*, cultural workers, tutors, younger ITE students who held 'Ships': all were clear about at least three dimensions to Yolŋu roles in the school. First Yolŋu enabled both worlds learning through careful organisation of western and Yolŋu knowledges. Second, they drew on kinship ties with elders, clan members and across the community to promote integration of the school and the community. Third, they cooperated and collaborated with a range of people to build strong relationships to benefit children's learning. These dimensions were expressed in different forms by Yolŋu. Marcus, for example, described enabling both worlds learning this way:

**Marcus:** *Academically in the dominant culture if you have a piece of paper that really tells you how much knowledge you got, you know, and that gives you a pass, it is a pass for any job – or a particular job that you have been training for. And, you know, [it] might take you four or five years just to [get it]. But our knowledge is – is still – we don't receive paper for that. There's no – ah, we are qualified only when the Elders say we are qualified, when they think we – when they think we're qualified. We don't say I'm qualified.*

**Sue:** *So someone else has to give you the authority?*

**Marcus:** *Yeah, the accreditation comes from our Elders. Um, but that's like it's – it's heartbreak coming in here with a wealth of knowledge, coming into the school and not – not being able to be recognised.*

**Sue:** *If you could tell a Balanda teacher what you know, what would you tell them? What would you say you know?*

**Marcus:** *Well, for example, when we [the class] went down looking at trees for science, plants, you know, whatever the sun gives life to, what energy that, um, comes from the sun, we were looking at the sun and the energy that it relays to everything else that's on the earth, and we were looking at different plants. And – I didn't say anything, but we were walking around and teachers were saying 'Identify – Oh what's this plant? Ah, that'd be – '. You're looking at the book, you know, like information, scientific word. But the kids were saying, you know, this plant is, um, it's my totem, you know. Yeah, so there's a spiritual connection.*

*So there was cross-cultural teaching happening right there. ... This plant is a medicine, we use it for sores or, you know, tooth ache. ... this particular flower tells a story, you know, a shark's heritage, or stingray's heritage, or this particular tells you the season is ending. Yeah, so you know, the children themselves, they're intelligent, they are intelligent in their world, when you – when you take them into their world, but it's just a boundary when they get into the class. Um, some of the teaching that happens in the class, the reason why they have that, ah, why there's a boundary there is because it's not useful – there's no sense or meaning behind in what are they learning it for ... But if it's like a real life situation where you set up, like the kids I've seen, I've worked with, when I was in the primary area, like they've set up a stall or something, and then they see 'Oh that's why you use maths'. 'This is why we need maths' you know. Um, if they want to become a pilot or a doctor or, you know, working in the office or shopkeeper, you know, or policeman, they need – they have to be able to read, they have to be able to write because they have to take notes, you know, they have to write – mechanic has to order the right parts, you know.*

While quoted at length this particular excerpt from Marcus reflects many of the issues raised by other Yolŋu. It shows how 'that big ditch' (see J. Gurrudupunbuy in earlier sections) might be bridged. It provides a way of working through the "different laws, attitudes and social systems, and different knowledge and values to education" emphasised in Bulkunu's (2001) writing. It also emphasises the extent to which the constant relapse to one cultural frame (western schooling) closes off an alternative pathway to, and experience of, becoming and being a teacher at conceptual and pedagogical levels within the school.

In one particular set of discussions about collaborating with others the workshop conversation and reporting took an unexpected turn. Yolŋu were concerned that Balanda often had to be convinced of the importance of these notions of 'enabling both worlds learning', 'cooperating/ collaborating practices' and 'kinship ties' as serious educational knowledge, serious teachers' work, precisely because Balanda seemed to find these notions 'foreign'. Yolŋu talked about a range of ways in which their knowledge was undermined by practices that reduced their standing in the School to 'the AT' – an industrial classification that ignored their wealth of both world's knowledge and connecting-up capacity.

New Balanda teachers would arrive at the School and would not always know about the knowledge and potential collaboration an Assistant Teacher could offer – they could not see the *Yolŋu Teacher* expertise sitting below the surface of the Assistant Teacher classification. A small task like taking the roll, something that might have been the province of the Assistant Teacher, might appear to be an easy way for a new Balanda to connect with the *children*, it set up a Class Teacher/Assistant Teacher relationship in the class that activated unequal hierarchies of knowledge and power relations, simultaneously picked up by children. In the process, Christian names for children (and *Yolŋu Teachers*) were often used because Yolŋu names were ‘unfamiliar’ or ‘difficult to pronounce’ for new Balanda teachers. Overall, this apparently small act set in place the very things Dhaykamalu (cited in Kamara 2009) describes as core to the colonising processes in the early mission days of schooling – erasure of names and hence erasure of identity. However, what it also does is close off the possibility of a Yolŋu Teacher partnership emerging within the classroom: one which draws on the best of both worlds through particular knowledge practices and sharing techniques that are held by neither one nor the other teacher but requires both to work in the interests of drawing out the children's worlds.

Yolŋu had a responsibility to be at work – of course, most of them were employed by the education system albeit not always as permanent employees. Being employed, as a Yolŋu Teacher, required them to be visible, walking around the community, being a role model for children, connecting with families. But this work was not always recognised as teachers' work and at times they felt their ‘absence’ from the school was questioned by those who did not yet fully understand what was involved in activating both worlds learning. Moreover physical absence impacted on the ‘crowd controller’ role they were often assigned in the classroom and it activated stereotypes about metropolitan notions of ‘being on duty’, which they (and some of their Balanda colleagues) had to contest and reposition. Yolŋu navigated close cultural and clan knowledge and family relationships all the time. Living on country meant there were limits to their ancestral knowledge and so also to their contact with other Yolŋu. The range of *Yolŋu Teachers* employed generally made it possible for clan complexities to be addressed, nevertheless Yolŋu remind us that this constant demand to speak on behalf of all Yolŋu is a feature of the metropolitan white public space which repeatedly saps their physical, emotional and spiritual energy while becoming and being a teacher.

On the one hand they felt they had to know everything about being Yolŋu and provide evidence of this every hour of every day (cf MATSITI, 2012), yet often their Yolŋu knowledge was trivialised – relegated to 'social contacts' or the behaviour management expert. One benefit of the 'long conversations' approach enabled some of these practices to be connected to historical experiences and frustrations *Yolŋu Teachers* had experienced for decades. One workshop report back returned to the naming practices used by systems to designate different types of teachers and so also their responsibilities in the School. The *Emergency Teacher* – a classification used in the past to designate short term or temporary teachers – became a replacement term for an Assistant Teacher called in at short notice to solve a problem; any problem really that might confront a Balanda and require them to think through the eyes of Yolŋu. The 'Emergency Teacher' became the catch cry of the workshop group. The Emergency Teacher is of course a *Yolŋu Teacher* who is called upon whenever there is a crisis. But the workshop report back indicates these crises are to a certain extent manufactured and premise on the belief that Balanda have limited capacity to resolve a range of small scale issues that arise in any classroom on a day to day basis: a child missing from class, or not feeling well; a disagreement between children; fixing a bloody nose; finding a contact number for a local service. The workshop group posed the question: What would happen if the *Yolŋu Teachers* went on strike? as part of their exploration of the work of a Yolŋu teacher.

