

School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

**“Keeping us strong”: Negotiating power, literacies and
learning in an Aboriginal context**

Melanie Sarah Smith

**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

April 2013

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: 

Date:

Abstract

How do Indigenous adult learners in Australia find a balance between the requirements of mainstream education practices and their own very specific learning needs and aspirations? This thesis examines this question, a question of considerable significance in an era of government determination to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In the domains of education policy and programming much is assumed about Indigenous learners, in particular about their aspirations and what they hope to gain from engaging with further education, yet little is currently known about the nature of the literacy 'gap' or what actually happens in community-driven education centres and why. Drawing on theories of literacy as social practice and using ethnographic research methods, this thesis addresses this gap in the literature. Largely through interviews with learners, teaching staff, and community members at Karrayili Adult Education Centre in the remote West Australian town of Fitzroy Crossing, this research looks in particular at how one adult Aboriginal learning community ensures that their sense of autonomy, of doing things *their way*, is not compromised as a consequence of their engagement with further education and training. It also questions the assumption that simply providing people with English literacy will automatically lead to empowerment and improved well-being. Instead it finds that while the learners in this study do indeed believe that the education centre in question makes them stronger, it is through their perceived ownership of the Centre and their connections to it, to their culture, and to each other, rather than through the development of literacy or workplace skills, that they are empowered.

This research reveals the ways in which learning cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical contexts of people's lives, and how the education centre at the heart of this study not only recognises such contexts but is itself an integral part of the local learning community. It is this powerful connection, the ownership and affection that local people feel towards the Centre, which has played such an important role in ensuring the Centre's

longevity. Whether or not this counts as 'success' however depends upon how success is defined. Are we to measure success narrowly in terms of unit completions and pass rates, or could success instead be viewed more holistically as it is by the learners in Fitzroy Crossing? If 'success' in adult education means engaging learners who have had little positive interaction with mainstream education, and – in their own words – “making us strong”, then Karrayili is indeed a success. Its story has much to add to discussions around education and training for marginalised adult learners, demonstrating that in determining 'what works', people's connections may be every bit as important as the pedagogies that are employed to teach them.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to everyone at Karrayili, especially to all those who so kindly agreed to be interviewed, for your unfailing warmth, generosity, good humour, and willingness to participate in this project. In particular I would like to thank Carolyn, Moira, Kerry and Tamela for your constant support and practical help, without which I would not have been able to undertake this research. Thank you especially for helping me to get to know who the people involved with Karrayili really are, and to become a part of the wonderful Karrayili family. Carolyn and Moira, thanks for your expert comments on early drafts. Kerry - thanks for prodding me to finally get over my fear of interviewing, you really got the ball rolling. Tamela – thanks for sharing so much of your time and knowledge, and thanks too for all the joey down-time! And of course a special mention to the KCs, who very kindly showed me that I didn't know half as much as I thought I knew, and who helped me to see literacy, learning and life in a whole new light.

To my supervisors: Will Christensen - thank you for getting me started on this journey, for believing that I could do it and for persuading me that I had something to say; Sue Trinidad – thank you for providing ongoing support at such a professional level, for constantly encouraging me and for reminding me of the need to 'keep at it'; and to Phil Moore – thank you so much for helping me to see the wood for the trees, and for making sure I got over the finish line. Thank you all for all your guidance and support, without you this thesis would not have been started, let alone completed.

A big thank you to the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, without whose funding the travel and periods of field work would not have been possible.

To all my family for your encouragement and belief that I could succeed, and especially to my daughter, Grace, for all that you have taught me about ... well, about everything that matters really.

To my friends for your constant love and support. To Sarah and Audrey for reading and commenting on drafts, and to Tania for your collegiality, support and for being such an inspiration to finish this project.

And finally to my amazing parents - for teaching me the importance of education, but more importantly for instilling in me a passion for social justice and a belief in the value of lifelong learning.

Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
List of figures	viii
Preface	ix
Part A: Setting the Scene	1
Chapter One: Introducing the thesis	1
Who am I, and how did I come to be researching Indigenous literacy?	8
My introduction to Karrayili	10
Why does this research matter?	13
An overview of the thesis	17
Chapter Two: Putting Karrayili into context	22
A brief history of Fitzroy Crossing – the town and its people.....	24
Fitzroy Crossing today.....	38
Language use in Fitzroy Crossing	49
Conclusions	55
Chapter 3: Reading the literature	56
Literacy, learning and (dis)empowerment.....	57
Literacy as social practice	72
What is known about Indigenous literacy in Australia?	85
Indigenous perspectives on research	94
Conclusion	98
Chapter 4: Designing and carrying out the research project	100
Processes and Protocols in Indigenous Research:.....	101
Doing research in an Aboriginal community	101
Research Methods:	102
Ethnography as a research methodology.....	102
Narrowing the research methodology to critical ethnography	106
Doing critical ethnography	107
Preparing for fieldwork	113
Collecting the evidence.....	121
Analysing and interpreting the evidence	128
Reflecting on the research experience	130
Conclusions	132

Part B: Exploring literacies in the Kimberley context – a case study of Karrayili Adult Education Centre	134
Chapter 5: Doing things the Karrayili way	136
A day in the life.....	137
What is Karrayili?	141
Who studies at Karrayili?.....	148
Who works at Karrayili?.....	159
“They trust the people that work here”	161
Who makes decisions?	164
Literacy and learning programs at Karrayili	169
Taking learning to the communities	179
Talkin’ that Kartiya way	186
Chapter 6: Connecting learning to social context	194
Connections to Culture.....	196
Connections to Community	216
Connections to Language	231
Conclusions	236
Chapter 7: Working in Two Worlds	238
Directing Karrayili	240
Deciding what can be taught	243
Funding issues	244
Meeting conflicting needs.....	247
The Gooniyandi Rangers	249
Conflicting roles.....	263
Conflicting representations of student needs.....	267
Conclusions	272
Part C: Conclusions and findings	273
Chapter 8: Diversity, equity and empowering Aboriginal learners.....	273
Diversity and equity	274
Literacy learning and empowering learners	277
Disempowerment through bureaucratic constraints.....	280
Limitations of the research	282
Summary.....	285
References.....	288

List of figures

Figure 1: Map of Western Australia (sourced from atn.com.au).....	2
Figure 2: The Karrayili Class, 2009. Photo courtesy of Gayle Slonim.....	3
Figure 3: Map of Fitzroy Valley communities (sourced from Morphy 2009)	36
Figure 4: Karrayili students painting at Mangkaja. Photo courtesy of Gayle Slonim	41
Figure 5: RK and PW broadcasting from Wangki.....	42
Figure 6: The Karrayili Class outside Wangki.....	42
Figure 7: DA and DS broadcasting from Wangki.....	42
Figure 8: Map of Kimberley language groups sourced from McGinty, Jimbidie et al. (2000, p. xii).	49
Figure 9: Poster written and designed by the students in the Karrayili Class, 2010	152
Figure 10: The KCs doing literacy work with teacher ChD	156
Figure 11: Poster produced by the KCs	200
Figure 12: KC students looking for jurnta (bush onions) at Yakanarra, May 2010	201
Figure 13: The Gooniyandi Rangers in 2010, with Marcus Finn from Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (Photo courtesy of TRaCK).....	249

Preface

I have chosen to write this thesis in a style which reflects two driving forces in my research. The first is the community with whom I conducted this research. The Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing have a history of non-Indigenous interference in their lives, and the accompanying imposition of ways of doing and knowing to which they feel little connection. It was important to me that this thesis, while clearly needing to be written in Standard Australian English and to a certain academic standard, nevertheless be presented in a way that would ensure that the Fitzroy Crossing community could feel connected to my work. Secondly, my profession as a teacher of English as a second language is all about communication, with a strong focus on presenting information in specific ways so that meaning is clear. In crafting this thesis it was important to me that my voice be heard, that my passion for the subject matter be conveyed, and that my message be communicated effectively to as wide an audience as possible. I have strived to position my writing in ways that are consistent with my commitment to both these factors.

This focus on meaning has also extended to the way in which I have chosen to present my participants' voices. I have endeavoured to present interview excerpts and quotes in such a way that meaning is communicated, but participants' voices are not lost in the process. This presented me with some challenges in that I am not a linguist, so I was faced with a dilemma; if I transcribed oral interviews exactly as they were spoken it made excerpts difficult for people unfamiliar with Kriol and/or Aboriginal English to read, and at times appeared patronising. On the other hand if I retained meaning but transcribed quotes in Standard Australian English then the participants' voices could no longer be heard. I decided that my commitment to the Fitzroy Crossing community was to communicate their voices, together with their meaning, as best I could, and I have represented participants' voices accordingly.

Much of this research is centred on the lived experiences of Aboriginal people, which raised issues of identification and protection of confidentiality. My initial plan was to code participants (for example L1 for 'lecturer 1') to ensure they were de-identified, but when I started writing my thesis I soon realised that this was highly inappropriate. I now knew my participants well; I was part of their community – considered family by several people – and I felt strongly that the coding system I had envisaged dehumanised these warm, funny, vibrant people. Given that the majority of the contributors were Aboriginal, and that during colonisation of the Kimberley many Aboriginal people were given 'white' names (often of a pejorative nature), it would also have been extremely insensitive for me to give participants aliases. My final decision to refer to participants using initials was suggested to me by the Principal of Karrayili – as she pointed out, many Aboriginal people in the Kimberley are commonly known by their initials so this method 'fits' with local ways of doing.

Australia has two major groups of Indigenous peoples – Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. Given Australia's history of non-Indigenous invasion and the subsequent oppression of its Indigenous people, it is important that appropriate terminology be used when referring to Australian Indigenous peoples. In writing this thesis I have been mindful of the need to use appropriate and respectful terms to describe particular groups of people. When I have referred to Indigenous Australian learners in general I have used the term 'Indigenous'. When referring specifically to Indigenous learners in the Kimberley though I have used the term 'Aboriginal', to reflect the cultural background of the people and the context of this research. When referring to non-Indigenous people in the context of this research I have used the Walmajarri word, 'Kartiya'.

One final point that I would like to clarify in this preface: A number of photographs of members of the Karrayili community have been included in this thesis, both as a way of 'bringing to life' the written word, but also at the express request or suggestion of a number of participants. The Karrayili students frequently use photographs of community members and events as

part of their learning, but it is also very much a way of acknowledging and reinforcing relationships and connections in the community. On a number of occasions when I asked participants for feedback on my research, I was urged to include photographs of their daily lives at Karrayili as an important part of telling their story. Consent, either verbal or written, depending on which was considered more appropriate by participants, was sought and received for all photographs used in this thesis.

*Aboriginal readers please note:
This document may contain
photographs of people who have
now passed away.*

Part A: Setting the Scene

Chapter One: Introducing the thesis

We started Karrayili. Although the kartiyas [white people] were teaching us but it was us who started Karrayili. At the old Karrayili building, I put my hand on that one, my country. I came from that country.

Stumpy Brown, a member of the first women's literacy class at Karrayili Adult Education Centre (in McGinty, Jimbidie, & Smiler, 2000, p. 26).

