



KAYA WANDJOO NGALA NOONGARPEDIA – WELCOME TO OUR NOONGARPEDIA

*Report on a research project.*¹

Jennie Buchanan^a Len Collard^a Ingrid Cumming^b David Palmer^c
Kim Scott^b and John Hartley^b

^a University of Western Australia, ^b Curtin University, ^c Independent Scholar

Chapter 9: Noongapedia karnany balang – How Noongarpedia responded to challenges

A reflective conversation, responding to issues raised in Chapter 8 of this Report, conducted among: Len Collard (Chief Investigator), Ingrid Cumming and Jennie Buchanan (Project Research Associates), Gideon Digby (Wikimedia Australia) and David Palmer (host).

Introduction

Dave: Hi team. In the last chapter (chapter 8), Kim and others set out a series of challenges confronting a project such as Noongarpedia. As Gideon and Ingrid pointed out at the end of that chapter, the Wikipedian and Noongar traditions have similarities in the way they deal with disputes, tensions and obstacles in relation to knowledge. Both seem to face the problems by (1) getting people to make them quite public, and (2) have a crack at a solution. Gideon, some might say that these contrast with the typical conventions adopted in the Western academy, and the modern state when it deals with ‘knowledge management’?

Gideon: Well, I’m not expert when it comes to academics but it seems to me as an outsider that there is a rather large incentive for those working in universities to put all their attention into identifying problems from a distance, standing back and waiting to see more problems emerge. I think it is fair to say that Wikipedia has more of a nurturing culture, of trying something, seeing where the problems are and then seeking different ways of doing things. This is how policy has been developed since

¹ Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project IN140100017 (2014-17): *Noongar kaatdijin bidi – Noongar knowledge networks; or, Why is there no Noongar Wikipedia?*

the inception of Wikipedia. A policy gets developed in response to the need for one. In the meantime, when something doesn't work, people get online and use discussion forums to try and fix it. We tend to love creative solutions too, drawing on different ways of thinking and exploiting all the possible multimedia and multimodal systems that are available.

Ingrid: Yes, the modern state seems more and more obsessed with identifying risks and investing lots of time and money on 'managing' things just in case there is a problem. Noongar haven't usually had the luxury of waiting around until someone else fixes a problem. My understanding of the old knowledge traditions was that when a dispute occurred people held special meetings to talk it out (Myers, 1992).² If today's meetings are anything to go by then they would have been pretty heated. In fact, I remember reading or hearing about how most days would start with a yarn to sort out disputes and come up with courses of action.

Dave: Yes, Inge Kral talks about this in and around Warburton:

In the past, public explosions of anger or frustration were a socially acceptable way of releasing tension in the Western Desert that enabled conflict between kin to be resolved generally through ritualised payback, spearfights or 'yaarlpirri'. Yaarlpirri, or early morning talk, was a form of public oratory used extensively across the Western Desert to discuss issues, air grievances, disseminate information, or organise the day's hunting and gathering (Kral, 2014: 184)

Ingrid: Noongar also love creative ways of doing things. As with what happens today in places like the Western Desert, Noongar traditionally 'utilised a rich multimodal communicative repertoire incorporating speech, song, sign language, silence, gesture and the graphic symbols evident in sand story narratives' (Kral, 2014: 181).

Noongar, trauma and the project

Dave: Len Collard, can I bring you into the conversation here? In the last chapter we identified the importance of the history of denigration, separation and trauma experienced by Noongar. This history of trauma surely has been and will be a challenge facing the project?

Len: Of course. There is no doubt that many Noongar families have had language and culture smashed. Every Noongar family has suffered unimaginable hardship and pain. I speak to people almost every day who are so hurt and damaged by the loss of their

² Fred Myers, working with Pintupi people in Central Australia, concluded that 'meetings constitute the Pintupi polity as an organised framework within which certain principles (rules or precedents) are held applicable and binding' (1992: 431). He added that the principle or value that 'defines this jurisdiction' is 'relatedness'.

culture, language, knowledge, contact with moort and alienation from boodjar. Some people will never recover from this and many will find it incredibly painful, almost impossible, to get involved in projects like Noongarpedia. I'd guess that a majority of kids that Ingrid and Jennie have been working with in schools come from families that are in a whole lot of pain.

This is a serious challenge for us.

On the other hand, this is also the most important reason why we need projects like Noongarpedia to go ahead. There is massive healing power in being involved in Noongar knowledge and cultural work.