Yolŋu described themselves as "witnesses of changes that happen in our schools". A scan of Yolŋu staff working at the school and the periods of time they had spent working there was testament to this. Many had been employed in the school in one capacity or another for more than 25 years. Yolŋu were the stable staffing core for a school that had run the gamut of change of classroom teachers, principals, support staff and others. *Yolŋu Teachers* negotiated with people who owned the country, lived on the country and passed through the country – the latter sometimes much too quickly, sometimes not quickly enough.

In common with Aboriginal teachers in other states (Williams, Thorpe & Chapman, 2003; MATSITI 2012) *Yolŋu Teachers* provided substantial evidence that they were micro-watched. The group workshops provided an opportunity for them to collectively scope the boundaries of that watching. What emerged was a series of practices, individual and yet also repetitive, that held them in place within an industrial classification – 'Assistant Teacher'.

When 'pathways to teaching' are accessed through Yolŋu accounts, the dissonance between metropolitan and on country accounts of becoming a teacher are more clearly articulated. A clearer web of relationships emerge of what counts as teachers work for example:

- Accounts of 'knowledge, practice, engagement' (AITSL, 2011a, p. 4) and how Yolŋu scaffold both western and Yolŋu knowledges to meet the 'physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of their students' (ibid).<sup>18</sup>
- Which walking and talking pedagogies (see Marcus's discussion in earlier sections) are aligned with 'a repertoire of effective [and sanctioned] teaching strategies' (ibid p. 4) and which are trivialised as going outdoors.
- What relationships count as formal network building 'to understand the links between school, home and community in the social and intellectual development of their students' (ibid) and which are read as walking home from work.

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See for example *Strong Voices* (Blitner, et al 2000) and *Strong Voices* (Murphy & Railton, 2013).

Other accounts enabled similar dissonances to emerge:

- What illnesses and ceremonial responsibilities are publicly and personally supported (and which ones are privately undermined).
- What interruptions count as emergencies important enough to interrupt Balanda managed activity (whole school PD events) and Yolŋu managed activity (cross cultural training for new staff);
- What study support structures are deemed necessary and which ones raise an eyebrow or an eyeroll or, alternatively, release funds from a cost centre to move forward with support.

The white public space of Australian schooling is sometimes experienced as so subtle, so routine, that many people (regardless of racialised experiences and identifications) accept and adopt its assumptions, premises and rulings without question. What emerges is an attitude of 'white is right' and 'west is best' which manifest in language and impact on working relations. The above discussion illustrates how white public space shapes responses at structural and individual levels to compromise the achievements possible when *Yolŋu Teachers* bring their pedagogies and practices to school. Yet many of these issues are not conceived as barriers to preservice teacher education per se.

What *Yolŋu Teachers* recounted in this project had significant resonance with many other Australians, particularly those working in predominantly female, mature-age workforces with family and carer commitments. For some *Yolŋu Teachers*, the tensions were perhaps compounded by the circumstances surrounding their return to study. Employer funded scholarships reduce the *financial* burden, but other burdens persisted including navigating a 'third shift' of teaching placement when undertaking 'practicum'. The effects of these shifts are well documented as stressors in feminised workforces (Masterman-Smith and Pocock 2008). For almost all Yolŋu there was the equally well-documented but not well acknowledged stressor of the 'white sentry' (Williams et al. 2003) who monitored their work from a western, managerialist, metropolitan world view of quality assurance. The accounts *Yolŋu Teachers* offered of their work were not without awareness of 'quality' as Wunungmurra has advised:

*They talk about excellence and quality as if these are new ideas and goals they have just thought of. Those voices are now telling us what we told them for as long as I can remember. Along the way they insult all of us who have gone before, we did not aim high enough, as if we were not smart enough, not trained properly or not excellent teachers or trainers. Well Yolŋu leaders have been talking about excellence and quality for a long time and we are still talking about it today. (Wunungmurra, 2011)*

In particular this section has foregrounded the contributions *Yolŋu Teachers* make to the schools regardless of whether they hold an industrially recognised position within the school as a Class Teacher, Assistant Teacher, Tutor, or Cultural Advisor, whether employed by the government or the School Council, whether employed on a permanent or contract basis. Many Assistant Teachers are enrolled in BIITE certificates of study. Others are already employed in the school, but often on a contract basis. Others volunteer (their labour, their emotions, their energy, their knowledge, expertise and cultural authority).

It is possible that many of the conditions that compromise Yolŋu exist in other schools in Australia. Moreover not all *Yolŋu Teachers* experienced the compromises in the same way. The purpose of this section has been to focus attention, again, on how particular teacher education programs, particular lecturers, individual researchers, national policies, structures, procedures and practices converge on a locality, Galiwin'ku in ways that repeatedly default to metropolitan imaginaries. By focussing on Yolŋu Teacher experiences, beginning from the ITE perspective of *learning on country*, this section continues to disrupt metropolitan drift by drawing specific attention to the moral and imaginary contours of a metropolitan centre that legitimise interventions in Yolŋu lives and then proceed to justify those various interventions on the basis of measures of quality for the sake of children's futures. Discussions in this project and elsewhere have made it very clear that Yolŋu want a future for their children. The events that activated The Northern Territory Intervention were complex. Our intention here is not to trivialise them. Rather the discussion in this project surfaced a repeated concern for children that activated metropolitan strategies and practices for achieving teacher quality at the expense of local practices associated with language, land, culture and family.

In this project the focus remained on *Yolŋu Teachers* and how to gain traction in the area of employment opportunities for the adults – *Yolŋu Teachers* – who are so central in securing futures for local Yolŋu children.

### Respect and trust

In this project it was apparent that the focus on relationships between teachers and children relegated to secondary importance the collegial relationships between teachers as colleagues. In the case of teaching on country, the Assistant Teacher industrial classification recognised specific contributions that Assistant Teachers bring to the school and the classroom. Moreover these were often described as *paraprofessional* precisely because of associated qualification requirements that establish a demarcation between Class Teachers and Assistant Teachers. The above discussion about connection focusses on teachers and children, however this report has emphasised the importance of connections *between* colleagues, and specifically recognition of the knowledge and expertise Assistant Teachers bring as Yolŋu to the classroom *and* the school.

In this context, trust and respect were words repeatedly raised in discussions about how difficult it was for *Yolŋu Teachers* to persist with their work in schools. Anecdotally difficulties were often framed in terms of *personal* relationships and incidents between *individual* people. In remote communities this may well be the case, however in this project, descriptions of everyday experiences in the school indicated trust was not simply about spending more time getting to know each other, although that was an important dimension. Nor was it simply about understanding how a 'place' – a desk, a classroom, a joint responsibility for planning a lesson, the spot in a classroom where children expected authority to reside – could be shared. Trust was not something Yolŋu had found they could rely on when reflecting on past experiences of schooling and teacher education. In the context of contrapuntal readings of their work (cf Said, 1993) they found that old ideas about schooling – discipline and behaviour management, behaviours and dispositions required to be taken seriously as a leader; absences from family in order to gain long term 'career' benefits; knowing the capabilities expected of a 'fit and proper' teacher – were caught in two very different and unequally recognised systems of knowing. In this respect the past was never over in terms of shaping how their work was often *not* recognised, *not* respected and *not* affirmed in the present.