In mid-2009 I accepted a teaching position at Karrayili Adult Education Centre (commonly known simply as 'Karrayili'), an Aboriginal-directed training and education centre in the Kimberley region of Western Australia¹. Packing the necessities of my life into a small camper van, I drove the 2500km up through the centre of Western Australia from Perth to the remote town of Fitzroy Crossing. This was to be my home for the next year, as well as the site of the case study on which this research is based.

¹ One of a number of education centres funded by the Federal Government in rural and remote Australia.

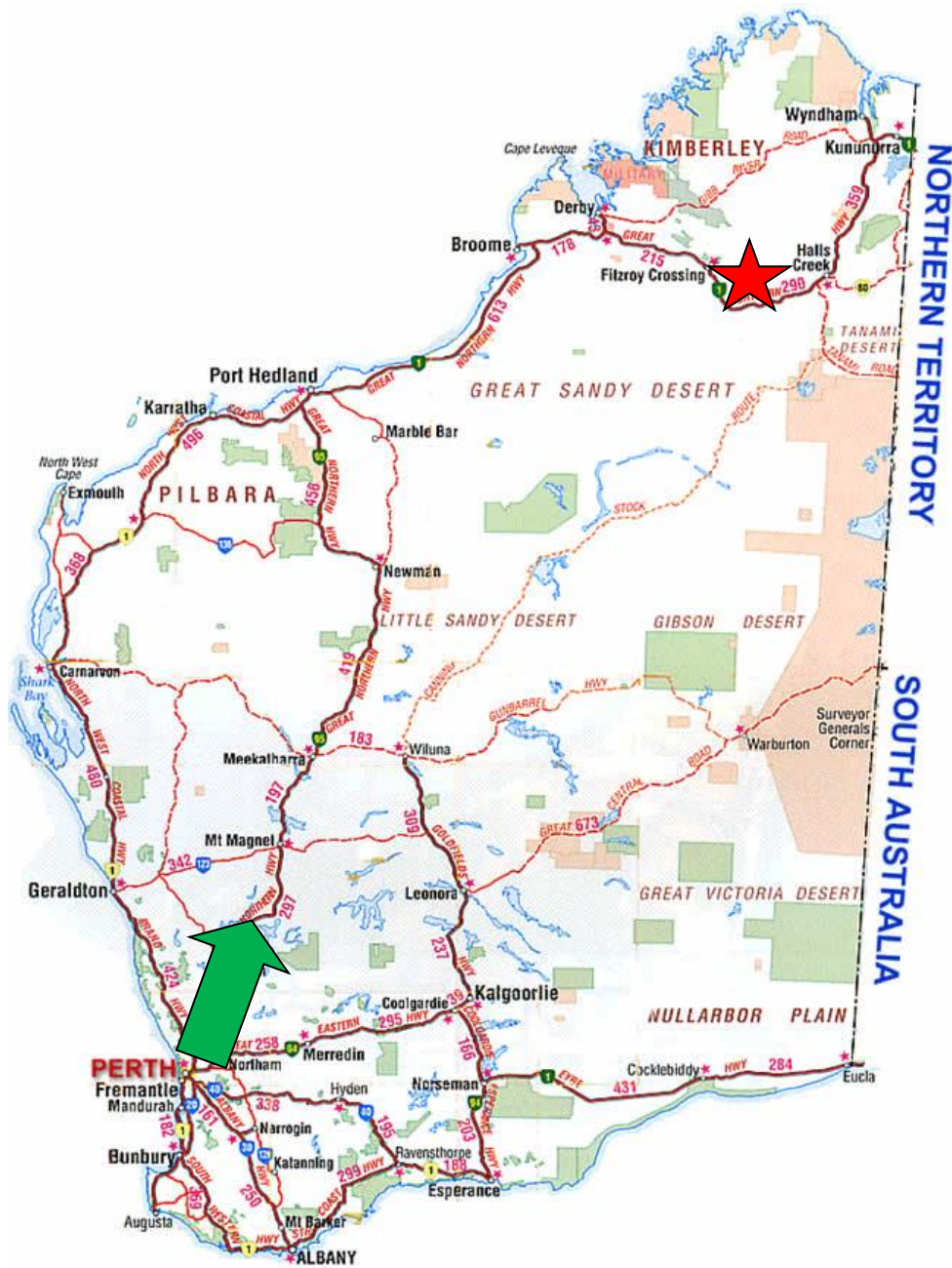


Figure 1: Map of Western Australia (sourced from atn.com.au)

This was not my first experience of Karrayili, but it was the first time I had worked there full-time and it was the first time I had lived in the Fitzroy Crossing community. In going to live in Fitzroy Crossing I had two main objectives. The first was to conduct the research for my doctoral studies, developing my research skills and immersing myself fully in community life in order to gain the ‘insider’ perspective essential for the ethnography I hoped to write. In order to spend an extended period of time with the staff and

students of Karrayili, however, I had taken the position at Karrayili as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and in this role I was committed to helping my students develop their English language skills.

My main role was to work with the Karrayili Class (the 'KCs'), a group of women, mainly Aboriginal elders of their communities, many of whom had been involved with Karrayili since it had first opened in 1980. My brief was to improve their English literacy skills, while ensuring lessons were both culturally appropriate and fulfilled the requirements of the accreditation body by which Karrayili was regulated.



Figure 2: The Karrayili Class, 2009. Photo courtesy of Gayle Slonim

I was aware that these women had been attending English literacy classes at Karrayili for many years, and yet their use of Standard Australian English (SAE) had shown relatively little improvement. With my considerable experience in the field of teaching ESL, I felt sure I would be able to make a real and lasting difference to the literacy levels of students at the Centre.

I thought long and hard about the students' needs, and about how I could ensure that I approached the lessons in a culturally appropriate way. I created interactive materials that I hoped would engage and interest the women, while also meeting the intended outcomes of the training package they were enrolled in. And on the first morning I was ready to go.

I drove the Karrayili mini-bus out to the various communities to collect the students, and we arrived back at the Centre in time to start the lesson at 8.30am as planned. Everything was, I believed, under control – the classroom unlocked and the air-conditioning on, my lesson plan and materials copied and ready on the desk, the day's date written in clear, large lettering on the board (many of the women had extremely poor eyesight, partly the consequence of age but also a common issue in remote Aboriginal communities due to poor health and environmental conditions). The women left the bus, while I stayed behind to help LU, one of the students, with her wheelchair.

Pushing the chair up the ramp and onto the wooden decking of Karrayili, I became aware that none of the students had gone to the classroom. Two were speaking with the Principal about a community matter that they were concerned about. Another had gone to visit the Environmental Health lecturer, to say hello and to ask about the workshop that had recently been conducted at their community. One of the women had gone to the post office across the road to check her mail, and another was chatting with her daughter and granddaughter who lived on a different community, in the town. LU said she needed to go to the bathroom, so I found myself with a lesson all ready to go but no students. I felt a little uncomfortable. Things were slipping out of my grasp and I wasn't sure why, but I decided to head over to the classroom myself and wait there to see what happened.

Once their various concerns had been settled, the women all came over to the classroom and sat down in what I would come to understand as their regular places, ready to start the lesson. I had planned a speaking activity to start with – to 'generate an interactive learning environment' according to the

aims of my lesson plan – and once the women were seated I started to set up the task. The women listened politely to my instructions, then one of them carefully got out of her seat and went over to the trays where their individual work was stored, taking out her ‘diary’ workbook and a pencil case. The other women indicated to her that they would also like theirs, and they all started to copy the day’s date from the board onto fresh pages in their workbooks.

In 25 years of teaching ESL, I had never before been ignored by an entire class. Bemused, I waited for them to finish then tried again. Again they listened to my instructions, then one asked me “Manga” (a Walmajarri word meaning ‘girl’), “where that meeting today?” “Which meeting?” I asked. “That one Native Title for Bunuba mob” she replied. This led to a long, complicated discussion that involved, at various times, more than one person having to leave the room to check details with someone in a nearby classroom. I glanced at my lesson plan in dismay. It was clear that little, if any, of it was going to be covered today.

This pattern was to be repeated on an almost daily basis for many weeks to come. Every evening I planned an ESL lesson for the following day, and every day after class I was left with an unused plan and materials. And the thing that intrigued me most was that I was never entirely sure what had happened to derail my planned lesson. Things just happened – people came and went, other issues were raised, sometimes arguments broke out or dogs sneaked into the room to enjoy the air-conditioning and much shouting and carrying on was required to evict them. Frequently somebody would poke their head around the door to announce that people needed to be at a community or Native Title meeting. In other words, life went on as usual in Fitzroy Crossing, and life was oblivious to my lesson plans.

It took me a long time to realise, and even longer to accept, that unlike every other teaching position I had ever held, at Karrayili I was not in control of the students’ learning. By their own actions, they were. To a large extent it was

the students who determined what, how and when they learned, and if I was lucky they let me be a part of it.

The KCs were not alone in this. Karrayili students, I was to discover, do not approach further education and training in ways with which I was familiar. While students are happy to enrol in units, the pathways to completion within a given timeframe that are generally followed and expected in mainstream education centres are far less common at Karrayili. Study at Karrayili rarely takes place on a predictable course, for a variety of reasons that will be explored in the pages that follow. This was an important lesson for me to learn, and it took me all year to fully absorb it. Life is different in Fitzroy Crossing. Community life is different, values are different, and attitudes towards learning and studying are most certainly very different from those of mainstream Australia.

This thesis is a critical ethnography of Karrayili, in which I argue that an understanding of such difference is vital to any discussion of improving English literacy in a remote Indigenous context. Understanding literacy practices in this context has to also be about understanding local cultural practices, both traditional and contemporary, and about acknowledging the need for people to be able to exercise autonomy in their lives. The Karrayili students exert personal autonomy in a number of ways, including – as the KCs showed me in our first lesson – their insistence on doing things their way, their gentle refusal to participate in learning that does not fit accepted local practices, and their perceived sense of ownership of their learning, and it is in part this independent approach to learning that makes them strong. My research demonstrates that a narrow focus on Standard Australian English literacy for adult Indigenous learners can serve to perpetuate the disempowerment of this marginalised group of people, rather than empowering them, and it is instead through their own actions and decision-making that the learners at Karrayili gain strength.

In my early contact with Karrayili I had believed, as do many others, that the provision of literacy and training opportunities has the ability to empower

Aboriginal communities by enabling them to negotiate with non-Indigenous Australia. The problem at Karrayili, as I then saw it, was that literacy levels were not showing significant improvement because of the pedagogical approaches being employed there. I believed that if teaching practices were changed, literacy levels would improve accordingly. With the very best of intentions I started teaching at Karrayili, employing all the teaching techniques that had served me so well in my career teaching English as a second/foreign language in the city. Gradually, as I not only taught but observed, talked and most importantly listened, I realised that I had been wrong in my simplistic understanding of what these learners 'needed'. I came to understand something of the complexity of English language learning, literacy and training for Indigenous learners in remote Australia. Most importantly, after my year of living and working in Fitzroy Crossing I understood that Karrayili did indeed empower its learners, but I now knew this to be in ways that were very different from those I had earlier imagined.