Ingrid: Yep, I agree and anyone who knows anything about Noongar systems of health and healing knows that one of the principal ways of strengthening ourselves is through spending time on country, with family and learning and speaking language and culture.

Gideon: I think the project has always acknowledged the trauma and distrust. This was part of the original proposal and rationale for it. We want to share and make use of knowledge that is acceptable precisely because we want to support those who have suffered.

Dave: Yes, but that it is a very tender and raw business, talking about Noongar knowledge.

Gideon: I also think it is important to realise that, in addition to the history of attempts to kill Noongar knowledge that the knowledge is already out there – used, accepted, culturally it influences people – not just Noongar but others as well. It is already in European culture.

Dave: So it is not just a language and knowledge system that has been taken – it is a system of doing business that remains and stays and influences. This is what we talk about in chapter 3 of this Report.

Len: Yes, Noongar katatjin baal nyinniny nidja boodjar yeye. We also need to acknowledge that Noongar knowledge is alive and sitting on this boodjar today. As Ingrid said, it is a powerful thing for Noongar that language and knowledge exist in the public arena in various forms – through writing down and recording in the early days, up to the present with the resurgence of Noongar academic and cultural people making it public in theatre, music, the media and in schools.

Jennie: It's also important to make the point that although non-Noongar have been involved this has been a Noongar led project from the start. Our bosses Len Collard and Kim Scott are deep cultural men. Ingrid Cumming is well grounded in language

and knowledge. We've worked closely with the central cultural organisations, had senior language speakers lead the way, and we have had lots of young Noongar involved. We want to do more but Noongar baallup boordier nidjar project. Noongar, they're bosses of this project.

Dave: It also seems to me that there is a subtle and powerful way of coming to a project like this. Len, I know you have talked about and done this in much of your work. From the beginning there has always been a strong emphasis on strength and resilience despite the history of colonisation and the resultant losses. Perhaps we could call this part of the weirn (spirit) of the project – lots of focus on the strength of language, the old people, and what remains.

Len: Yes, that has always been a strong element in my family history. In this project we like to start with positive elements, drawing out great stories that come from Noongar themselves. If you start with trauma there is a risk you stay there and that paralyses you from moving forward.

Dave: Jennie and Ingrid, I've also noticed that a strong element in the weirn of the project has been its focus on work with kids, young people and them having lots of contact with other generations.

Ingrid: Yes, in Noongar knowledge systems, it is paramount, fundamental to work with kids. Not only to work with kids but to see them as 'knowledge agents', those who already have knowledge and are already capable.

This is important for a few reasons. They have lots of energy and will do lots of things. For example, the really young ones in primary schools have been among the most productive Noongarmedians, posting up lots of the content.

Jennie: Working with young people is important too to build their knowledge early on before they are too subject to trauma.

Also, when you work with kids you are more likely to see the rest of the community change, more likely to see others open up, be sparked up, optimistic. It helps to give people 'skin in the game', both in the Noongar and non-Noongar sense. When kids are involved, moort (family) gets involved.

Len: This is partly because Noongar knowledge is so dependent on relations and relationships. As we have been saying, you can't build katatjin (knowledge) unless you are also in relationship to boodjar (country) and moort (family).

So to recap, one of the key ways we approach the challenge of dealing with Noongar trauma about knowledge, and cultural, family and land loss, is to build a weirn (spirit)

of the project where we wangkiny woolah (celebrate) boodjar (country), moort (family) and our koorlungka (young people).

Ingrid: Owing to legislation in the past, and different historical occurrences, unfortunately many Noongar people didn't have access to the language or culture. However, some were successful in retaining that culture as they lived and worked in areas where they were encouraged to keep that knowledge consistent. This will be a continual issue between different groups. As a team, we acknowledge the potential anxiety, fear and resentment between groups around knowledge and identity, especially when Noongar identity has historically been defined by legislation like the 1905 Aborigines Act (Western Australia). The power of the 'pedia is that it has the ability to provide new information to people about their identity, about historical issues aligned with how identity has been taught, understood and learnt by both the Noongar and the wider community. It can provide data, research and evidence on what culture and identity really is, including information from elders and people in the community themselves, rather than from 'the other'.

Gideon: There are other ways of working that will potentially help take traumatised families forward. These are probably side benefits but they are still important. Using a Wikipedia framework involves teaching young people about citations and stating sources. This teaches them how to work in a non-Noongar academic framework, instilling a capacity to operate in a Western knowledge system while still framed in Noongar knowledge systems.