*Western society and Yolŋu society have different laws, attitudes and social systems, and different knowledge and values to education. They should respect and learn from each other.*

*Recently, Western pedagogy has started to recognise the importance of integration and has started focussing more on curriculum integration. For example, the Queensland Government's New Basics Project (2003) talks about 'productive' pedagogies and focuses on "Connectedness to the world" and "Knowledge Integration". However, from a Yolŋu perspective, school curriculums are still very isolated and non-integrated. Lessons are still structured around the different subject areas rather than the 'big picture'. This is the biggest difference between the two perspectives. (Bulkunu, 2010, no page)*

These different ways of knowing were often the basis on which decisions about Yolŋu children's schooling were made. Yolŋu and Balanda alike argued that much of the progress in building strong schooling for Yolŋu children and communities relied on a person who would show leadership and 'make things happen'.

While consistent funding per se was not the only barrier to making things happen, decision-making about funding was often a related factor. Managing and supporting community engagement often involved judgements on the run, guided by a spatial understanding that differed in form and function from metropolitan decision-making. Local administrative decisions needed to be made to enable preservice teachers to participate in workshops at Galiwin'ku with other teachers in the school. Experienced managers had ways of negotiating some of these challenges *if* they valued the ITE experience and understood the benefits of a comprehensive professional development program for all staff. Travel to Galiwin'ku from Homeland Centres invariably involved a flight. If workshops were planned with other teachers in Galiwin'ku this might involve 'holding over' or delaying a charter flight (often in the order of \$1500 per flight) to enable a Yolŋu preservice teacher to attend a group session and return home the same day. If flights were irregular or dependent on charters from external agencies, it was necessary to think outside the square and adopt such tactics to get the best value for teachers, the school cost centres and the community. Evidence suggests this kind of 'make it happen' philosophy occurred repeatedly over the years.

*People told me today about the institutional commitment by Shepherdson to support teacher education including providing support like an office, computer, Internet, infrastructure support. At other times a support lecturer (most often a Balanda) might live on site and be employed by Batchelor, but there may be no allowance for housing – Shepherdson provides housing to make the on-site position viable.*

*In other circumstances students might be expected to have access to their own computers and printing. So the edict to 'download the article and read online' or 'printout materials if you are having trouble reading online' may be dependent on the kind of support a preservice teacher will have access to locally. [Sue Shore: field notes].*

Terri Hughes noted similar instances where personal circumstance for preservice teachers was dependent on a certain level of goodwill from others, Balanda in particular:

*At Lajamanu for example, the principal would take my class for ½ day/week to release me to work with all the Indigenous staff who were studying through Batchelor. The importance of this was evident when we had a change of principal who was unwilling to release me or the Indigenous teachers to work on their studies. At Milingimbi, under one principal, one of the senior Indigenous staff began working with the principal – I think it was one day a week – to take up leadership role. (Terri Hughes, cited in Reaburn, 2012, p. 5)*

Moreover people living on country bring deep knowledge of place to their teaching:

*from kinship relationships and obligations, to country, culture, language, Dreaming and laws; and everything is connected to everything else. Identity is strongly connected to kinship and country, and important skills such as hunting and dancing for cultural ceremonies are included in the child's education, as well as vital social knowledge such as raypirri (discipline), respect and values. (Bulkunu, 2010, np)*

How do we come to 'know' place and therefore the kind of management practices responsive to the local under these circumstances? Industrial conditions and employment contracts for teaching remote are highly conscious of the need to address many of these pragmatic issues of travel and resources for non-local teachers (see of example Brasche and Harrington 2012; NT DET, 2012; NT DET, nd a; NT DET, nd b). Yet Yolŋu, who are also local teachers, appear to have limited professional and cultural capital to access to this industrial knowledge. Moreover, while it is important not to pathologise life on country, reports and commentary over decades are a reminder of what must be overcome every day before *Yolŋu Teachers* even begin their day in the school (Nicholls, 2009). Developing the cultural capital and practical know how to access industrial entitlements is yet another task to add to an already busy day.

'Local teachers', that is teachers living and working on country, draw their *strength* from the cultural authority structures of the community, their relationships with elders, and local family networks regardless of where they were born. Susanne provided a report of a workshop group discussion on 'What is a *Yolŋu Teacher*?' She had just re-entered an ITE course after a period of leave and explained how she could not do the work of teaching if she did not have the older women and men to guide her, to keep her strong, to help her know the ways of community. She understands the connection to cultural authority through people who may or may not be directly engaged with the school at any point in time, as the *foundation* for her mission to teach. This is a position that contrasts starkly with the research on Balanda experiences of remote re-location (Brasche & Harrington 2012; Shaw, 2005) and what they draw on as a foundation for teaching. Other Yolŋu also emphasised this connectedness rather than isolation, which is not surprising given that the community is their home. Consultation with community, elders and families was not a bind or a chore. While often described as 'obligation' and 'responsibility', nevertheless, this was the pattern of sociality which guided the community – 'it's our life'. These relational ties enabled *Yolŋu Teachers* to work closely with children, to ensure they didn't "suffer the consequences" of an unresponsive system to local conditions. However it also contributed an added stressor that individual teachers could be held accountable by the community when things did not work or particular issues were not addressed as part of the running of the school.



The stories Yolŋu told had a familiar internal resonance. Yolŋu did not use the language of attrition, at risk, or dropping off the ITE pathway. They relayed stories that brought into sharp relief the metrocentric assumptions about becoming a teacher that lie at the heart of *national* ITE. We already know that many ITE students cannot follow the linear path from school to university and back into schools as a teacher (DEEWR, 2013) and that up to 30-40% of teachers leave teaching in their first 5 years. *Yolŋu Teachers* asked for their stories to be read as complex decisions about staying in and taking time out in the context of balancing a range of pressures about caring for country and caring for family. Moreover Balanda who experienced close working relationships with Yolŋu were aware that some might not be successful in their first try at higher education. They were also concerned that this might be perceived as setting low benchmarks and encouraging low aspirations. Yet underneath their concerns were years of experience working with Yolŋu and 'watching' from a somewhat different perspective than that of the micro-managing white sentry. They could see how daily life made it difficult to sustain a standard enrolment pattern: respectful ceremonial participation, responsibility to extended family groups and kin, calls on time and energy and financial resources, climatic conditions that soak the paper you work on and make it near impossible to protect computing facilities in local houses; lack of transport where even in a small community the act of walking home in 'the wet' or 'the dry' was profoundly challenging. At this pointy end of the long conversation it was apparent that very real and tangible differences exist for Indigenous people living on country.

The stories reconfigured western notions of work, voluntary work and career. These are not remarkably new or original ideas about 'teachers' work'. Reading more widely in sociology, across the Yolŋu literature and studies of Territory education, it is clear that these messages have been relayed previously.<sup>19</sup> What is significant, possibly different, about presenting them here is the extent to which we have illuminated how rules, structures, guidelines, procedures and assumptions underpinning participation in ITE begin from metropolitan premises about working conditions that require repeated justification about connection – to family, to land to culture and how language and knowledge practices 'smother' (Maddison, 2009) ancestral lineage. It is therefore increasingly difficult for *Yolŋu Teachers'* work to be recognised, respected and adequately positioned as legitimate within the larger space of Australian teachers' work.