This thesis reveals the ways in which the learners at Karrayili manage their own learning, quietly exercising autonomy and doing things in ways that best suit them and their cultural and social contexts. The thesis also demonstrates that learners' perceptions of the value of their learning can often be very different from the values and expectations held by the bureaucratic systems that govern that learning. Using Karrayili as a case study, this thesis explores issues surrounding literacy-learning in a specific context at a particular time. Reporting on research conducted between 2007 and 2010 it is, if you like, a 'snapshot' of one group of people's experiences of teaching and learning, going beyond issues of literacy use and pedagogy to investigate the ways in which learners participate in adult education programs. It explores the types of learning that take place at Karrayili, how Karrayili works, and what Karrayili means to the people who study and work there. In doing so it also provides insights into the ways in which Karrayili learners believe that their interactions with the Centre make them strong.

In its exploration of issues to do with learning and teaching at an adult Aboriginal education centre, however, this thesis is also about much more

than Karrayili. It demonstrates how learning and teaching, especially for marginalised adults but certainly not restricted to this group, is very much about the local. This thesis highlights the need for decision-making about education, particularly in remote regions, to include and value understandings that are locally-based, with the real needs of the learners, as understood and identified *by them*, being prioritised in any decision-making processes regarding what will be taught and how.

Who am I, and how did I come to be researching Indigenous literacy?

In accordance with Aboriginal protocols of introducing oneself and providing information about one's cultural location (Martin, 2003; Wilson, 2008), and given that I am a non-Indigenous (Kartiya) researcher working within an Aboriginal community, it is important that before going on to describe the research project itself I first introduce myself as the researcher. This, I hope, will go some way to explaining how I came to be researching the topic of adult literacy, and in particular my connections with the Aboriginal adult education centre at the heart of this research. Introducing myself and my motivations is also an acknowledgement that in research, and in particular qualitative research, it is impossible to separate the researcher from the study itself. We all bring to our research our own beliefs, styles and biases, and it is only natural that these will influence our research to some extent.

My career as a teacher and teacher-trainer in adult education began in the UK in 1986, when I began teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to international students. This was to be the start of a twenty-something-year journey of discovery about the wonders, and the challenges, of teaching English to adult speakers of other languages. It was only much later, when I undertook a BA (Hons) in Anthropology, that I started to think about returning to a field of study that was very close to my heart. I had grown up in country Western Australia, spending most of my school years in Carnarvon – including living with a Yamatji (local Indigenous) family for eighteen months –

and Halls Creek, a remote Kimberley town with a majority Aboriginal population. In both these geographical contexts I formed close relationships with local Aboriginal people, and the experiences I had during these formative years were to stay with me all my life – the warmth with which I was welcomed into people’s families, the strong bonds of friendship which survived years of separation when I moved to Europe during my twenties, as well as some less-welcome experiences of racism from both Aboriginal and Kartiya people. My experiences of living and working with Aboriginal people had had a profound impact on my ways of seeing the world, and had left a strong desire in me to contribute in some way, no matter how small, to addressing the appalling inequities faced by many Indigenous people in Australia.

In late 2006, in the early stages of preparing my PhD candidacy, I came across the book *Karrayili* (McGinty et al., 2000). The book – written about, and partly by, Aboriginal literacy learners at the Centre – told of how learning to read and write had motivated, transformed and, at times, frustrated them, and it started me wondering not only how but also why people in remote communities choose to learn English literacy skills. With my years of working in adult education, my background in teaching EFL, and my experiences living and working with Aboriginal Australians in a variety of contexts, I wondered if this might not be an area of research to which I could make a useful contribution.

Yet it was this very desire for my research to be *useful* to Indigenous people in some way that caused me a great deal of trouble. With so many Aboriginal people expressing their frustrations about visiting researchers taking away information about their communities and giving little in return, how was *my* research going to be any different? How could I ensure that my research would be meaningful, and that it would make a positive contribution to the community I was about to research? These questions, in particular the ethical dilemmas posed by my being a Kartiya researcher conducting research into Indigenous issues, were to challenge me throughout the entire period of conducting this research project. However, to my knowledge, my

concerns were never once reflected in the attitudes or comments of the Aboriginal people who participated in this study. On the contrary, staff and students at Karrayili welcomed my research, with one student telling me “You can come and ask us whatever you want. We need all the help we can get here!” Questions of Indigenous autonomy and the struggle for true equity in education provision for Indigenous Australians are important issues requiring a whole of community approach. The research I am presenting in this thesis is intended as a contribution towards bridging the divide between Indigenous and mainstream Australian ways of thinking about adult literacy and learning.

My introduction to Karrayili

As noted in the previous section, I first became aware of Karrayili through a book I had come across as part of my research into social practices of literacy among Aboriginal people in north-western Australia. *Karrayili*, from which the quote at the start of this chapter is taken, tells the story of this Indigenous enterprise located in the heart of the Fitzroy Valley. Written by staff and students some eighteen years after the Centre’s inception, the book is much more than just a description of an educational institution. It celebrates an achievement of which local people are extremely proud. It also reveals the profound connections that exist between the institution itself and the community it serves; not just the people but also the culture and country. Reading the book I became aware of both the affection local people have for Karrayili, and the important role they see it playing in realising their hopes and aspirations.

The book tells of how Karrayili came about at the request of local elders and spokespersons who recognised the need for Aboriginal people in the town to be able to read and write in English so that they could negotiate with white people, especially those representing (or seen to be representing) government, instead of having to rely on other Karrayili people to carry out negotiations on their behalf (McGinty et al., 2000). As Tarungka Irene

Jimbidie, a Walmajarri woman from Fitzroy Crossing who worked at Karrayili first as teacher assistant and later as Principal explains:

Karrayili was established in the early 1980s by a group of Walmajarri people who wanted to learn to read and write English. They wanted to learn to write their names so that they could sign their cheques instead of putting a cross on their cheques all the time. They wanted to learn western technology such as using a telephone. They wanted to learn to better understand the letters they received from various government departments, and to be able to reply to these letters. Most of all these people wanted to learn to be more independent in the society they lived in. They felt that they didn't want to go on getting other people to do certain things for them when they could do it by themselves. So from all this, the English class was set up (in McGinty et al., 2000, p. 18).

Linguist Joyce Hudson was working with Walmajarri people in Fitzroy Crossing in the late 1970s, and was becoming increasingly aware of the need for an adult education centre – at that time government funding was narrowly focussed on teaching English to children, with no attempt made to teach the adults in the community. In *Karrayili* Hudson tells how one day she came out of her house to find a note pinned to her front gate, asking in Walmajarri of her and her colleague Eirlys Richards, “My two mothers, when are you going to teach us about money?” Hudson believed that this request was closely linked to issues of self-representation and power; ‘outsiders’ were regularly coming into the communities to consult with local Aboriginal people, and the Walmajarri adults wanted to be able to communicate with them (in McGinty et al., 2000, p. 7). It was from this humble yet profound beginning that Karrayili Adult Education Centre evolved.

Intrigued by the vision of the founders of Karrayili, its demonstrated longevity, and the obvious determination of students and staff that the Centre succeed, frequently against considerable odds, I first travelled to Fitzroy Crossing in 2007, as part of my research, to visit the Centre and see for myself what it was like. My initial impressions were mixed. The people were warm and friendly; I was made welcome and felt comfortable being at the Centre simply observing and having informal conversations with staff and students. Local Aboriginal people seemed very proud of Karrayili, and appeared to enjoy studying there. As a teacher and teacher-trainer in the field of ESL, though, I

found myself confused by some of the daily practices at the school. Things seemed a little haphazard, with lessons often responding to the immediate needs of students rather than following any strict curriculum outline. The whole place had a very fluid feel, with people wandering in and out seemingly as they pleased, classroom cohorts changing on a daily basis, and above all there being little sense of students' learning progressing systematically towards a pre-determined goal. I had the impression of a prevailing sense of chaos, and I was unsure as to why this should be or how it might impact on the students achieving meaningful learning outcomes. It was very different from my previous experiences of teaching in adult education; but as an ethnographer, I was aware of the dangers of imposing my own worldview and was keen to find out more about how the place 'worked', including how the students and others felt about the role played by Karrayili in the community. From the start, it was evident to me that while literacy and training are important, the everyday needs of local people are about much more than just learning English.

These early impressions, reinforced but also reframed by later experience, suggested to me that a true understanding of English literacy learning and practices in this context would require more than a narrow approach to literacy and its capacity to 'empower' people. The wider purpose and significance of Karrayili for the local people stands rather awkwardly in relation to what they themselves often say about Karrayili and their reasons for attending its classes. Typically, Karrayili students, when asked why they attended the Centre, identified learning to read and write in English as a priority. Yet there was little evidence of English use outside the classroom (or indeed inside the classroom), with the vast majority of interaction being conducted in Kriol, Language (traditional Aboriginal language), or a mix of the two. When, I wondered, do people in Fitzroy Crossing need, or see themselves as needing, to use Standard Australian English, and if the answer is 'rarely' then what do they identify as their motivation for improving their English literacy?

In revealing some of the ambiguities and tensions surrounding literacy learning in this context, this thesis argues that the participants' reasons for undertaking training at the centre do not always align with those assumed and implied by the mainstream systems within which the centre operates. The evidence collected for this research strongly indicates that while the Karrayili students clearly recognise the functional role that can be served by the development of literacy and employability skills, it is the learners' connections to people, place and culture which dominate their interactions with Karrayili. Furthermore it is these very connections, rather than the teaching and learning of English literacy or work-related skills, which 'empower' the Karrayili learners, giving them the sense of belonging and ownership that strengthen them as individuals and as a community.

Why does this research matter?

The research reported in this thesis is significant in several ways. Firstly, unlike much of the research into Aboriginal literacy in Australia it deals with *adult* literacy practices and institutions. As will be detailed in Chapter Three, a review of the relevant literature, little is currently known about adult Aboriginal literacy in Australia, with even less known about literacy in remote areas. The majority of existing research into Aboriginal literacy has addressed the classroom experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal children and the implications for teaching primary and secondary students, with far less attention being paid to the specific needs and circumstances of adult learners. What research has been undertaken in the field of adult Indigenous learners has tended to focus on the areas of vocational education and training (VET) and the health care field.

What is known, however, is that Indigenous Australian standards of English literacy fall well below the national average (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). Despite concerted efforts to address the literacy

'gap' the overall picture of Indigenous Australian literacy remains bleak, and without greater understanding of the realities of the context of learning for Indigenous Australians the overall picture is unlikely to improve.

Secondly, it is significant that the theory underpinning much of this research is that of literacy as social practice. A social practice approach to adult literacy learning, such as that taken in this thesis, widens the research frame of reference to include issues of identity and meaning embedded in local cultures and experiences, exploring the everyday uses of literacy in this particular context and how learners make sense of the role of literacy in their lives. Theories of social practice enable social science researchers to describe how individuals shape, and are shaped by, the cultural worlds in which they live. They are concerned with everyday activity and real-life settings, with an emphasis on the social systems of shared resources by which groups organise and coordinate their activities, relationships, and interpretations of the world (Wenger, 1998, p. 13). The focus is on shared meanings in personal activity and identity construction, and on how these shared meanings are produced and reproduced through personal action and interaction.