Dave: Yes, and if you don't understand how Noongar knowledge systems see all of this then there is a solid body of work that comes out of the Western scientific domain that demonstrates the multiple values of this work.

Available evidence that has been generated by bio-medical, scientific, social psychological, demographic and economic research shows a strong correlation between the kind of work you have been doing and other outcomes. The evidence demonstrates that the more Indigenous people spend time on country, are able to share time with other generations and are deeply immersed in culture, language and knowledge, then:

- 1) the better is their cardio-vascular function,
- 2) the healthier is their renal function,
- 3) their diets are more balanced,
- 4) the more likely is that they are participating in the market economy and formal education and training,
- 5) the less they are involved in alcohol use,
- 6) the less they are involved in the criminal justice system,
- 7) the less likely they are to attempt suicide and self-harm. (Palmer, 2013)

Dealing with public nature of Noongarpedia

Dave: Another challenge that has been identified has to do with restricted knowledge: How to contend with the fact that Noongar traditions maintain a balance between knowledge that is public, knowledge that sits with specific families and cultural leaders, and knowledge that needs to be kept secret or only available to specific people such as men, women or persons of ‘high degree’. In contrast there is a strong Western tradition of claiming that knowledge ‘wants to be free’, and ought to be made available to everyone.³ Indeed, this is a central platform in the world of Wikipedia. How has the project responded to this challenge?

Len: Yes, this is a serious challenge. As we have said, in Noongar traditions knowledge is relational not universal. Since the Enlightenment, science has wanted all knowledge to be subject to public scrutiny and public accessibility. For Noongar, some knowledge is dangerous. We say that going to some places and seeing some things can damage a person’s health. Noongar knowledge protocols have also emerged to deal with these dangers. These have involved negotiating access through relationships with the appropriate people for an area and for particular knowledge.

Dave: Of course Western modernity is often dishonest about the idea that knowledge is neutral. Much of what is known is not available because of legislation, commercial interests and technical access. This has also been recognised by emerging scientific traditions such as chaos science, time and relational theory, game theory and quantum physics.

So how has the project attempted to deal with this?

Ingrid: The first thing worth saying is that we started and largely worked with content that is already in the public domain. Much of what we have done is to create Noongarpedia as a clearinghouse of knowledge that is already public. Now this doesn’t completely deal with the challenge because some content has previously been made public without the prior consent of proper Noongar custodians. It also doesn’t deal with the fact that Noongar knowledge is relational. However, it is an important step.

Jennie: The second thing we have done is to try and make sure Noongar are moderating and reviewing the content that gets posted. During our workshops we

³ However, an amended slogan was proposed by Stevan Harnad (2004): *Let All Knowledge Be Free That Wants to be Free* (<http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Temp/gazette.html>). He writes: ‘Some well-meaning cowboys have noticed a similarity between the World-Wide-Web and the Wild-Wild-West, with its limitless space, free for the taking. They’ve concluded that the Web Age means we can at last have free access to all knowledge. I wish they had been right, but unfortunately knowledge is produced by people, and not all people want to give away their work for free!’. Harnad was thinking about open access journals (like *Cultural Science*), but the same applies to both Noongar knowledge and to Wikipedia: it is possible to organise a system in which *All Knowledge is Free That Wants to be Free*.

stress the importance of testing out with other Noongar whether something is OK to be posted. We have always suggested that if people have to a source from someone in confidence then it should not be shared.

Gideon: So far, Noongarpedia hasn't promoted much use of the discussion pages on the software. However, Wikipedia has a very strong tradition of encouraging people to 'talk' with each if they have an issue with the content that is posted. Generally, this is done through the discussion pages. I can think of one highly relevant example. I'm not going to cite the source at this point. However, on the English Wikipedia there was a very active discussion about whether to include the location data on an Aboriginal site on the east coast of Australia. The site was suspected by some to be of high cultural value and had physical artefacts that are at risk of being removed if the location is known by many people. After some considerable debate the decision taken was to remove any reference that may allow people to identify the location of the site.

Ingrid: another convention in our work in schools was to invite students to consider what their parents and grandparents would think if a piece of information was made public. They were then invited to make this a piece of homework and go and talk with the appropriate family members (often a grandparent or uncle and aunty). Jennie, I know you have a couple of stories from schools.

Jen: Yes, when we working with kids in Albany the Noongar students got really excited about a presentation earlier made by one a Noongar custodian about an old ochre pit story. They really wanted to make the story a subject of a Noongarpedia entry and started to prepare photos and maps of the location. We began to have a conversation with them about this, posing the question: 'What would your Nana think about this? What might be the consequences of everyone knowing about this place?'