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<sup>19</sup> Martha Kamara's (2009) PhD study documents in detail the work involved in leadership in remote schools experienced by Aboriginal women. These include the advantages and challenges of living closely with community and family and the spiritual obligations they negotiated while working in the white public space of Australian education.

Teachers' work is an old theme in education research. Using it here runs the risk of collapsing *Yolŋu Teachers'* work onto a framework of western labour and focussing on the superficial aspects of 'doing' teaching in schools. *Yolŋu Teachers'* work emphasises the passage of becoming a teacher as a set of cultural, social and economic decisions for remote residents and these moves are always made in the context of knowledge practices of community, cultural and family responsibilities. Williams, Thorpe and Chapman (2003) have already presented some insights into the contradictions between a range of human service labour processes undertaken by Aboriginal people (e.g. education, social work and etc.) – the 'obligatory community labour' (pp. 48-67) and 'emotional labour' (cf Hochschild, 1983) required to do their work successfully – and "the way these practices do not fit readily into Western concepts of 'work', 'non-work' and 'voluntary work' (Williams et. al 2003. p. 65). Masterman-Smith and Pocock's (2008) research is also relevant in the context of the financial and emotional costs of work experienced by low-paid workers. Smith's (2005) research on work knowledges and generous work provides further examples of the importance of understanding teachers work as a broad range of activity: deep knowledge from children's pasts that enables application to curriculum learning in their present-day; the management of emotions from sources as diverse as Yolŋu colleagues, family, past and present Balanda teachers, senior leadership on country and in town and so much more.

While some Yolŋu in this project were full-time workers, many were employed under part-time and contract conditions and accumulated none of the financial or employment benefits of the permanent Balanda counterparts over the years (cf Brasche & Harrington 2012; NTG DET, 2012; NTG DET, nd, a; NTG DET, nd, b). In addition they lived in communities where clan and family obligations were substantial and employment opportunities were limited, with the school being a major employer of Yolŋu expertise.

The focus of this part of the discussion is not so much the 'lack' of employment opportunities in a remote community (although that is an important issue and has been addressed in a number of studies (for example Taylor, 2010). Rather the focus here is on the contradictions in developing career paths in education through accredited training in on country contexts that conflict with metropolitan understandings of work and teaching.

When remote ITE is conceptualised more specifically as 'teaching on country', the issue of a pathway that attracts, develops, recognises and retains a *Yolŋu Teacher*, morphs into an ongoing practice of ancestral, cultural and community which must be navigated in the context of a leadership structure shaped by western ideology (cf Kamara 2009). Within this structure barriers to successful and timely completion of ITE courses are multiple.

An enduring theme in studies of Aboriginal professional experience is one of convincing the 'white sentries' (cf Williams et al., 2003) that 'we' are no longer the ones who determine the boundaries of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence in classrooms, meetings and indeed texts. Agreed, Principals and Senior managers have a role in ensuring teachers achieve the goals of a school in the context of the Northern Territory's education system. But micro-monitoring the discrete behavioural practices for Yolŋu Teacher engagement is not only unnecessary, it is a persistent reminder of just how far we still have to go to "reveal the limits of scientific knowledge in ways that that [are] not even glimpsed at present" (M. Yunupingu, 2005, p. 5).

This section of the report has attempted to illustrate the limited relevance of western knowledge and understanding of ITE on country by illustrating the practical ways in which Balanda practices, knowledge and small everyday acts combine to interrupt or negate Yolŋu Teachers in their attempts to live and learn and work on country. Yolŋu are quite cognisant of the changes occurring around them. The people involved in this project indicated they are aware of the challenges and, equally, unafraid of them. In presenting these stories here it is disconcerting to know that in other domains Yolŋu views are often depicted as out-of-touch with a world that is modernising around them. Listening carefully to Yolŋu suggests this is a narrow and premature closure of their views. Listen to Marcus talk about schooling and generational change:

*Um, but it's just about, um, giving them – like every generation has its own way of teaching. You know, teaching changes every generation, and we have to be able to use – like everything, every teaching material... how they have to use it in the world that they live in, you know, our world has definitely changed from back in the '60s or '40s when everything started. So yeah, like kids are now using Facebook, everything else, you know. Phones, mobile phones, yeah, that was only introduced, what, 10 years ago or something like that?*

*It's about just, ah, it's not about changing but it's just about rearranging. Everything's always there but it's just about rearranging and making sure that our children, um, are stepping into a life that they truly understand and have to be able to adapt to the conditions and everything else.*

Of the range of responses available for reflection during this project some points seemed more salient than others for preservice teacher education:

1. The high turnover of Balanda staff living on country presents a landscape of constant and patient renegotiation by Yolŋu who are intent on being recognised for their knowledge, expertise and service to the school and community.
2. Relationships can be easily destabilised by small things when the past has created such an unreliable foundation for trust (cf Reynolds, 1999).
3. The rate and pace of change of contemporary ITE developments suggests currency of knowledge about the national ITE system may be less well developed on country, particularly given the limited availability of qualified Balanda staff available to provide ITE on country support.
4. Pedagogical models operating between preservice teachers and ITE lecturers and support tutors have promoted adult education principles which value the importance of relationships. While these relationships provide the opportunity to increase knowledge and access to industrial entitlements it is apparent that not all relationships with Balanda have facilitated this. In part this is because many Balanda do not have the knowledge or cultural capital to access such entitlements. Reluctance on the part of some Balanda to see this as an integral part of teachers' work, miss the opportunity to include this as part of ongoing mentoring within the community.

## We have told you this before

This project has been shadowed by particular mystery that Dr Yunupingu (1994, np) described as follows: “I think most non-Aboriginal Australians accept that there is a deep intellectual strength to Aboriginal knowledge. [B]ut they seem to think of it as a mystery”. In many respects aspects of this mystery have been made available to non-Aboriginal people through a body of literature assembled over a long period of time. Yet this information seems to have had limited influence on some of the more fundamental aspects of teacher education on country. Mary-Ann Bin-Sallik reminds us of the strategic denials and distancing associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attempts to work with/against bureaucracies:

*We are getting weary of being asked to give our opinions and participating in decision-making processes only to find that our opinions and participations have been what Freire regards as false generosity. I find it harrowing when educators seek my time and ask my opinions and then find all the excuses as to why my suggestions won't work, or that the bureaucracy makes it difficult to implement change. I feel that I have been used to either help these people: a) to become neurotic teachers; or b) to feel comfortable with their neurosis; and even worse, I have been colluding with them. So I shall have to stop. (Bin-Sallik, 1992, p. 14)*

There is every reason, listening to stories of people living on country, to understand why Yolŋu would stop. Stop speaking to ‘us’. Stop advising ‘us’. Stop teaching ‘us’. And yet many don’t. This report shows that many persisted, with patience, to guide, inform, advise and teach about living and working on country. And so there is a responsibility in relaying such stories to try not to get it wrong, once again, yet knowing all too well that this is a tricky problem of listening properly and then acting accordingly.