While some research on the social context of Aboriginal literacy has been undertaken in recent years, this perspective is still relatively new and relevant research is thin on the ground. Much of the recent research into Aboriginal literacy has drawn very similar conclusions – that in order to be effective, Aboriginal literacy programs need to consider the cultural context in which they operate, they need to engage the community, and they need to provide motivating, meaningful learning experiences (Australian Council for Adult Literacy, 2001; B Boughton & Durnan, 1997a; Eady, Herrington, & Jones, 2010; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). The focus of literacy research and service delivery is beginning to shift outside the classroom context and into a much broader social context, yet little is currently known about the nature of that social context. A 1997 report for the Australian National Training Authority (B Boughton & Durnan, 1997a) noted that while considerable evidence has been collected regarding what constitutes best practice in Aboriginal

community-controlled education, much less is known, at a grassroots level, about what this sector actually does. It would appear that little has been done in the intervening years to address this gap in the literature. Studies of educational attainment or practice in Indigenous contexts tend to presume, rather than explore, local cultures and their educational implications, and understandings of why Aboriginal adults learn literacy, or what they hope to gain from the experience, are limited.

The research presented in this thesis provides a valuable insight into what happens (and more importantly, why it happens) at a remote Aboriginal community-controlled education centre *at the level of practice*. In taking a social practice approach this study facilitates a better understanding of the learners' needs, values and aspirations, demonstrating in particular how learners' perceptions of training are inseparable from aspects of local culture, history and identity.

A third significant aspect of this research is that it interrogates the assumption that the provision of a particular form of English literacy, for particular purposes, will automatically empower Indigenous learners. Literacy, and in particular literacy in a dominant language, is frequently linked to issues of power and equity. Linguist Joyce Hudson refers to this when reflecting on the origins of Karrayili:

I think that is what the people wanted. They wanted the power. It's English that gets you what you need. People felt on the outside because they'd never been taught English, and they were very aware that they were being 'left on the side of the road' (McGinty et al., 2000, p. 7).

The assumption that improved standards of English literacy can act to empower Aboriginal Australians, giving them a greater level of participation in negotiation with government agencies and other key stakeholders, creating opportunities and self-reliance, and encouraging a healthy move away from 'passive welfare dependence' (Pearson, 2000), is a notion common to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The rhetoric is simple: improved English literacy = an improved ability to operate in a Kariya (non-

Indigenous) world = improved living standards and greater equity for Indigenous people living within the dominant Western society. But does the possession of English language and literacy skills necessarily 'get you what you need', in particular in the context of Aboriginal lives in Fitzroy Crossing? And who gets to decide what, exactly, it is that you need?

English literacy is important to many Aboriginal people, who recognise its power to open doors to a wide range of opportunities, and who know that without basic literacy skills equitable participation in mainstream Australian society is almost impossible. Being able to read and write in English can mean the difference between being independent and having to rely on others. It can mean being able to deal effectively with government agencies, medical practitioners, school staff, and employers; being able to negotiate native title claims; in short, being able to function effectively in the wider Australian community without having to rely upon others. When first starting out on this research journey I wondered, though, whether for Aboriginal adults learning English literacy there might not be more to the story than simply the acquisition of useful skills. What does it mean to a colonised people, for example, to learn and use the language of the coloniser? Given Australia's troubled history of Indigenous affairs, where is the line to be drawn between empowerment and assimilation? At a time when ensuring higher levels of English literacy is seen as one of the keys to alleviating Indigenous disadvantage, and yet when Indigenous literacy levels continue to be of concern, it is crucial that such an equation be interrogated.

This research adds to the current body of knowledge because of the factors outlined above. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this study, though, is the methodology used to conduct the research. As a critical ethnography, this project used qualitative research methods, in particular unstructured interviews, which ensured that the voices of those involved with Karrayili were able to be not only heard but prioritised. This was crucial to gaining the 'bottom up' perspective that sets this research apart from much of the existing knowledge base. Facilitating and complementing this participant-centred approach to evidence collection was the commitment to developing the real and honest relationships that are at the heart of conducting ethical

ethnographic research with Indigenous Australians. Early in my research I spent several short (two to three week) periods at Karrayili, and it was during these visits that I became aware of the need for any further research to involve a much lengthier commitment to participating in community life. I recognised that only through making a genuine commitment to the community, in terms of time, reciprocity and connections with people, would my research have any real meaning. My decision to relocate to Fitzroy Crossing for a full year was not taken lightly, but without it I would not have gained the insights that make this research significant.

An overview of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of three parts. Part A introduces the research, positioning it in terms of context and the relevant literature. Chapter One of Part A has given an introduction to the thesis, introducing the core issues to be explored in Part B and outlining the significance of the research. In its exploration of the historical, geographical and social factors that have shaped Fitzroy Crossing, Chapter Two provides a deeper context for the study to come, a context that is essential if the reader is to appreciate, in the coming chapters, how key aspects of history and country are inseparable from the local cultures and practices that dominate and shape the ways in which adult learning and training take place at Karrayili. In Chapter Three I discuss some of the works that provide the theoretical foundations for this thesis, in particular literacy as social practice and the impact of colonialism and assimilationist policies on Indigenous education in Australia. I explore the relevance of these works for an understanding of issues of empowerment and effective learning contexts in adult Aboriginal education in remote Australia. Chapter Four outlines the methods employed in undertaking this research project, the theories that have shaped it and the methods of critical ethnography used to collect evidence. In Chapter Four I also reflect on my own positioning as a non-Indigenous person conducting research in an Aboriginal community, looking at some of the issues this raised both for the ways in which my research progressed and for my development as a researcher.

Part B is the case study itself, comprising three chapters which together describe and analyse what Karrayili is and does, what it means to the community it serves, and the tensions that emerge when an Aboriginal-directed education centre operates within the constraints of mainstream systems and processes. Part B begins, in Chapter Five, with an examination of the unique ways in which Karrayili operates as an adult education centre, and in particular its emphasis on social practice approaches to teaching adult literacy and conducting training. Chapter Six reveals, largely through analysis of interview data, how the learners and staff themselves perceive the role of Karrayili, and of further education in general, in their lives and the lives of community members. Reversing the usual 'top-down' approach to analysing Aboriginal educational institutions, this chapter allows those involved at the ground level to explain what the centre means to them, in doing so highlighting the very different aspirations and expectations held by Aboriginal learners in this remote location from those generally assumed in mainstream institutions. The final chapter of the case study, Chapter Seven, explores the tensions that emerge as a result of an Aboriginal-directed organisation operating within the constraints of mainstream systems and processes, looking at how Karrayili manages these constraints without losing its integrity and commitment to meeting community needs.

Part C concludes the thesis, discussing the findings which have emerged from the research and making recommendations based on these findings.

My research leads me to the following main conclusions:

- The context of adult learning and training for Aboriginal learners in remote Australia is very different from that of non-Indigenous or mainstream education, yet there is little recognition of this by the dominant systems without which education providers such as Karrayili could not exist. The failure of those responsible for the funding and accreditation of Indigenous education centres to fully acknowledge such difference is contributing to many Indigenous Australians, and no doubt other marginalised learners, missing out on opportunities to benefit

meaningfully from further education. A deficit approach to education reinforces power imbalances, perpetuating a paternalistic approach to teaching and learning, and ultimately leading to *disempowerment*, rather than empowerment. Local organisations know their students and their students' very specific learning needs – it is essential that this fact be understood and accounted for in the provision of adult education if it is to be truly effective. Without recognition and genuine acknowledgement of the true context of Indigenous learning, much of the provision of education and training services to Indigenous learners will continue to be inequitable.

- An increased emphasis on the social practice of literacy, and to acknowledging the social context of learners' lives, has the potential to result in improved equity and empowerment for Indigenous learners. The current narrow focus on developing learners' English literacy skills from a human capital perspective is inappropriate for many Indigenous learners, particularly in remote areas. A social practice approach has the potential to empower learners by allowing them greater personal autonomy. The students at Karrayili, and indeed the Aboriginal community of Fitzroy Crossing in general, find individual and community strength not only from their learning, but also through the sense of ownership they feel for Karrayili and through the connections and sense of belonging that it both symbolises and sustains. Community-based education providers such as Karrayili are perfectly placed to provide culturally and socially appropriate programs, as they know their learners and the context of their learning. These organisations have the potential to empower their learners, but not solely or necessarily through the literacy learning and training that take place there.
- What happens at Karrayili in practice suggests that Indigenous learners will seek ways to ensure some degree of personal autonomy in their learning. When this conflicts with the ways in which learning programs are provided, it can lead to inefficient and ineffective program provision. Organisations such as Karrayili may find themselves in a position of trying

to meet the needs of two very different cohorts; their students, and the systems within which they are required to operate. In attempting to deliver services that are locally appropriate, while simultaneously maintaining responsibilities to mainstream funding and accreditation bodies, Indigenous education providers are severely constrained in terms of what they can achieve for the benefit of individuals and their local learning community. While staff and students may find ways to manage the limitations of the bureaucratic systems in which they operate, these limitations nevertheless create tensions and frustrations for all those involved at ground level in the delivery of education services to marginalised adults.

As will be explored further in Chapter Four, my research is neither objective nor detached, and nor was it intended to be. As qualitative data, researched, analysed and written ethnographically, it will inevitably represent a situation as it was revealed to me, based to a large extent on what particular people chose to tell me at that particular point in time. While I have endeavoured to tell the whole story, I acknowledge that in different circumstances a different picture may have emerged. Yet this in no way detracts from the value of the story that those involved with Karrayili had to tell, or the picture of adult Aboriginal education that is revealed. What happens at Karrayili is unique – I'm not sure there is anywhere else like it in Australia, perhaps nowhere quite like it anywhere else in the world. But while Karrayili may be very different from other education centres, the issues it deals with and the challenges it faces are no doubt reflected in education practices for marginalised adults in many other locations.

After almost thirty years, an impressive lifespan for any Indigenous organisation in Australia, Karrayili continues to play a significant role in the Fitzroy Crossing community. In doing so though it is required to meet a wide range of expectations, from often narrowly conceived expectations of what is meant by training and literacy, through to far more complex community interpretations of Karrayili as being representative of their dreams; of where

they have come from, of what they hope to achieve, and even for some of who they are. As Stumpy Brown notes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it was local Aboriginal people who started Karrayili, and they continue to shape its direction and daily practices. In the thirty-odd years since its inception, its focus on improving Aboriginal literacy and supporting Aboriginal people of the Fitzroy Valley to achieve their goals has been determinedly maintained. Karrayili is a remarkable place of learning. It is remarkable for its history, its resilience, and for its resolve to remain focused on the real needs of its students and the community at large. I can only hope that the material presented in this thesis does it justice.