Dave: This sounds similar to the way that advocates of the educational practice of 'critical literacy' would approach the work.

Jennie: Students responded with quite a deep discussion. In the end they determined that the risks of mapping the location or allowing others to identify the site were great. However, they still thought it important to make public the fact that this is an important part of local Noongar knowledge. Instead, after seeking advice from two senior women, they decided to frame a post that celebrated the historical fact that the ochre was traded as far as central Australia, and the place was where some of the last ceremonial activities occurred. This general reference did not include any reference to its location or present importance.

Ingrid: In another case, some kids found a particular breed of bird feather. They really wanted to take a photo and make a post about their feather. However, one of the Noongar students was worried that this bird was too special and held particular powers that may be dangerous to others. They then asked advice from us. Instead of

telling them what we thought (that it was fine to use the feather) we invited them to all talk with the most senior people in their family about what their particular family had to say about that bird and feather.

This was also a way of demonstrating that different Noongar have different views and that there is no such thing as a single or universal Noongar fact.⁴

Len: Active involvement of Noongar in the project was also an important way we dealt with this challenge. Getting a mix of generations involved was the most important thing here.

Dave: I noticed that the majority of Wikibombs had lots of non-Noongar involved. Did this make things tricky?

Len: It is always going to be tricky, whether you have non-Noongar or Noongar who are not connected to their culture and family.

Ingrid: Yes, but every event (whether it be Wikibombs, work in schools or other activities) was always hosted by Noongar. Either Kim Scott, Len Collard or myself were at each event, overseeing things.

Jennie: And with the Wikibombs, the model was that there will always be hosting and linking with Noongar cultural facilitators, organisations and businesses where Vivienne Hansen and others were invited to run things. In addition, we sought out lots of resources that have been written and prepared by Noongar and Noongar knowledge holders.

There was also Noongar moderation of the content that was posted. In the sessions, people are always asking questions. The process of Wikibombs is not first about getting the content up; it is about getting people together, building relationships and talking with Noongar.

Gideon: We should also say that the Wikipedia convention is to encourage people to seek out more than one source, multiple points of view, and that no single point is correct. Knowledge is a combination of lots of different truth(s). The Wikipedia approach is that there is always an alternative, and multiple views. We are trying to build community of users rather than controlling the content.

⁴ Talking of feathers, the yoondoordo (osprey) is common in Western Australia, but was made extinct in the British Isles in the 19th century. It was reintroduced in the 1950s, first to Scotland and later to England. The nests are so vulnerable to egg collectors that their exact location is 'not widely disclosed', a convention that Wikipedia respects: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ospreys_in_Britain (the Noongar name *yoondoordo* is sourced from <https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/images/documents/about/science/cswa/articles/14.pdf>, p. 243).

Different spelling and knowledge conventions

Dave: This seems related to one of the other challenges we identified earlier. Noongar use many different conventions, approaches and ways of spelling. Just because something is a fact in one place with one group doesn't mean that it is the same across Noongar country. How does the project deal with this?

Gideon: There is a mechanism available on Wikipedia called 'redirect'. Whatever the spelling or the concepts being used is we can acknowledge all the variants. In other words, if visitors to the site find a word that is used in different ways they can choose to be redirected to the other ways of using it.

Let's take Yonga or kangaroos as an example. Some use yongka, yundka or yonga. The software checks what is more commonly used and redirects the others to this site. In this way Noongarpedia acknowledges but does not prescribe what is correct. It is also not fixed – we can always shift and move things around.

Ingrid: It's also worth making the point that the existence of the Noongar Language Centre, and the fact that it has hosted much work in this area, means that we can use them as a strong 'knowledge source' that recognises much diversity in Noongar knowledge. The other point worth making is that they have done lots of work on LOTE (Language Other Than English) so that we have a commonly accepted system to fall back on.

Dave: As Kim noted, because knowledge and language are a currency tied to identity and relationships, some will find discomfort with other people's usage and promote their own approach.

Ingrid: It is also important to acknowledge that one of the ways we tried to deal with this was physically to go to different regions, sit down with people, yarn, build connections, understand and acknowledge their journey in the first instance, before any talk of the Noongarpedia Project.

It was also important to speak to as many groups as possible and to respect the fact that, despite the ongoing rhetoric in Australia, all Aboriginal people including Noongars are not the same. There will be disagreements, arguments and challenges around knowledge. The better the relationship with the different stakeholders, the better was our ability to negotiate and work across multiple groups.