In 1989, Ian Stewart argued of Aboriginal controlled programs at Batchelor that they are designed to:

*serve the interests and aspirations of ‘tradition-oriented’ Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Mediators in this effort, however, are the largely non-Aboriginal staff of the College and officers of the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, and Training. Very often, decisions are made in support of bureaucratic, political, or economic expediency. Negotiation with Aboriginal students and communities often fails to engage them in meaningful decision-making, and rarely provides real choices. (Stewart, 1989, extracted by Ingram, 2003)*

Nearly twenty years later The Bradley Report argued for ground-breaking change in higher education to respond to the contemporary challenges of regional provision:

*Australia needs a sustainable system of higher education in regional and remote areas. Provision needs to be flexible and innovative. It must anticipate and respond rapidly to local needs. Providers in regional and remote areas need to be encouraged and supported to build upon local communities, providers in other sectors of education, businesses and industry. (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales 2008, p. 111).*

*Yolŋu Teachers* have worked at Galiwin'ku for over 70 years, proof they can work in education systems, but their requests to Balanda to reconceptualise education in order to address the 'big ditch' they and their children experience when navigating Yolŋu and western knowledges have not been answered. There are many ways in which *Yolŋu Teachers* could be supported to enter and remain in the education system. Some things amounted to 'big ticket' items, such as substantial changes to the metropolitan premise of English speaking communities that surround Australian schools. This would go some way to providing supports to navigate the big ditch many Yolŋu children experience in moving between home and the school. It would also substantially change the way ITE content and structure was conceptualized in their preservice education. Other suggestions were minor in the grand scheme of things but would make working life for *Yolŋu Teachers* more viable, for example access to keys for staff toilets and timely activation of employment contracts. In this particular community few Yolŋu had experience of more recent online ITE delivery experience, although some 'Ships' students had entered this terrain.

An overriding theme underpinned discussions. If Assistant Teacher work in the school was understood through the frame offered by *Yolŋu Teachers* in this project there might be a better chance of achieving respect, recognition and affirmation (with adequate industrial compensation) of the expertise they bring to the school. This would mean recognising features *Yolŋu Teachers* articulated during workshops for this project including Yolŋu:

- *knowledge*
- *experience*
- *ability to ask the right questions*
- *ability to engage students*
- *community and school leadership*
- *potential as role models*
- *capacity to promote learning through sharing and learning together*
- *contributions to curriculum development.* (Workshop, May 2012)

Furthermore they argued that 'community and parents need to be involved' if *Yolŋu Teachers* are to remain working productively in the School. Yolŋu admitted it was critical that their 'authority was recognised by families' and this involved ongoing negotiations between the school and community about what this looked like and how it worked.

The notion of 'generous work' (Smith 2005) is critical here. Understanding *Yolŋu Teachers* work requires an understanding of *how work happens*. The act of travelling to Galiwin'ku, walking about the school, walking and driving around the community, listening to how relationships and agreements are put in place puts in perspective what is involved in doing teaching in Galiwin'ku.

Each of the appeals embedded in the above texts and quotes from participants invoke a particular kind of institutional reflexivity that is difficult to engender under conditions endorsed by managerial cultures. Professional work such as teaching, is captured by notions of standards – Standard 1, Know students and how they learn; Standard 2, Know the content and how to teach it; Standard 7, Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community – that are measured according to metropolitan performance criteria which suppress the articulations with language, land, culture and family that underpin Yolŋu learning. Yolŋu teacher's work emerges in the collective and 'generous' space of work knowledge co-created with children, Balanda teachers and community. Yet it always runs the risk of ending up in that 'big ditch' that Gurrudupunbuy has so graphically described.

This report offers some confronting challenges for the preparation of the Australian teaching profession: that 'we' understand the effects of our metropolitan assumptions on what is taught and how within ITE and how one can become and be a teacher. It challenges that we learn to read contrapuntally (cf Said, 1993) with a view to seeing the articulations between the past and the present and so also how research literature reinscribes metropolitan assumptions through use of the term 'remote':

*The lifestyle of remote teaching is paradoxically one of the most attractive yet one of the most difficult aspects of the job. Many of the most remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory are in spectacular, unspoilt landscapes. The recreational opportunities that take advantage of the physical surrounds, such as fishing, camping and hiking, make the experience extraordinarily appealing for those who enjoy such pursuits but the social isolation of such settings can be unsettling for some. Seasonal isolation can cut off communities for long periods of time, particularly during the wet season, and policies surrounding the purchase and consumption of alcohol vary considerably both between communities and from metropolitan centres. Other logistical aspects that affect lifestyle, such as infrequent food deliveries, limited or unavailable health services and limited opportunities and options for social recreation, can make life in a remote community difficult. The nexus between work and life outside work is often unclear as so much of remote life is intertwined with the workplace—socially, professionally and physically. In many communities, the school is the hub of the community, along with the council, shop and clinic. It is often a site for community meetings, activities and events. Such environments make it difficult to 'switch off' after work, or indeed establish boundaries between work life and home life. Developing strong, meaningful community relationships in Indigenous communities is critical to effective engagement, establishing trust and building social capital (Harrison, 2008) but an intimate knowledge of the workings of a small community can be a double-edged sword as, though this undoubtedly contributes to building relationships, managing the expectations of the community outside school hours can be difficult. (Brasche and Harrington 2012, p. 120)*

Even a surface read of this excerpt reveals that the audience for this paper is a non-local audience, a Balanda who will reap the benefits of

*highly competitive salaries, all transfer and transport costs, free accommodation, special remote allowances of up to \$7500, three 'fares out of isolated localities' (including accommodation for three days in either Darwin or Alice Springs) per year, a remote retention rate of \$1000 for 12 months' service, generous special study leave and such (Brasche and Harrington, 2012, p. 119).*

As the researchers admit this provides access to "lucrative career opportunities".

*Yolŋu Teachers* have said they would appreciate the opportunity to access these career opportunities also. But under what conditions might this be achieved? Many Yolŋu are not in a position to work full-time: health, cultural and family obligations make demands of Yolŋu that make full-time work unrealistic. Yet if they take up a teaching role it is difficult to balance these obligations over a sustained period of time and as a result the cultural life of the community suffers. Moreover the school is less able to provide, via *Yolŋu Teachers*, that bridge between western and Yolŋu worlds that people such as Bulkunu, M. Yunupingu, Gurrudupunbuy and others argue is necessary for Yolŋu children's future. Simultaneously, as contract employees in the education system, many Yolŋu experience all of the challenges of precarious low paid employment depicted in other sectors (cf Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008) So, under what conditions might access to better career opportunities be achieved? Yolŋu in this project offered the following advice:

1. Hold in tension the notion of ITE and individual choice as the default starting point for becoming a teacher and begin from the premise that when living on country, being and becoming a teacher involves multiple and ongoing negotiations including but not always being assigned a teaching path by the community at a very young age and acquiring *Yolŋu Teacher* status well before any national teaching qualification has been awarded.
2. Acknowledge the substantial mobility within and between remote communities while simultaneously noting that theories of teacher mobility and career advancement, contain many metropolitan assumptions that reintroduce colonialist assumptions about Yolŋu engagement with the world.
3. Make explicit the moral assumptions underpinning decisions that deem it mandatory for all Australian children to have an education and then fall short in providing that education for children who live on country. As such this has implications for how to avoid a particular metropolitan imaginary negating the language and knowledge requirements to successfully teach in country. These requirements and their performance standards, apply equally but differentially to Yolŋu and Balanda teachers.
4. Establish a stronger focus on the range of 'local teacher' expertise and academic literacies possessed at the beginning of an ITE program and use those achievements and expertise to enable *Yolŋu teachers* to meet the requirements of Teachers Registration Boards at the other end of their degree.