Chapter Two: Putting Karrayili into context

This chapter explores the ways in which historical, geographical and social factors contribute to an environment where the Aboriginal community in Fitzroy Crossing, and in particular the learners at Karrayili, have very specific learning and training needs. In doing so it puts the research findings in later chapters into a broader context, as well as providing information crucial to the reader's understanding of what Karrayili means to the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing. Karrayili does things differently from mainstream education institutions. This element of difference is key to my findings; not simply that difference exists, but that for Indigenous education to be truly effective the very specific local needs of communities such as that at Fitzroy Crossing need to be appropriately and sufficiently acknowledged and valued. Ensuring education is culturally appropriate for Indigenous Australians is not simply a matter of doing things Karrayili way and incorporating Indigenous content. It requires, as later chapters illustrate, a long-term and systematic knowledge of the complexities of learning and teaching in remote Indigenous communities.

This chapter sets the scene for the case study of Karrayili by providing the context for the very locally-specific approaches to teaching and learning that take place there. It explores the history of the demographic make-up of Fitzroy Crossing's Aboriginal population, a history that continues to impact on the social structures and practices to be found in the town. It reveals the cultural backgrounds of Karrayili students, and in particular the relatively recent and rapid changes in lifestyle that many Aboriginal people in the area have experienced. And lastly this chapter describes some of the current

linguistic, educational and social issues that impact on the teaching and learning that happens at Karrayili. It is not intended to be a comprehensive literature review – that is to come in Chapter Three – but rather a means of ensuring that the issues to be explored in Chapters Five, Six and Seven make sense to the reader.

The next part of this chapter takes a look at some of the historical events that have helped to shape Fitzroy Crossing, and in particular have had a significant impact on determining the Aboriginal population of the town. There is a sizeable anthropological literature on Aboriginal history and culture, language and communities in the Kimberley. In the early part of the last century, when white settlement of the area and intercultural contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples were still relatively new, the work of anthropologists such as A.P. Elkin (1932), Kaberry (1939), and the Berndts (1952) expanded non-Indigenous Australia's understanding of traditional Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley. In the latter part of the century literature by authors such as Kolig (1987), Hawke and Gallagher (1989), Biskup (1973) and Sullivan (1996) provided a more political perspective on aspects of Kimberley life such as Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, the impact of settlement on Indigenous communities, and land rights, particularly with regard to the dispute between traditional owners and a major mining company at Noonkanbah in the late 1970s. Significant works which deal with language use and community life, both contemporary and traditional, (for example R. M. Berndt & Berndt, 1980; Bulugardie, Richards, Hudson, & Lowe, 2002; Choo, 2001; Harris, 1991; McGregor, 2004; Sandy Toussaint, Sullivan, Yu, & Mularty Jnr., 2001) have also been produced.

While this literature has made significant contributions to their respective fields, much of it deals with issues that are not, by and large, relevant to this thesis. The focus here is on literacy, power and social context, and how the realities of life in Fitzroy Crossing influence the ways in which Aboriginal adults approach opportunities for training and literacy learning there. My review of the historical literature on Indigenous life in the Kimberley in this chapter is not an attempt to reconstruct the past, but rather reflects only those issues that I believe have a direct relevance on what happens at

Karrayili today². The issues reviewed here are relevant to this study because they reveal evidence that helps explain not simply who the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing are, but more importantly the cultural and social values they hold and how these impact on practices of literacy and learning. It is this social context that matters, that impacts on people's lives. In this chapter I have looked for the social and cultural contexts which I can most clearly connect to life in Fitzroy Crossing, and in particular those aspects which connect Fitzroy Crossing to the dominant society that in many ways continues to shape life for the Aboriginal population of the Fitzroy Valley³. While largely dealing with the past, this section reveals information essential to any understanding of what happens in Fitzroy Crossing, and at Karrayili, today.

A brief history of Fitzroy Crossing – the town and its people

Karrayili. The name carries great meaning for local people, and is intrinsically linked to both its genesis and its objectives. A Walmajarri word meaning 'middle-aged', the name refers to the fact that the Centre was created for older learners to learn English and to get other relevant training. It was Walmajarri people, more than any of the other language groups in Fitzroy Crossing (Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Wangkatjungka and Nyikina), who started Karrayili.

The Walmajarri are a desert people, their traditional lands in the northern Great Sandy Desert, south of and extending up to Fitzroy Crossing and covering an area of roughly 85,000 square kilometres (Bulugardie et al., 2002; Morphy, 2010). For more than 30,000 years (Kolig, 1987) they had

² Here I am referring to the period during which my fieldwork took place.

³ The Fitzroy Valley is defined less by notional geographic boundaries, and more by the communities who live there. With the town of Fitzroy Crossing roughly at its centre, the topography of the Valley is dominated by the Fitzroy River and its tributaries. For more detail see: Morphy (2010)

lived a nomadic life of hunting and gathering, until the last few groups left behind their desert life in the late 1950s and 1960s to move to white settlements (Lowe & Pike, 2009, p. 142). Stories of white settlers (Kartiya) had reached the family groups living in the desert, and while many of these stories did not bring good news the Walmajarri people, like other language groups, were nevertheless drawn to the stations and settlements that were springing up around the cattle industry and chose to leave the desert in search of a better life.

This dramatic change occurred in a single generation, and in relatively recent history. Many of the Walmajarri people who were instrumental in the establishment of Karrayili had 'come in off the desert', and living their traditional lifestyle was part of living memory. The recorded stories of Walmajarri people, including Karrayili students past and present, tell of how some chose to leave the desert while others were forced to leave once their communities had dwindled to unsustainable numbers (Bulugardie et al., 2002; Kimberley Language Resource Centre, 1996; Lowe & Pike, 2009). They describe the experiences of Walmajarri people as they came into contact with Kartiya for the first time, as well as their fears – not only of the Kartiya settlers, but also of the new country that had previously been unknown to them.

RK, one of the regular Karrayili Class students, is also an artist of considerable national significance. As part of her work with Mangkaja Arts in Fitzroy Crossing, she tells her story of leaving the desert and travelling to less familiar country:

I was born at a jumu [soak water] called Payinjarra in the Great Sandy Desert. I walked out from the desert with my husband when I was a young girl. I left my mother and brother Kumanjayi [deceased] Pijaju behind at Japingka. My husband had two wives, my older sister and myself. These two passed away a long time ago, here in the river country at Brooking Springs Station.

When we left the desert we walked for a long time. We were walking and hunting all the way. We killed pussycat and wirlka [sand goanna] for food but no kangaroo. I was walking and worrying all the time about my mother but I kept going. My husband and my sister were both cheeky.

They hit me for no reason. I was crying for my mother. I got away from them once. But they were too cheeky to me and told me, “come on you have to go”. I told them, “No, I want to go back to my mother”. They kept telling me “No, you have to keep going”.

I was frightened but I came out at Old Bililluna. There was a plane landing right there and I was frightened of that plane. From there, all of us kids went walking and looking at the plane which had landed. I didn't know any English and so I just looked at the kartiya [Europeans]. We kept going and we saw kartiya getting water in a bucket from a well. This was new to me too because it was the first time I had seen this.

We had no shoes. We were wearing yakapiri [bush used to make sandals to protect feet from the hot ground]. After that, a motorcar came from Moola Bulla to Old Bililluna and took us to Moola Bulla. We were frightened in the car. We hadn't seen one before. And we didn't know anyone there either. I met Manmarria and her first son at Moola Bulla.

I talked only Juwaliny when I came out from the desert but today I speak Juwaliny, Walmajarri, Kriol and English⁴.

RK's story is illustrative of how many of the older Karrayili students have lived, in the one lifetime, several remarkably different lives. From a traditional lifestyle in the desert, to life on the stations working in subordinate roles to white people, to town life in Fitzroy Crossing and eventually taking on the role of student at Karrayili. As will be seen in later chapters, understanding this history and incorporating it into everyday life at Karrayili has been one of the key factors in the longevity and popularity of the Centre.

Kartiya settlement of the Kimberley, and early contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the area, has been researched and written about extensively (Biskup, 1973; A. P. Elkin, 1979; Kolig, 1987). While it is not necessary or relevant to explore this history in great detail for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to have some understanding of how that history has impacted on past and present practices at Karrayili. The following section looks at several aspects of Kimberley Aboriginal people's experiences of early contact, paying particular attention to the historical and

⁴ Accessed 27 June 2012 at <http://www.mangkaja.com/content/taku-rosie-tarco-king>

social changes that influenced the development of the town and the eventual development of Karrayili.

The land on which Fitzroy Crossing was established was originally Bunuba country. The Bunuba people had lived in the area for tens of thousands of years; living off, and enjoying a close spiritual relationship with, the land (Kolig, 1987). The land where Fitzroy Crossing now stands is also believed to have been a possible meeting place and a significant area of interaction for the four major language groups of the region, whose territories converged in the area, in the pre-colonial past (Morphy, 2010, p. 12).

The Kimberley region is believed to have been one of the most densely populated areas of Aboriginal Australia prior to Kartiija settlement, with more than 30,000 people making up nearly fifty distinct language groups (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006, p. 47). Life for the local Aboriginal people prior to European settlement of the region is unlikely to have been idyllic – as Kolig states, “There was clandestine and overtly violent struggle among Aborigines themselves for survival in the harshly beautiful, but frugal land” (1987, p. 15) – but it was *their* land. Drastic change came about, however, following Alexander Forrest’s exploratory expedition up the Fitzroy River in 1879, and particularly after the discovery of gold in the region in 1885, when thousands of European men travelled to the Kimberley to seek their fortune in this new, ‘frontier’ environment. Sheep and cattle stations, run by and for non-Indigenous Australians, soon began to appear in the Fitzroy Valley, and this more than any other form of contact between Indigenous peoples and European settlers had severe consequences for the traditional owners of the land. The pastoral industry – through its demand for land, the use of Aboriginal workers, and conflicts arising as a result of differing cultural understandings of ownership and use of the land – shaped relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. With whites as colonisers and employers a paternalistic attitude dominated relations between the two groups, especially on the cattle stations:

With no recognition of the rights of Traditional Owners, the Western Australian government issued pastoral leases to anybody prepared to pay. Within a few years almost the whole Kimberley was blanketed by

pastoral leases. Sheep and cattle runs were imposed on the land by settlers who saw the Traditional Owners as having only the right to live if they surrendered their independence and worked for the new colonial masters in a system of slavery (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006, p. 47).

In order to understand what happens at Karrayili it is important to remember that, like RK, there are many people living in Fitzroy Crossing today, students themselves as well as the parents and grandparents of younger students, who either experienced these changes as children or for whom the impact on their own parents had lasting repercussions. The violent nature of much of the early contact, in particular, has influenced (and continues to influence) relations between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in the Kimberley (Biskup, 1973; Hawke & Gallagher, 1989; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Kolig, 1987; Lawford et al., 1989).

This and other aspects of local Fitzroy Valley history and culture have been written about extensively, using interviews with Aboriginal people from the Fitzroy Valley, by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC). Based in Fitzroy Crossing since 1994, KALACC was established by local Aboriginal people in 1984 at a Kimberley Land Council meeting at Crocodile Hole, near the small settlement of Warmun in the East Kimberley. KALACC became incorporated in 1985, and according to its website is “now the peak body for Law and Culture [in the Kimberley]. It exists specifically to develop, promote and maintain Indigenous Law and Culture in a holistic way”⁵. As such, for the purposes of this chapter KALACC provides an important local Aboriginal perspective on historical and social aspects of Indigenous life in Fitzroy Crossing.