Jennie: Built into various layers of the project was recognition and respect of the fact of diversity. A message was posted on the front page outlining that Noongar has mostly been a spoke language, so people should expect much diversity. The sessions we ran all began with the reiteration that Noongar is a diverse set of knowledge systems. The design of the structure of the 'pedia also reinforced this, showing

visitors to the site the diverse groupings of Noongar and knowledge systems. The more content and involvement we get the more this diversity is likely to emerge.

Accuracy of early sources

Dave: Another point that Noongar often make when talking about work to support knowledge and language is that there was inaccuracy in the source material, given the history of non-Noongar recording content.

Len: Yes, nowhere is this more pronounced in the area of place naming. As someone who has spent lots of time studying Noongar place names I now come to expect that the translation of Noongar words by early Wedjela is often seriously flawed. This means that lots of the work on local places perpetuates the errors of the past, so people now think a place means something that it does not.

Ingrid: Noongar involvement and control of the project has always been a core and central component of the 'pedia from the creation of the concept, the research itself and continual monitoring of content. Len Collard and Kim Scott are really important here. Not only because of their cultural experience in community but also because they have spent much of their lives studying and comparing the source materials. This means they quickly pick up fundamental errors and use their knowledge to compare and contrast what is being said. This has happened not only within the research team but with individuals and communities that we have worked with over the period of the project, including SWALSC, the Minang Albany community, through Facebook and social media interactions, and through the work generated by young people in schools.

Jennie: Again, this was something that we made part of our sessions. We made a point of emphasising that, as in the Noongar world, no-one is an expert on everything. This means that we have to check and get a few different sources.

Len: Yes, in kura or the past, certain people had certain knowledge and certain roles. Today, this is still the case. In the past (and today for some) boodjar would use a range of ways of telling you what was going on; country would offer a number of sources. For example, different winds would let you know certain things, different birds would pass on certain knowledge, different features of the landscape would sing out different messages. Of course the seasons were full of things to read. When we were kids were taught to look at all these different sources, not just rely on one.

And you announce yourself to country in a variety of ways. Country comes to *knowledge of you* through your voice and you singing out, through smelling the sweat you have left, through feeling your movement and through the smoke you send. So seeking and offering multiple sources is deeply cultural.

Ingrid: My sister often says, ‘I don’t have to speak the language or know all the dances to know I am Noongar, I know who I am’. The point I think she makes is that there are many different ways to come to know something as a Noongar. You may not be strong in each of them to know. The power of this is that it encourages every Noongar in some way to participate or contribute if they wish to, and feel comfortable doing it their way.

Gideon: I think we have been over this when we talked about Wikipedia and its conventions around encouraging multiple sources. When you look at a source you should look at sources around them and the context. Daisy Bates is an example. She did lots of writing that was commissioned by newspapers and needed to be written in the genre of newspapers of the time. That meant that the newspaper stories didn’t focus as much on the facts as on the style of story. Some of her sources were second-hand and not based on an intimate relationship. I think I remember that her work around Busselton wasn’t based on strong relationships with Noongar.

Different people heard the same things with different ears. For example, in New Norcia Noongar was recorded in a distinctly Spanish way.

Jennie: One of the exciting things about the Wikipedia platform is that it allows us not only to use different sources but to draw on different kinds of media: old sources from the colonial frontier, recent academic work comparing these sources, such as Bindon’s (1992) dictionary, where multiple resources are used in a comparative way, and new digital-based sources that have been designed and created by Noongar.⁵ Noongarpedia is also encouraging users to cite living sources from families.

This is giving us new opportunity to cross-reference, check, build and challenge fundamental inaccuracies. Like the coastal navigation metaphor of *triangulation*, using three points, Noongar systems of coming to know and Wikipedia both encourage people to check from multiple reference points.

Another observation to make is that most of the activities hosted by the Noongarpedia team have had people working collectively on content with oversight from Noongar academics and other Noongar ‘knowledge agents’. Even in the early days of work with young Noongar leaders, sessions were based on group-sharing and working with one another. While some of the postings subsequently involved people working on things on their own, we always started with social learning and in a shared physical space. This I think is one of the ways that the Noongarpedia Project stands out from other Wikipedia work – it is not just a digital affordance but a workshop-based

⁵ E.g. SWALSC (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council) Kaartdijn website: <http://www.noongarculture.org.au>; Collard, L. *Nyungar Wardan Katatjin Bidi – Derbal Nara*: <http://www.derbalnara.org.au/index.htm>; Collard, L. *Boodjar: Nyungar Placenames in the South West of WA*: <http://www.boodjar.sis.uwa.edu.au/information-and-resources>.

facilitated practice, like the digital storytelling movement (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009). This is how it has had a distinct Noongar weirn or focus.