## Listen carefully: listen deeply

The people who contributed to this project had assorted views and qualifications: *Yolŋu Teachers*, Balanda school teachers, Balanda researchers, Yolŋu professors, Yolŋu cultural authorities, Balanda and Aboriginal administrators, teacher education lecturers. We each had very uneven experiences and knowledge of the day-to-day ebb and flow of living on country. The project began by asking what pathways promote strong teacher education pathways for *Yolŋu Teachers*. While not taking the national teaching space for granted, the original framing of the question opened up only partial possibilities for understanding Yolŋu Teaching on country. Shifting attention and listening practices brought into focus the white public space of schooling: a space which repeatedly blind and deaf to its metropolitan and racialised qualities and in so doing, repeatedly undermines the promise of education for all Australians.

Mick Dodson (1994, p. 6) draws attention to the subjective nature of *definitions* arguing “they would better be described as the state’s tools for [Aboriginal] domination and assimilation”. It is highly likely that these tools of definition are operating in the national ITE space and it is worth considering how a discourse that repeatedly defaults first, to a metropolitan discourse of schooling and second to the child’s physical, social and intellectual development, will serve the needs of *Yolŋu Teachers*.

The research underpinning this report indicates that Yolŋu parents and communities want an education for their children which addresses western and Yolŋu knowledge practices. Moreover Yolŋu children and their families will travel: they already do. Underpinning the stereotypical concerns about Yolŋu (lack of) mobility is a metrocentric logic driven by the entrepreneurial spirit to travel. The spirit of colonialism is alive and well in the logic that Australian teachers will activate their career potential through mobility. Contesting this mantra will not lock Yolŋu into occupational dead ends. Rather it will open Balanda eyes to the ways in which western metropolitan definitions are currently constraining career pathways and possibilities for *Yolŋu Teachers*.

Gap analogies have been useful in drawing attention to huge disparities in life conditions – health, education, social support, recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity – that most Australians feel they are entitled to by default of their Australian citizenship. The gap is premised on a notion of citizenship that defaults to a national white public space. People living in remote and really remote homes experience the realities of this ‘gap’ in practical and conceptual ways. They have advised that the conditions for their success as teachers are multilayered and include relationships, attention to their pedagogical expertise and knowledge and an often overlooked factor, their identities as employees and the industrial conditions they are often denied through the contract conditions associated with quite long periods of continuous employment. It is time to listen carefully to their advice about conceptual *and* technical arrangements that must be put in place to enable Yolŋu to take their place as teachers in a national schooling system.



Yolŋu who generously offered their insights about generating a strong schooling space for their children through strong pathways for *Yolŋu Teachers* did not ask that all of Australia learn their language. They did not ask for complete control over all teachers who entered their School seeking employment and more often than not moving on within a few years. They did not ask that all Balanda teachers who entered their community show evidence that they could meet particular Graduate Standards (cf Standard 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; Standard 3.5 Use effective classroom communication [where English is not the language spoken in the community]; Standard 7 – Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community [AITSL, 2011a]). They did not ask for a curriculum and pedagogic practices anchored only in Yolŋu knowledge practices. They did not ask that all Australians experience the challenging residential, employment and economic conditions of their communities and housing localities (cf ABS, 2011; Nicholls, 2009).

They did ask that all Australians recognise that language, land, knowledge practices, cultural authority structures and family connections were not bargaining chips they would trade in on *their* quest to become fit and proper teachers (cf NTG TRB, 2012), indeed they did not believe that the qualifications granted to become a fit and proper Balanda teacher were adequate to educate Yolŋu children. This report outlines a number of ways in teacher education institutions, schools and educators need to work together to make the premises and assumptions of teacher education less disconnected, less 'remote', from the lived realities of *Yolŋu Teachers* on country.

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## Appendix 1: An explanation of methodology

Many researchers believe methodology to be at the heart of knowledge production processes, other readers of this report might want to cut to the chase and hear what 'the people' said. Be that as it may, what people say is often a result of who is asked, who does the asking and in this case how they listened and what they heard. This section provides some explanation of the approaches taken to talking with Yolŋu about teacher education on country.

### Talking with Yolŋu Teachers and others

A series of conversations, more formal interviews and video/audio recordings were undertaken with a range of people involved in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and teacher support at Galiwin'ku. These conversations canvassed experiences of other schools, universities in other states and experiences with school structures stretching as far back as the 1970s. The advantage of long conversations (Chilisa, 2012; McCracken, 1988) held over 18 months enabled understandings to grow *through* shared talk about past work as teachers and community residents, and as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If nothing else, that was one of the key elements of participatory research that was able to be activated in this project (cf Chilisa 2012)<sup>20</sup>. It is a tribute to the MATSITI project managers that they accommodated a long timeline for long conversations. Shorter timelines, or pressure to come to closure too quickly, would not have afforded the extensive range of memories across time, the opportunity to sit and reflect past the surface notes made on field trips and during conversations with *Yolŋu Teachers* and to cross check historical records and the reasonably vast amount of material that has been written about *Yolŋu Teachers* in the last 3 decades. Time and connection with others surfaced the range of institutional relations central to the experiences of becoming and being a *Yolŋu Teacher* living on country in Galiwin'ku. In practical terms the aim of the project was to illustrate the experiences of *Yolŋu Teachers* as they participated in teacher education. Their location on country required some specific methodological decisions in order to ensure illustration of experience appropriately reflected their lives as *Yolŋu Teachers*.

<sup>20</sup> Late in the project we encountered related information about the RMIT 'deep listening' project (<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=6p8ewr7st125>). It is possible that one may engage in long conversations with a focus on how the historical is always and already articulated with contemporary experience (cf Said, 1993). However, it is not always the case that long conversations result in deep listening. Only Yolŋu readers will be able to determine if the report has adequately portrayed the concerns they have repeatedly offered to metropolitan centres. See Duwalatji et al., (2013) for one response to the overall messages of the project.

Methodologically then, the aim was to begin from a different starting point: to draw attention to the assumption that remote Aboriginal living experiences and therefore remote Aboriginal ITE experiences, were perpetually outside the metrocentric frame. In taking this approach the report aimed to illustrate, from the perspective of *Yolŋu Teachers'* experiences of ITE and ongoing employment in the national system, how notions of national standards, national curriculum, national registration and national identity, activate a form of 'institutional capture' over their accounts of being and becoming *Yolŋu Teachers*. In so doing, their accounts as 'informants' are re-constituted as institutional discourses and their engagement with the cultural authority structures of their community reconfigured "as the objects of professional or managerial knowledge" (McCoy, 2006 p. 110). *Yolŋu Teachers* and their expertise to draw on western and non-western knowledge practices were central to decisions about who, what where, when and how to identify 'the topic' and engage with people who would contribute their experiences and opinions.