In the book *Yirra: Land, Law and Culture, Strong and Alive* for example, KALACC notes that during white settlement of the Kimberley:

Thousands of Aboriginal people were massacred in a sustained campaign of violence. Whilst much of this violence is not recorded in the

⁵ Accessed from KALACC website at: <http://www.kalacc.org.au/index.htm>

official records, the memories of the killing times have been handed down and form a powerful part of the consciousness of Kimberley Aboriginal people today (1996, p. 48).

This quote demonstrates that while details of the violent nature of non-Indigenous settlement in north-western Australia may be scarce or contested, memories and stories of this time nevertheless continue to impact on Aboriginal people in the Kimberley today. In particular, they impact on issues of trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, hardly surprising given the events that took place in the Kimberley region.

Policies of 'pacification by force' (Biskup, 1973) and assimilation meant the displacement and destruction of much of the Indigenous populations of the area. Despite the Bunuba people strongly defending their land against the white settlers, in particular under the leadership of Jandamarra, the Fitzroy Valley has been identified as having borne the brunt of European settlement in the West Kimberley, largely because it had the best grazing land available:

Of the original population that had inhabited the area of Derby, not even a trace remains. The Unggumi and Warrua of the Western Leopold and Oscar Ranges, and the adjoining flatlands, were destroyed so thoroughly that today hardly a person exists who claims descent from them. Those Bunuba who occupied the area in between the Oscar Ranges and the central course of the Fitzroy River ... were so decimated that today only a handful of people can trace descent ... from them."
(Kolig, 1987, p. 17)

Much of our knowledge of this time has been informed by a 'white' perspective. Priority has often been accorded to the written records provided by anthropologists, missionaries, station workers and bureaucrats, while less recognition has been given to the oral history accounts provided by Aboriginal people of the Fitzroy Valley. In more recent times, Aboriginal people in the Kimberley have been involved, in partnership with linguists, anthropologists and cultural centres, in several significant projects to record their own stories. A number of publications relate the stories of the various language groups of the Kimberley, in particular the Walmajarri people, both in their own words and with accompanying translations (see Bulugardie et al., 2002; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Kimberley Language Resource Centre, 1996; Lawford et al., 1989; Lowe & Pike, 2009).

The stories tell of how and why the Walmajarri people began to leave their desert country and venture north to the cattle and sheep stations – a source of employment, as well as new goods such as flour and tobacco.

When they left their traditional lands, many of the Karrayili students (or their parents or grandparents) spent time at Moola Bulla, a cattle station in the East Kimberley north of Halls Creek. Moola Bulla was a key destination for Aboriginal people in the north-west of Australia who left their traditional lands in the first half of the twentieth century. Initially a government institution, it is widely held to have been established as a ration depot and cattle station in order to alleviate growing problems between station owners in the region and Aboriginal people who had been chasing and spearing their cattle (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2012). Moola Bulla was seen as a cheaper alternative to imprisonment, and was also intended to provide training opportunities for Aboriginal people. According to the *Bringing Them Home* report⁶, AO Neville, who at that time held the title of ‘Chief Protector of Aborigines’ for Western Australia⁷, wanted to “take control of the missions ... (and) turn them into self-supporting cattle stations” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 92). Moola Bulla was seen as a model for this type of enterprise.

⁶ The full title of this report is the *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Up until the 1960s Australian government policies provided for the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families. It is estimated that 100,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families, and these children became known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. The Inquiry was established in 1995 in an effort to address the general public's ignorance of the history of forcible removal and to achieve recognition for Indigenous Australians of their suffering. As noted on the *Bringing Them Home* website, “the laws, policies and practices which separated Indigenous children from their families have contributed directly to the alienation of Indigenous societies today ... The actions of the past resonate in the present and will continue to do so in the future.” The full Report can be accessed at: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/report/index.html

⁷ Prior to 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were considered to be the responsibility of the State. As a consequence of the referendum in 1967, Aboriginal Affairs became a joint Commonwealth-State responsibility. Accessed 21 February 2013 at: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation>.

Many of the Aboriginal people who were taken to Moola Bulla did not go willingly, as evidenced by testimonies in the *Bringing Them Home* report. One, for example, said:

When I was about twelve or thirteen years old I was taken to Moola Bulla. That's where I lost my Aboriginal ways. The Police came one day from Halls Creek when they were going on patrol to Lansdowne and found me, a half-caste child. The manager ... took me down to Fitzroy Crossing to wait for the mail truck from Derby to take me to Moola Bulla. When [the manager's wife] told my people, mum and dad, that they were taking me to Fitzroy Crossing for a trip, they told her 'you make sure you bring her back'. They did not know that I would never see them again. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997 , p. 66)

From my conversations with students at Karrayili it appeared that the purpose of Moola Bulla was not always clear to the Aboriginal people who went there, and their feelings about the station were mixed. DA, a founding member of Karrayili and still one of the key students and contributors while I was there in 2009-2010, told me of her own experiences at Moola Bulla. The interview excerpt below, during which DA and I were assisted by an interpreter (GS), illustrates some of the ambiguities that existed for Aboriginal people with regard to Moola Bulla. As there are three participants here I have used bold font for my contributions to better clarify who is speaking.

(DA): Mrs George. He used to tell us girls work all the time. You know, scrub the floor, and this thing here (points to ceiling).

(MS): And where was this?

In Moola Bulla.

(GS): That was another mission, a lot of our people were sent there.

That was a station wasn't it?

No, government.

It was a government school, you know? They had lot of them children from all over, different areas, and they were put there, to go to school.

And they take my father to station, and he was run away, but he bin go to Broome, for I don't know how many years he bin there. And then we see him in station, in Moola Bulla. (pause) Yeah, we live on the station. All the time when Dad didn't run away, used to take me bush, and policeman come and jus' pick 'em up us.

Why did the policeman pick you up?

Because Dad was run away every time.

Oh, because he didn't want to be at the station?

Nup.

A lot of the children in the station, they were collected by the police. (*Yeah!*) So a lot of their children was run into the bush and some of them was captured, to send them to Moola Bulla, ... this is where ... a lot of the kids from surrounding stations was taken there for education.

Oh, ok. So she was taken for education?

Yeah.

So you went to school at Moola Bulla? (*Yeah*). What was it like going to school there? Did you like it?

It was like a ... Moola Bulla was like a big settlement, where a lot of the kids went there. (*asks DA in Walmajarri then in Kriol if she liked it at Moola Bulla*)

We was crying for (unclear)

(*GS speaks to DA in Walmajarri*)

She was crying?

Yeah, she was crying for come home.

And my sister was crying for come away this way.

And what did you learn at school, at Moola Bulla? What did they teach you? (*GS repeats in Kriol*)

Yeah, we do learn, sit down there at school an' go for reading and writing. But nothing. I work in that kitchen, anyway.

They used to make them work as well, after the school, like ... put them in ... one of them ... what 'big house' mean is like boss's house, you know? Go that superintendent house and clean everything.

Everything clean ... We gotta clean everything, kitchen, doing all the cooking there. I was cooking for the old people, and for the young kids.

And how old were you?

I was big woman now.

When she worked there she had [her son] with him. [Her son] was only little that time, maybe way back in the '50s, that?

*Must be. Alright, then I bin come back this way now. Me an' my sister,
an all my family we bin come back this way.*

It is likely that DA and her family were part of the exodus from Moola Bulla when, in 1955, the government made a sudden decision to close the station. With very little warning, almost two hundred Aboriginal people were evicted from the station, and the majority were taken to the then tiny township of Fitzroy Crossing (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 1996; Sandy Toussaint et al., 2001).

The town of Fitzroy Crossing had evolved from its initial incarnation as a telegraph station in 1892, with the establishment of a police camp in 1894 and then a pub (the Crossing Inn) three years later, but at the time of the influx still had little in the way of infrastructure. In 1952 a United Aborigines Mission Base had been established in Fitzroy Crossing at the site of what had originally been a ration depot⁸. The UAM missionaries had set up a basic school and health centre there, but even by July 1955 the mission was vastly under-resourced for the sudden arrival – one missionary said they were given less than twenty-four hours' notice – of more than 150 people who had been transported from Moola Bulla (Rumley & Toussaint, 1990, p. 101).

The closure of Moola Bulla in 1955, together with the introduction of the pastoral award in 1968⁹, meant that large numbers of Aboriginal people were displaced. Many were no longer able to live and work on the stations (Sandy Toussaint et al., 2001). The pastoral award in particular, which introduced minimum wages for employees on pastoral stations, led to most stations

⁸ See Shire of Derby West Kimberley website at <http://www.sdwk.wa.gov.au/community/history.html>

⁹ *The Federal Pastoral Industry Award* had a far-reaching impact on the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley. Introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 1969, the Award was intended to address the unequal employment conditions for Aboriginal people working on stations. Instead, it served as a major catalyst for massive social dislocation. Many station owners and/or managers claimed they could not afford to pay full wages to Aboriginal workers, resulting in large numbers of Aboriginal people either leaving, or being evicted from, the stations where they worked. See: (Sandy Toussaint et al., 2001)

being no longer willing or able to use Aboriginal workers. As a result, many Aboriginal people in the Kimberley were transported to Fitzroy Crossing.

This displacement of large numbers of Aboriginal people from all over the Kimberley to Fitzroy Crossing meant that very distinct language groups, who had previously lived very separate lives, suddenly found themselves living in the one small area: Bunuba people, the original inhabitants of the land on which Fitzroy Crossing was established; Walmajarri people from the Great Sandy Desert region south of Fitzroy Crossing; Gooniyandi people from the south-east side of the Fitzroy River and between Margaret River/Christmas Creek extending east to Louisa Downs Station; and Wangkatjungka people from the desert region further south of Walmajarri country (Morphy, 2010). While this forced sharing of the land was generally accepted by all the different language groups, it has nevertheless had lasting consequences for the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing. As MH, a Walmajarri woman and Karrayili director, told me:

You know all the people were dragged into, not dragged into but basically put into a community where everyone had to fit – whether you were a Walmajarri person, a Gooniyandi person, Bunuba person, or Wangkatjungka person, you know. Even though we're all Aboriginal, within our own language structure we got ways of ... our own cultural beliefs, our roles, I think the law that we've got is so different from one another ... They said "Well ok, you're all Aboriginal, you all live in that" and now that, you can see the ramifications now you know, and also the alcohol on top of that. But in those days, going back to the early 70s, you seen the strength and the structure that the old people have and I was one of the lucky ones that actually went through that structure where you know along with the old people, of them teaching me, about my own – you know, where I stood and my values – and me helping them with their stuff. So you know I was really lucky.

Here MH highlights an issue familiar to discussions around Indigenous health care and education in Australia – that of the 'one size fits all' approach. Expressions such as "... everyone had to fit" and "... you're all Aboriginal, you all live in that", tell us how little consideration was given (and often still is) to cultural and linguistic differences between Indigenous language groups. MH also draws a connection between this forced sharing of land and the

social issues – especially substance use and abuse – currently being faced by Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley.