Ingrid: That is right. Our work with primary schools has almost always involved groups going things together. Even when we were not working as a whole class we tended to have kids working in small groups or in pairs. It was very social.

Len: As people like Michael Christie (1985) point out, this is a classic feature of how Noongar and other Aboriginal groups work with knowledge. When we were kids our elders always insisted we not go off on our own. This was partly because if someone got hurt or lost then they would be with others, and partly because this is how we learn best, together and in relationship with family.

Strong focus on writing

Dave: Another obstacle to overcome is that Wikipedia has a strong focus on writing and a relatively poor record on oral, aural and embodied transmission of knowledge.

Gideon: This is right, up to a point. Given its roots in Western traditions, Wikipedia has relied heavily on text-based posting. Its rules, conventions and policies reflect this. On the other hand, as new technologies and media become available, this is shifting. Wikipedia has developed over 15 years and changed and grown as the Wikipedia community develops. It has happened organically as projects develop, as issues arise and as the knowledge environment demands.

But it has come out of a philosophical commitment to encouraging the communities that use it to build their own guidelines, shaped by their languages and cultural values. There was never a time when a small group of people set specific rules. I can see a time, probably soon, when we will start to see Noongar knowledge validation rules being instituted. For example, I think there is already considerable openness and experimentation with elders and family knowledge being seen as a legitimate validated source.

Technically, writing has been a lot easier to work with and to use. Multimedia have been more of a challenge for Wikipedia, owing to difficulties of formatting across media. Until recent times most audio formats aren't free and able to be used by both PC and Mac systems. This is something in which the Wikipedia Foundation has invested considerable time and money (e.g. OGG and OVG formats for inserting multimedia). Free licence and open source formats have had limitations in terms of accessibility.

Dave: It is worth remembering that all knowledge platforms struggle with the same challenges. For example, books face challenges in terms of access by groups like Noongar. Multimodal platforms involve an increased capacity to open up knowledge

to people, particularly where print-literacy has been restricted. However, this increases the difficulty of making things available to everyone.

Jennie: Noongarpedia has started to experiment with how to draw in new forms of media, audio recordings, video, links to YouTube, Vimeo and photographs. On the first page of the Noongarpedia incubator, there is link to a Noongar rendition of ‘Santa Claus is coming to town’ sung by students of the Ashfield Primary School.⁶

A good deal of the new language resources are coming in forms where there are at least two modes of communication. The Language Centre are now producing books with audio content as part of the experience. Some of the new websites include sound files, spatial content and Google Earth-based experiences. One of the stories developed by the Wirlomin Project has been made available as an app. The others include sound files available on their website.⁷

Feelings of not knowing

Dave: Can we return to the challenges associated with some Noongar feeling that they do not know much about culture, knowledge and language? This is likely to have considerable impact on their participation. Indeed, some may be hostile to the project because they are worried it will highlight their deficiencies.

Len: As we have acknowledged, this is a reality for any work that goes on around Noongar knowledge. It is certainly a reality for someone like me, who is daily doing work in this area. However, I’d say two things. The first is that in my experience this does not reflect the feelings of the majority of people I know. Every time I talk with Noongar about language and knowledge, every time I go to conferences, cultural events and spend time with family I am confirmed in my view of the strength and resilience of Noongar and Noongar knowledge.

The second thing I’d say is that while people’s lack of confidence in knowledge may be a burden, that is not a reason to halt this kind of work. If I stopped working on Noongar matters every time someone showed hostility or resentment, then I would never have started.

Ingrid: I can understand why some people feel angry and hostile because of their experience of school. Our educational system seems to be premised on a weird way of thinking about knowledge and culture. It is still the case that we talk about culture as if it is something you do or do not have. Dave, I think you mentioned that our schooling is premised upon the same model we use in the world of banking.

⁶ ‘Santa Claus is coming to town’ (in Noongar): https://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wp/nys/Noongar_Christmas_Carols.

⁷ Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project: <http://wirlomin.com.au>.

Dave: Paulo Freire (1976) made this observation about the experience of Indigenous people in South America. That we see students as being like a new savings account we set up in a bank. Young people start being empty and the job of a teacher is to make small and regular deposits to fill this receptacle up.