In the early stages of the long conversations with Yolŋu it became clear that people at Galiwin'ku had experienced many requests to tell their stories of engagement with western knowledges and governance practices. They believed the people extending these requests were not listening to them, or reconfiguring their responses to meet objectives already in process. They wanted their message relayed, again, beyond Galiwin'ku into the metropolitan space of Darwin and the national teaching space, to those people who planned what was called 'remote teacher education'. In response to these requests, admittedly not always heard accurately at the beginning of the project, a number of different resources were produced:

1. Butchers paper sheets produced in workshops remained with *Yolŋu Teachers* to be used as the basis for further conversation with school staff.
2. A short executive summary of the key messages of the project able to be distributed as a flyer to interested people short on reading time.
3. A longer report directed to an audience of primarily Balanda researchers, administrators and teachers in an attempt to flesh out the experience of "Assistant Teachers" as they are known industrially and professionally in the Northern Territory. The report disrupts many of the assumptions about Yolŋu experiences as Assistant Teachers in schools by drawing on the term *Yolŋu Teacher* to reflect the complex work they do in that in-between space of western and Yolŋu knowledge.
4. A website with a key messages flyer; the report; and short videos of Yolŋu talking about their experiences of teaching.

## Learning to 'know' Galiwin'ku

As is often the case in the Northern Territory this project was managed by a researcher new to the community and the Northern Territory. Being put into the community was critical, and was not simply a matter of 'flying out' to meet people. Sue Shore undertook two, one week visits to Galiwin'ku to listen and talk with *Yolŋu Teachers* (and of course ask many questions as Balanda do).

Preparations beforehand included lengthy talks (5 months in fact) with a range of people living in Darwin, Batchelor and Alice Springs. Key features of those talks included:

- discussion about the purpose of the project and how it would be useful for Yolŋu;
- effective ways to disseminate the findings of the project;
- applying to Charles Darwin University for ethics to meet the protocols required to talk with people;
- working with a cultural adviser to visit and talk with people in community
- working with Balanda advisers to ensure a Yolŋu adviser would be available to guide Sue in talking to people in Galiwin'ku;
- return trips to the community, phone calls in between those trips, emails;
- visits with people while they were in Darwin;
- contact with longstanding Balanda administrators who lived in Darwin;
- requests for video and audio sessions with people who were willing to tell their story of being a *Yolŋu Teacher*; and
- video and audio recordings of workshop and report back sessions held with *Yolŋu Teachers*.

The project was guided by Yolŋu and those Balanda working with them who had gained their trust. A reference committee was planned but did not eventuate as a formal mechanism for a number of reasons. Approvals, protocols and ultimately the ability to meet and gain a more in-depth understanding of teacher education in this community rested with the capacity of the research team to demonstrate a willingness to listen and to visit more than once to 'get the data'. Indeed at times people were surprised that Sue Shore returned for three weekly over a nine month period, believing that the first visit was the project and that it had been completed long ago. The project was largely contained to Galiwin'ku, but from Darwin, the education department approved work with a group of employees, although the composition of that group changed for multiple reasons as the department experienced multiple restructures and changes of government during the time.

As a community with a long history of Aboriginal participation in teaching, many residents had experience of working at or with the School over many decades. Who then should one speak to? This is a recurring issue in projects where some members of the research team are new to a particular community. The answer was easily resolved in this case: anyone who might want to say something about ITE and Galiwin'ku.

In essence, once a location for the 'long conversations' was determined and contact made, the process of who would participate became one of ongoing discussion with *Yolŋu Teachers*. People were suggested, past teachers were called upon, some people arrived for formal workshops and interviews, others asked to be visited in their homes. Some workshops preceded, some transformed into short meetings, others ended up as conversations between two people. A repeated pattern across discussions began to emerge: Yolŋu participants were aware of who was present, but also conscious of who should be asked, where were they, how could they be contacted. Inevitably some people were missed. Logistically it was not possible to speak to all people who might have offered an opinion. Some people were not residing in the community when visits were made. Some people chose not to attend meetings. Some people had other commitments when workshops and meetings were held. Every effort was made to ensure people could attend meetings or workshops: changing scheduled times; waiting until all could assemble; renegotiating community visits to fit around ceremonial obligations and school term times.

People who were involved included the following:

1. *Yolŋu Teachers* who had been employed in the community some decades earlier and who now had substantial positions of influence and expertise. These residents were not always paid; if so they may have been employed by the school Council rather than the department; and, were sometimes hired for specific work as cultural advisers in the school.
2. 'Ships': Yolŋu who had in recent times been offered full-time department scholarships to complete teacher training.
3. Assistant Teachers: Yolŋu people employed in the school whose role was to "provide support and assistance to Indigenous students, their parents or guardians, teachers, the school and the community in the provision of effective educational programs" (NT DET [nd]).
4. Tutors, also Yolŋu, who were employed in the School, sometimes on an hourly or half day basis to support student learning.
5. Yolŋu enrolled in the NT DECS funded RITE program (generally enrolments began around 2009 and 2010), however funding of that program ceased at the end of 2012.
6. Balanda who taught programs or provided support to remote ITE students.
7. Balanda teachers who taught in the school.
8. Other Balanda lecturers, principals and university academics with experience of ITE or delivery of ITE programs in remote communities.

The *bad news* was that Yolŋu were often asked to tell their stories by Balanda and Yolŋu research teams. During this project many nationally funded projects and researchers from other universities and jurisdictions – health, child care, community quality assurance teams – visited the community to speak with residents. Not surprisingly *Yolŋu Teachers* figured in these activities: they were often articulate in a number of languages as well as English, well connect in and across the community and knowledgeable about community history and dynamics.

This theme of retelling a story again and again over many decades emerged at regular intervals in each conversation and group meeting. It was so pervasive that project partners initiated a review of published and 'grey literature' to complement this report and the video/audio recordings of *Yolŋu Teachers* (Shore & Bat, 2013).

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Yolŋu have told their stories time and again and have been exposed to quite astounding instances of research forgetfulness or selective exclusion of their concerns in final reports, the *good news*, at least for this project, was that people were still surprisingly willing to once again tell their story of teaching on country.

A further principle driving the intention of the project was to avoid the impression that there was a single story to be told about ITE on country. Listening to Galiwin'ku people and others it was clear that the story told in English would differ from that related in Yolŋu Matha. A story told through a 1:1 interview would differ from a workshop conversation in which *Yolŋu Teachers* talked together in Yolŋu Matha. Furthermore since people had been asked to tell their stories so often it was likely they might tell a version of the story we might want to hear – thus managing the time and effort required of them in order for Balanda to hear the story correctly (cf Williams, Thorpe & Chapman, 2003). If approaches, and requests and invitations to tell their story were not respectful of the long conversations already in place, it is possible that a local response is to tell a surface story unless a researcher earns the right to hear the deeper messages of *Yolŋu Teachers'* experiences. From this perspective it required 'work' to earn the right to be told a deeper story of Yolŋu engagement with teaching and teacher education.