There is little doubt that these issues stem at least in part from the displacement of Aboriginal communities, often to new locations so far from traditional country that many Aboriginal people were no longer able to return on foot to traditional Law grounds to practise ceremonial Law. This resulted in a significant decline of ceremonial Law during much of the 1970s. Eventually, as communities were able to afford vehicles, people began to access their country once more, but not to the same extent as prior to the displacement of their people (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006).

The displacement of Aboriginal people from the stations and their traditional lands into Fitzroy Crossing (following changes resulting from the 1968 pastoral award) led to the establishment of distinct, language-based communities within the ‘boundaries’ of the town. These include the main town communities of Kurnangki, Mindi Rardi and Junjuwa (the oldest Fitzroy Crossing community), Loanbung and DarlIngunaya, as well as key outlying communities such as Bayulu, 15km from Fitzroy Crossing. Demographics of the communities are largely influenced by their residents’ kinship relations, geographic origins and/or language groups (Morphy, 2010). As will be seen in Chapters Five and Six, there are connections between the various language groups and the use of Karrayili.

The following map shows the location of Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley and in the town of Fitzroy Crossing itself:

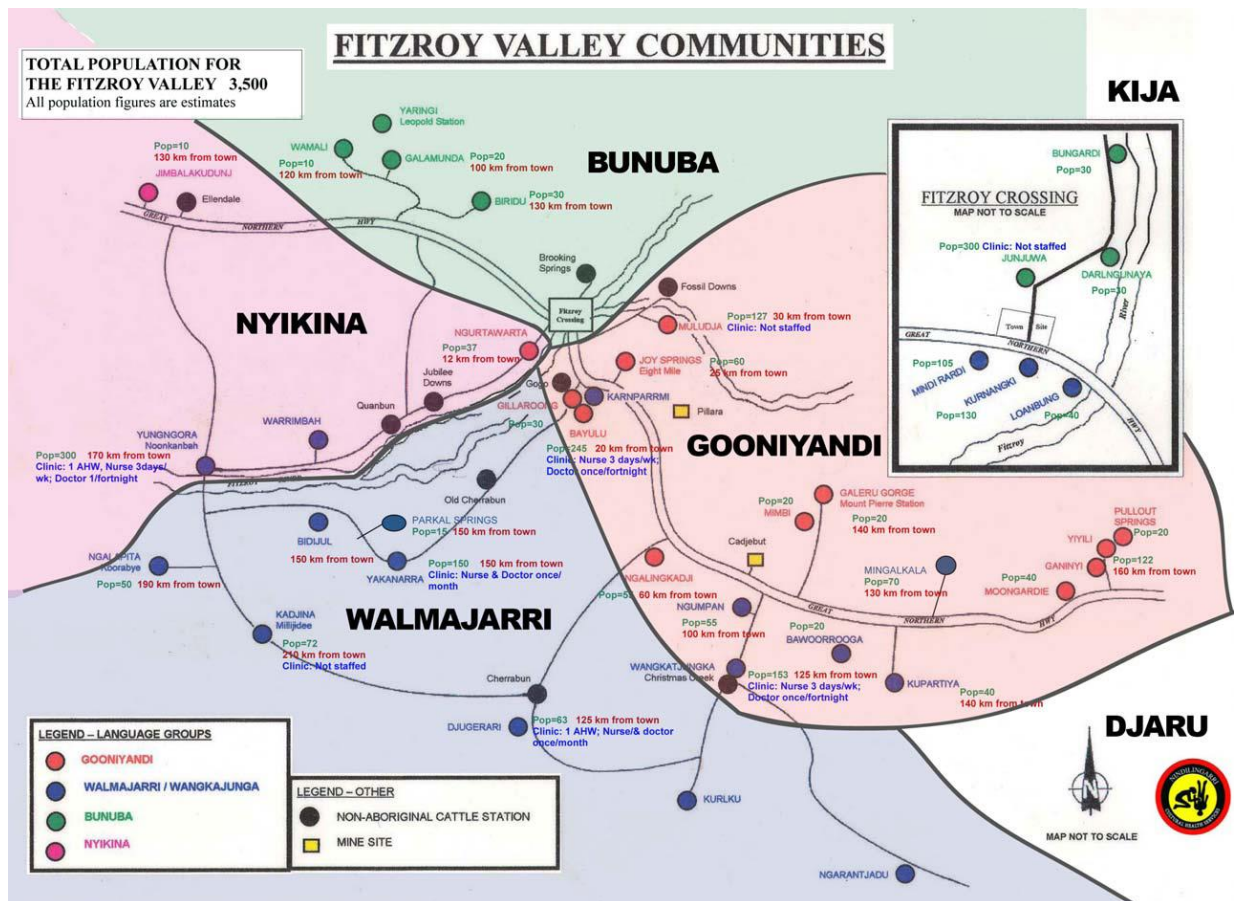


Figure 3: Map of Fitzroy Valley communities (sourced from Morphy 2009)

The long-term impact of this population displacement is unclear, and has quite possibly had varied significance for different language groups, communities, families and individuals. In the *Fitzroy Futures Town Plan* (March 2009) it is claimed that “this separation [from traditional lands] has had a significant negative effect on cultural customs and lifestyle” (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2009). In contrast, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) states that:

As in all other parts of Australia, European settlement had many serious consequences for Aboriginal people, yet remarkably the Kimberley remains a stronghold of traditional languages, customary Law and Culture to this day. Almost thirty language groups have survived the pearling and pastoral industries and nearly a hundred years of government policies intent on breaking up communities and preventing the continuation of traditional ways of life. (1996 p.65)

It is entirely possible of course that both interpretations have some degree of relevance to Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. While the move to white settlements, whether by choice or under duress, has obviously resulted in significant and lasting changes to cultural ways and language use, the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing have, without doubt, been able to hold on to at least some degree of their traditional languages, beliefs and customs.

This contact history of oppression, forced removal, and the imposition of a foreign culture continues to impact on the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing in a variety of ways. With so much loss of power and control over their lives, there is little wonder that the community takes such pride in Karrayili as an organisation that was created and evolved under their direction, and of which they continue to feel 'ownership'. It is little wonder, too, that their learning experiences at Karrayili continue to provide them with opportunities for resistance against the mainstream bureaucratic systems and processes. Or that Karrayili is valued by local people from all language groups as a neutral space, a 'place for everyone', regardless of their cultural background.

The oppressive social, economic and political structures that had dominated Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations for over a century finally began to change in the latter half of the twentieth century. Nationwide changes in attitude following the 1967 referendum¹⁰, coupled with local changes perhaps linked to greater Aboriginal awareness of the need for self-determination (for example the station walk-offs¹¹), saw Aboriginal differences beginning to be recognised and their cultural practices legitimated.

¹⁰ The 1967 Referendum saw 90.77% of Australians vote for Aboriginal Australians to be counted in the census. However this significant change in attitude failed to result in any meaningful change to Aboriginal people's living conditions or rights (KALACC 2006).

¹¹ Although the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission found in 1965 that Aboriginal people should have equal rights in the workplace as other Australians, the introduction of award wages did not come into effect until 1968. In 1966 Aboriginal workers at Wave Hill station protested against this delay by

However, non-Indigenous Australia continues to dominate Australia's Aboriginal population, though now in more subtle or normative ways. Pervasive paternalistic attitudes, and the imposition of Kartiya ways of doing and being, continue to oppress many Indigenous Australians through marginalisation and government regulation of people's social, political and economic lives. The failure to include people in decision-making processes, in decisions that determine their own wellbeing, could be argued to continue domination under a different guise.

Fitzroy Crossing today

The previous section described some of the historical factors that have contributed to shaping Fitzroy Crossing, and in turn to determining how Karrayili works. This section moves on to explore some of the more current issues that impact on Karrayili, taking a look at the interplay between factors such as the town's remoteness and socio-cultural make-up, and the role Karrayili plays in the town. As with the previous section, a comprehensive overview of all the issues potentially relevant to Karrayili learners would be outside the scope of this thesis. The issues I have chosen to review here – namely the town's remote location, the wider role of Karrayili in the community, the lack of employment options for Aboriginal people in the town, and issues of alcohol use and restriction – have been selected for their direct relevance to the issues for learning and teaching at Karrayili that are explored in the case study to come.

Fitzroy Crossing is a town made up of a central Town Site area surrounded by six discrete Aboriginal communities. According to Fitzroy Crossing's Cultural Health service provider, Nindilingarri, the current population of the Fitzroy Crossing area stands at around 3500, with the majority being

walking off the station. Their protest developed into a land claim, which proved to be a significant event in the Land Rights movement in Australia (KALACC 2006).

Aboriginal¹². This figure, however, includes surrounding communities, and the population of the town itself – while extremely transient – is more often estimated at around 1000 people.

While classified as ‘very remote’¹³, Fitzroy Crossing can be easily accessed by road or air. It is situated on the Great Northern Highway, almost half-way between Broome to the west and Halls Creek to the east. After a drive of some four to five hours from Broome, punctuated only by the occasional roadhouse, reaching Fitzroy Crossing can be an experience of mixed emotions – relief at having finally reached *somewhere*; but many travellers are also a little disappointed at the somewhat unprepossessing appearance of the town. The town centre has little to offer tourists seeking the ‘Kimberley experience’ and most choose to spend little time here, stopping only long enough to visit the imposing and beautiful Geikie Gorge just out of town before heading off to larger, more lively towns such as Broome to the west or Kununurra to the east. Fitzroy Crossing is remote, and it *feels* remote. Many non-Indigenous residents of the town commented to me on how it feels like a ‘different world’, and living there one can certainly feel cut-off from the rest of Australia. It seems this sense of isolation from mainstream Australia plays a part in determining the sense of Karrayili ‘going its own way’. This suggestion, of course, reflects my own (non-Indigenous) impressions, and while it would be interesting to know something of local Indigenous people’s perceptions of whether or not Fitzroy Crossing is ‘remote’, this was not a question I addressed during my research¹⁴.

¹² See the Nindilingarri website at <http://www.nindilingarri.org.au/fitzroy.htm>.

¹³ According to a 2004 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, accessible at [Measuring Remoteness: Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia \(ARIA\) Revised Edition](#), remoteness is identified using the ARIA system of classification system based on 1996 census population data. Interestingly, it defines very remote as having “very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction”. While the first two factors are undeniable, I am sure that many Aboriginal residents of Fitzroy Crossing would disagree with the assertion that their opportunities for social interaction are limited.

¹⁴ In his paper for the 2005 SPERA (Society for Provision of Education in Rural Australia) National Conference, Michael Christie gives an interesting examination of the common metro-centric notion of ‘remote’. “Remoteness”, he notes, “depends on your point of view, the particular frame that you use” (Christie 2005, p. 5).

As demonstrated in the first part of this chapter Fitzroy Crossing, as with all of the Fitzroy Valley, is the “product of a layered history” (Morphy, 2010, p. 14). In her extensive demographic profile of the Fitzroy Valley, Morphy notes that the regional identity of the Valley is “founded in a complex interaction of topography, culture, history and current administrative arrangements” (2010, p. 2).