Ingrid: As Noongar we also grow up hearing that we have lost culture. That's a pretty weird way of thinking about culture. This is clearly the message that comes out of schools and teachers who claim that there are no resources out there. This is wrong on two levels. First, Noongar have the knowledge, collectively this is at a profound level. Second, it is wrong because there are now lots of things 'out there'. What they are really saying is that they know little.

Jennie: Part of the real success of our work, if I can say this, is that we have not shied away from people's discomfort, even hostility. Noongarpedia has helped to create a relatively safe public environment for people to air their concerns. I liken it to a digital 'agora' – a civic space, a place where Noongar and non-Noongar can come and mingle with different knowledge.

As Hannah Arendt reminds us, an ability to contend with varying and opposing views, listen to different sets of values and handle conflict have long been central ingredients for a civil society (Arendt, 1963). In contrast, education that produces citizens who only have available stock phrases, repeated clichés and are unable to look at anything from another's point of view, is education against healthy civic life. The point of education, argued Arendt, is to encourage people to think for themselves, to contend with differing points of view and to participate in plural society and public life. Following Aristotle, she argues that true happiness comes from having a share in public life, something that necessitates listening to, contemplating and negotiating with differing views (Fry, 2009).

Dave: Since ancient Greek times, democracies have featured civic practices and institutions designed so that people living in close proximity can deal publicly with conflicting values and interests. These institutions – such as parliament, the judiciary, public education and independent public administration – are premised upon the need to create spaces, rules, practices and systems of governance that protect the right of citizens freely to maintain and make public their differing views. In this way there is a need for spaces and mechanisms to deal with political 'agony' (Greek: contest) and differing interests.

One early example of a safe public space designed to bring people together in this way was the ancient Greek agora. The agora was a central place in a city. It had a number of functions, including being used as a market, a social place, religious centre, seat of justice and a place to discuss politics and decide on the future of the city. In ancient Athens the agora helped provide a means through which citizens could

publicly disclose their values, hear opposing views from others and participate in the process of decision-making (Sennett, 1994: 33).

Ingrid: As I said in the beginning of this chapter, this sounds like what I understand as happening in old Noongar meetings. I'm not sure about the Noongar equivalent for the Western Desert term 'Yaarlpirri' (Kral, 2012: 53), but I have heard that this would happen each morning, often quite recently when people lived together on reserves. I definitely recognise it when I go to community meetings. Wedjelas often freak out when they see it but it is often healthy.

Jennie: I think that it was with these 'civic' elements of work where the project excelled. It was civic in a number of ways. Across the schools, children were encouraged to find ways publicly to express their values about places of importance. They started doing this in safe and intimate environments, sharing stories through artistic expression and finding new words to describe their care for special places. Later their ideas went more public, through such venues as whole-of-school meetings and the use of the school as a gallery of children's ideas. Some of the children were able to take their ideas out of the school through exhibitions of their work in art galleries, hosting public debates and participating in campaigns to have action taken on certain local places like parks and reserves. Finally, the decision to create a website allowed children to move into the World Wide Web. We could say that in this way children were given the opportunity publicly to express their values and ideas about important places in the 'global agora', a virtual public space for civic deliberation and action.

Dave: one of the important things I saw happening in the schools as part this project was that it gave adults (team members, teachers and sometimes parents) license to listen to children, to work with them, to visit their favourite places and become engrossed in their colourful artwork, poetic ways of expressing themselves and to their intelligent insights about Noongar knowledge. This makes it a story not just about the preparation of children for civics but about civics as such.

Ingrid: At times I think that it was this respect for the work of the children that protected us from getting attacked by those who are protective of Noongar knowledge.

Dave: As was mentioned in chapter 8, Inge Kral picks up that the new technologies can represent a real risk to the relationship between Noongar generations. There is clearly a distance between younger people's experience of global culture and their grandparents' generation. Kids are growing up digital. Their parents did not. Some of their grandparents grew up with limited access to books let alone computers. Using these new platforms may create a challenge for bringing young and older people together, further accentuating the generational differences. How do you think Noongarpedia deals with this?

Ingrid: This was a risk but it also presented a great opportunity. Noongar elders love to spend time with their grandchildren. They understand the generational differences yet they love, almost more than anything, to hang out with kids. We made sure we took every chance to support this, particularly in the work in schools.