Furthermore teacher education on country begins from a number of central starting points – not least that many children do not speak English when they arrive at the school. Rather than seeing this as a metrocentric deficit of community practices this starting point was central in understanding the everyday world of Yolŋu. By extension it means "1st language educational engagement and instruction is crucial for learning meanings, concepts and ideas from a foreign culture (i.e. Mainstream Australia). The alternative is to rote-learn, but not comprehend" (Dhamarrandji, 2011).

These overall principles shaped the practical decisions that determined the contours of long conversations about preservice teacher education generated in this particular project.



## Appendix 2: About Galiwin'ku

Extracted from: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/publications-articles/communities-regions/local-implementation-plans/local-implementation-plan-galiwinku?HTML>

### History

Aboriginal people have inhabited this region for more than 40,000 years. After the Goulburn Island mission was set up in 1921, Elcho Island was chosen as the site for a second Methodist overseas mission. However, oil drilling by the Naphtha Petroleum Company closed the mission site, which was relocated to Milingimbi.

Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island was eventually established in 1942 as a refuge from possible bombing of the Milingimbi Royal Australian Air Force Base during World War II.

The Methodist church started its Methodist overseas mission in Galiwin'ku in 1947. During the 1950s a fishing industry started, a large market garden flourished and a cypress pine logging industry and sawmill began. During early settlement, the mission encouraged Aboriginal people to stay on their traditional homelands and use Galiwin'ku as a service centre. However, the mission ended when self-government came in the 1970s, and the community is now the largest Aboriginal community in north-east Arnhem Land. In 2008, Galiwin'ku became part of the East Arnhem Shire and the Shire took over local government.

### Location

Galiwin'ku is the largest community on Elcho Island, which is 150 km north-west of Nhulunbuy and 550 km north-east of Darwin. Elcho Island is at the southern end of the Wessel Island group, and is bounded on the western side by the Arafura Sea and on the eastern side by Cadell Strait. Galiwin'ku is the only town on Elcho Island, and is also the Aboriginal name for the whole island.

### Population

The population of Galiwin'ku and its surrounds in 2006 was approximately 2,290, of which 2,158 were Indigenous (94 per cent). In 2006, 49 per cent of Galiwin'ku's Indigenous population was younger than 20 years of age.

The Indigenous population of Galiwin'ku and its surrounds is projected to increase from 2,158 people in 2006 to 2,930 in 2026, an increase of 36 per cent. The number of Indigenous people aged 15 to 64 (the working age population) is projected to increase from 1,397 to 1,905 over this period. The greatest proportional increase is expected to be in the older population of 50 years and above, which is projected to double from 217 to 535 people, between 2006 and 2026. The changing size and age composition of the Indigenous population of Galiwin'ku will increase the need for housing and employment opportunities, as well as aged care and health services.

These numbers are based on the 2006 census, adjusted using Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates as the census under-counted Indigenous populations. It is recognised that this may not be an accurate assessment of the current population.

## Languages

Galiwin'ku is home to the Yolŋu people. Yolŋu means 'Aboriginal person' in the languages of northern Arnhem Land. Yolŋu is also the name given to a group of intermarrying clans who live in Milingimbi, Yirkala and Galiwin'ku and speak a dialect of one of a number of closely related languages. Djambarrpuyngu is the most widely used and understood language in Galiwin'ku. Galpa, Golpa, Golumala, Gumatj, Liya'gawumirr, Wangurri, Warramiri and Gupauyngu are also spoken.

## Clan groups

People from many clan groups now live in the township of Galiwin'ku and are known collectively as Yolŋu people. Together these Yolŋu clans formed a social system of religious organisation that differs from neighbouring systems. Yolŋu people identify themselves first by their family group, then by their clan and language, and finally by their family's country. The Yolŋu landowning groups are divided into two moieties, Yirritja and Dhuwa. People belong to the moiety of their father and marry someone of their mother's moiety.

## Traditional Owners

A small number of traditional owners share the residency of the Galiwin'ku community with the speakers of the nine principal Yolŋu languages drawn from the many surrounding clans. The residents of Galiwinku, drawn from these clans, share multi-dimensional connections to the land and sea of the islands including rights expressed through matri-lateral relations of Ngandipulu (Mother's groups), Maripulu-ringgitj (Mother's Mother's groups), and Wakupuludjungaya (Mother's Mother's Mother's groups).

The patrilineal title holders of the estate, Baymarwangga (Senior Living) share the Galiwin'ku township with residents drawn from ancestral areas surrounding the islands. Some of these clans have matrilineal links and other cultural alliances, including ringgitj interests, which connect them to the Galiwin'ku traditional owners and their traditional estate. There are traditional owners who currently reside in the nearby communities of Milingimbi, Murrunga and Maningrida.

## Land Council

The Northern Land Council, based in Darwin and with a regional office in Nhulunbuy, is the land council to the community. It is responsible for matters under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. This includes:

- checking, representing and responding to the wishes and opinions of local Indigenous people about legislation, tourism, development and commercial activities that affect traditional land, and
- helping traditional landowners claim, manage and protect the land.

All of Arnhem Land was proclaimed as an Aboriginal reserve in 1931.



## Local Government

The East Arnhem Shire Council provides local government in Galiwin'ku, which is in the Shire's Gumurr Marthakal Ward. The Gumurr Marthakal Ward is one of four wards in the Shire and elects three of the 12 council members. The Shire headquarters are in Nhulunbuy and Darwin (both outside the Shire area) and it has a service delivery centre in Galiwin'ku.

The Shire consults community members through the Galiwin'ku Local Board, which meets monthly with the Gumurr Marthakal Ward councillors.

## Local Reference Group

The Galiwin'ku people have been very focused on culturally appropriate representation throughout the Local Implementation Plan process. The community held a series of meetings attended by community leaders, clan leaders and other representatives and decided that clan leaders would nominate people to represent the clan in the Galiwin'ku Local Reference Group.

Clan representatives, leaders and members were then engaged by the Galiwin'ku Indigenous Engagement Officer and Government Business Manager in remote service delivery and Local Implementation Plan governance and planning through a further six ringitj (cultural alliances of clans) group meetings representing 21 clans.

The Galiwin'ku Local Reference Group has representatives from across the community. It includes traditional owners and non-traditional landowners, and is almost 50 per cent women. Younger members have consulted with Galiwin'ku youth about the plan. The three Gumurr Marthakal Ward Shire councillors are also members of the Galiwin'ku Local Reference Group.

## Project documents

(<http://www.cdu.edu.au/education/research-projects/pathways-remote>):

Shore, S., Chisholm, P., Bat, M., Harris, B., Kell, P. & Reaburn, S. (2014). *Pathways for Yolŋu Teachers: rethinking initial teacher education (ITE) on country*. Darwin, NT: School of Education, Charles Darwin University.

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Bat, M., & Shore, S., (2013) Listening differently: an exploration of the grey literature on Aboriginal teacher education in the Top End of the Northern Territory. A review of grey literature produced as part of the research outcomes for the MATSITI funded project: *Pathways for Yolŋu Teachers: rethinking initial teacher education (ITE) on country*. Darwin, NT, School of Education, Charles Darwin University.