Jennie: For instance, in Albany we worked with the Dreamtime Committee in the school, which was made up of parents and elders. Nanas got really involved in the Noongarpedia sessions, bringing in work they have prepared previously, working with teams of kids and having fun.

Ingrid: Being on country together was something we made opportunities to do. At a number of schools, parents came in and joined the sessions. Initially they were quiet, some even reticent. I remember one mum who came through on the third week. She wasn't a computer user but was really keen to find out about the project. Her son had come home after the first session, happy and proud to be a Noongar. She wanted to come and learn more and pass on her knowledge to the rest of the kids in the class. It was beautiful to watch.

Jennie: I think the team did some of this solid work across the generations too. It was great seeing you (Ingrid Cumming) and your Dad (Len Collard) working together on creating posts. You, the master of Noongarpedia, leading the use of the digital platform, and your Dad, the master language speaker, leading the content production.

Ingrid: Yes and Seb, one of the early Noongarmedians in Residence, working with his Dad Kim Scott on building entries. I think we shouldn't underrate the beauty and power of the bond that gets created when you are involved in knowledge production together.

Jennie: Another way we supported work across the generations was in the way we started the workshops. It became the convention to introduce things in the Noongar way by acknowledging the importance of the 'old people', getting kids to introduce themselves and begin to talk about their connection to country and family. It became part of every workshop.

Ingrid: There was also a strong focus on Noongar boordier. Particularly in the work with tertiary students and in Wikibombs, there was celebration of and attention given to strong and capable Noongar leaders, from fields such as sport, community work, politics and education, by getting people to create posts on them.

We also brought senior people into the work in virtual ways, by using lots of digital sources they had created.

Dave: Can I ask you all to say a couple of things in closing this chapter on the mismatch between what might be called Noongar ontological frameworks and the Eurocentric ontology and practices that take priority in Wikipedian culture.

Len: I'd probably only say that I'm never entirely convinced of the certainty of 'European' ontologies. My understanding of the Enlightenment project was that it was always uncertain and often keen on conversation with Indigenous ontologies. I'm not saying this was done as an equal exchange. On the contrary, it has been devastating for Noongar. But I would say that, now more than ever, there are cracks in these ontological traditions and Noongar are starting to exploit these cracks.

Ingrid: I'd say that of course we need to be cautious in seeing 'pedias as some kind of fabulous new and intrinsically egalitarian technology. But I do think that we have had some success in embedding distinctly Noongar knowledge practices into our work. In particular, the relationships between boodjar, moort and katatjin are front and centre in how we work, and in the content that has been produced on the Noongapedia.

Jennie: Yes, much of the activity with schools, tertiary students and many of the other groups occurred 'on-country' and through country. Family and knowledge and relationality have been at the heart of the project. There has also been a strong emphasis on learning through the arts and performance.

Gideon: Noongarpedia involves process work. Like the culture that is very much at the heart of Wikipedia, the end product (the encyclopaedia) is not as important as the systems for encouraging people to become active in knowledge production. Where the focus seems to have gone with the Noongarpedia project and its activities has been with relationships and those involved in producing knowledge.

I am a newcomer to Noongar knowledge but it seems to me that some of what we do in the world of Wikipedia has much in common with Noongar knowledge systems.

Aliny baal karnany unna! – That one, that's the truth!

References

Arendt, H. (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Viking Books.

Bindon, P. and R. Chadwick (1992) *A Nyoongar Wordlist from the South West of Western Australia*. Perth: Western Australian Museum.

Christie, M. (1985) *Aboriginal perspectives on experience and learning: The role of language in Aboriginal education*. Geelong: Deakin University.

- Freire, P. (1976) *Education, the practice of freedom*. London, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative.
- Fry, K. (2009) *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum International.
- Hartley, J. and K. McWilliam (eds) (2009) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*. Malden MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kral, I. (2012) *Talk, Text and Technology: Literacy and Social Practice in a Remote Indigenous Community*. Bristol UK, Buffalo USA, Toronto Canada: Multilingual Matters.
- Kral, I. (2014) 'Shifting perceptions, shifting identities: Communication technologies and the altered social, cultural and linguistic ecology in a remote indigenous context.' *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 25, 171-89.
- Myers, F. (1986) 'Reflections on a meeting: structure, language, and the polity in a small-scale society.' *American Ethnologist*, 13(3), 430-47.
- Palmer, D. (2013) 'Demonstrating the relationships between culture, on-country activity and positive social outcomes for Indigenous young people.' *New Community*, 11(3), 54-60.
- Sennett, R (1994) *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation*. London: Penguin Books.