Industry in the Fitzroy Valley is comprised predominantly of pastoralism, tourism and mining. Employment in Fitzroy Crossing itself is largely provided by the service industry, either in hospitality servicing visiting tourists or by the facilities servicing the townspeople themselves. These include health services, education providers, the police and fire services, service stations and the local supermarket.

Aside from Karrayili there are several other Aboriginal-owned or directed organisations in the town. Two of these began their lives as part of Karrayili. Mangkaja Arts (commonly known simply as ‘Mangkaja’ – a Walmajarri word meaning the shelters used by the desert people during the wet season, roughly from November to April), is a highly successful art centre in the centre of Fitzroy Crossing. Serving today as an art gallery and studio space for local artists to paint and make cultural artefacts, it was started by the early Karrayili students who wanted to paint their personal stories and histories as part of their studies¹⁵. Despite becoming a separate organisation when it was incorporated in 1993, Mangkaja has maintained a strong connection with Karrayili. Many of the older Karrayili students, particularly those studying in the Karrayili Class, continue to work at Mangkaja, producing highly sought-after works on a regular basis. The Mangkaja website also acknowledges the link with Karrayili when it explains that:

Mangkaja Arts is steered by a Board of Directors elected each year at the Annual General Meeting which meets regularly to discuss decisions affecting the development of the art centre. The process of decision-

¹⁵ See Mangkaja website at <http://www.mangkaja.com/about>

making is one that is taken seriously. Many of the artists are also members of the Karrayili Adult Education Council and it is the skills developed through this involvement, which has helped the Mangkaja Arts committee to work more effectively.



Figure 4: Karrayili students painting at Mangkaja. Photo courtesy of Gayle Slonim

Wangki Yupurnanupurru radio station (Wangki) is another Aboriginal organisation that was originally a Karrayili initiative. Providing community radio broadcasting to Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley, Wangki plays an important role in keeping people informed about community issues and events. Broadcasters are almost entirely local Aboriginal people, and the local community takes great pride in the fact that Wangki broadcasts their music and their stories in their way. Wangki also has a strong connection with providing services to people with disabilities, and in 2012 had a weekly radio show *Ngarlimpagurra* (a Walmajarri word meaning ‘for all of us’) which “aims to enhance the lives of people with disabilities, their carers, families and friends, by sharing information, raising awareness and providing opportunities to tell their story”¹⁶.

During my fieldwork at Karrayili one of the KC teachers, ETM, was also a broadcaster at Wangki. Once a week, as part of their Karrayili studies, the KC students would head off to Wangki, where they would share their stories, their interests and their concerns with the Fitzroy Valley people – as well as their love of country and western music.

¹⁶ See Wangki web page at <http://my.opera.com/wangki/blog/>



Figure 5: RK and PW broadcasting from Wangki (photo courtesy Gayle Slonim)



Figure 6: The Karrayili Class outside Wangki (photo courtesy Gayle Slonim)



Figure 7: DA and DS broadcasting from Wangki (photo courtesy Gayle Slonim)

Karrayili's role in the genesis of these two successful and prominent Fitzroy Crossing businesses does not go unnoticed by the Aboriginal population of the town. The older people, especially, take pride in the fact that Karrayili created and nurtured organisations that have gone on to provide Aboriginal people in the region with opportunities for employment and civic participation, while simultaneously maintaining and strengthening local culture. This was evident during interviews; when I asked about the role Karrayili has played in the Fitzroy Crossing community, participants' responses invariably included references to Wangki and Mangkaja, and in particular to the fact that these two successful businesses were started by Karrayili. Karrayili is seen as playing a valuable role in the community, and not just through the provision of training and education programs.

Employment options for Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are extremely limited, both by the number of jobs available and by local Aboriginal people's suitability for those positions that do arise. While there are a number of private businesses (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), as well as various government organisations, servicing the town, unemployment among Aboriginal residents is high (Kinnane, Farrington, Henderson-Yates, & Parker, 2010, p. 19). A large number of Aboriginal people, especially those living on outlying communities, rely on wages from the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), a government program that provides financial support for Indigenous people in remote areas who undertake training or work experience¹⁷. CDEP wages, while providing a certain level of income and, for some at least, meaningful opportunities for work and/or training, are nevertheless in the low income bracket.

¹⁷ The government's FaHCSIA website states that "The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program helps Indigenous job seekers to gain the skills, training and capabilities needed to find sustainable employment and improves the economic and social well-being of communities. CDEP is one of the key Indigenous employment programs contributing to the Australian Government's aim of halving the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment within a decade." Accessed on 9 October 2012 at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/community-development-employment-projects-cdep-program#cdep>

A large number of the potential jobs in Fitzroy Crossing are in businesses operated by Leedal Pty Ltd, an Aboriginal company part-owned by Junjuwa community. Leedal owns both pubs in the town, as well as the supermarket and caravan parks, all businesses that would be likely to have positions for unskilled workers. However, concerns have been raised that Leedal has failed to provide sufficient and appropriate positions for local, generally unskilled and often illiterate or semi-literate, Aboriginal people. In October 2011 the Kimberley Page news website¹⁸ reported that “Karrayili Adult Education Centre’s job readiness trainer Irene Jimbidie has criticized Leedal in the past because she said there was no procedure in place for placing her trainees”. The lack of opportunities for Aboriginal people who have undertaken training and further education, and who wish to remain in their communities, has been highlighted by several research projects, particularly those in the healthcare field (e.g. Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004)¹⁹.

In 2007, Leedal came under fire during a coronial inquest into the high number of alcohol-related deaths in Fitzroy Crossing over the previous five years (Hope, 2008, pp. 112-120). In a report to the inquest, it was claimed that Leedal had failed the community in regard to its stated intention of increasing Aboriginal control over alcohol consumption in the community, and had “... achieved nothing in the way of control over policies relating to alcohol and employment”²⁰. Two years later, the Chairman of Leedal, in a statement to the Senate Select Committee, made the following statement regarding employment in Fitzroy Crossing:

At present the employment and enterprise opportunities for young Indigenous people in Fitzroy Crossing are limited. Leedal has made ongoing efforts to increase the number of Indigenous employees but

¹⁸ <http://www.kimberleypage.com.au/2011/10/fitzroy-crossing-leedal-takes-in-trainees/>

¹⁹ For more quantitative data see Norris, Rae. (2001). Australian Indigenous Employment Disadvantage: What, why and where to from here? Available at <http://epubs.scu.edu.au/jesp>

²⁰ While I was unable to access the original report, this quote was reported by the ABC’s 7.30 Report, and can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s2122107.htm>

cultural and social issues, combined with a lack of effective government action and flexibility in training programs, has resulted in limited success. There is a strong need for mentoring of young trainees and employees and many come from dysfunctional families and find it difficult to work. In an attempt to fill this gap and return benefits to our communities, Leedal is investigating opportunities for the training of housing maintenance and construction workers in Fitzroy Crossing. Mentoring and safe accommodation is a critically-important ingredient for successful traineeships. (Leedal n.d.)

Here the Chairman of Leedal makes reference to some of the problems facing not just those Aboriginal people looking for work in Fitzroy Crossing, but also the businesses seeking to employ them. While employing local Aboriginal people at Karrayili is an essential part of the Centre's objectives it also presents significant challenges in terms of the high turnover of staff and how best Karrayili can support Aboriginal people in their quest for work. The lack of meaningful work opportunities also raises questions as to why local Aboriginal people would need to learn SAE literacy or undertake work-readiness training programs. While the human capital aspect of literacy and language learning is often the preferred angle of government literacy policy and programs, the prospect of a career path is rarely the key motivating factor for Karrayili students enrolling in courses.

Another factor impacting on the employability and education of Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing is mobility. Mobility in Aboriginal communities is highly prevalent, and is motivated by a number of factors including kin-based sociality, cultural obligations, seasonal employment opportunities (for example station work), seasonal movement related to the wet season, and access to services (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d.; Kinnane et al., 2010; Morphy, 2010; Prout, 2008; S Toussaint, 1989). Temporary mobility practices impact on attendance and engagement with education, and can create problems for those providing education services. In her extensive report on Indigenous temporary mobility, Prout (2008) notes that mobility practices among Indigenous Australians can reflect disinterest in or alienation from those state practices that have symbolically been expressions of colonial rule, and may be a means of expressing defiance or resistance to those areas of social control in which they have little desire to participate. It

can be challenging for non-Indigenous employers to integrate employment practices which accommodate mobility practices and the need for Aboriginal people to respond appropriately to cultural and family obligations and responsibilities, while simultaneously meeting the logistical needs of the business itself.

Kinship ties are strong in Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley and this has implications for the ways in which people there live their lives. As noted earlier, community demographics are generally defined by language groups. Language group identity is not determined simply by the language that is spoken by an individual. In a comprehensive project on the Fitzroy Valley population for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)²¹, Morphy (2010) identified that language group identity in the area is multi-faceted. It concerns ancestry, with people identifying their language group according to the family from whom they are descended. It also concerns country, and sometimes complex relationships to place. And finally while there is a definite pattern to the distribution of language groups in the Fitzroy Valley, kin networks can embrace more than one language group (Morphy, 2010). Aboriginal kinship ties in the Kimberley are powerful, and impact on all aspects of people's lives there. They shape the ways in which people interact, who they interact with, and their obligations to others (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d.; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Morphy, 2010). Kin-based sociality also keeps communities strong, by keeping people connected to one another and to their language and culture.

In recent decades the people of Fitzroy Crossing have experienced a number of serious issues that have impacted on their wellbeing, and alcohol use has played a key role in this. In common with many rural and remote towns in Australia, in particular in the Kimberley, the consumption of alcohol in Fitzroy

²¹ CAEPR was established in 1990, with its principal objective being to "undertake high-quality, independent research that will assist in furthering the social and economic development and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander people throughout Australia" (<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/>)

Crossing has over the years been at a significantly high level (Kinnane, Farrington, Henderson-Yates, & Parker, 2009). In 2008, following a spate of Indigenous youth suicides, Fitzroy Crossing was the focus of a coronial enquiry into deaths by suicide. The enquiry found that many of these deaths were “associated with chronic and high alcohol use as well as cannabis use” (Kinnane et al., 2009, p. 13). Spurred into action by the appallingly frequent and seemingly never-ending funerals being held in the community as a direct result of alcohol abuse – at one point 13 funerals in 13 months – a group of women from the Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing began to lobby for change. In 2007 they began a campaign to ban full-strength takeaway alcohol in the town. While the campaign drew support from many quarters it was not universally popular in the town, particularly as there were very few support services for alcoholics at the time. In September 2007, the Director of Liquor Licensing released his decision, finding that as of 2 October 2007 there would be a restriction on the sale of packaged liquor in the town (Kinnane et al., 2009). In effect, the only takeaway alcohol that could be bought from that date was low-strength beer.

In the weeks and months following the decision the town experienced significant levels of social division, with many claiming that the ban simply moved the ‘problem drinkers’ elsewhere (mainly to Broome), and would contribute to increased incidents of traffic accidents as people travelled to Broome and Derby to purchase alcohol to bring back to Fitzroy Crossing. In 2009 a major review of the ‘alcohol ban’ (as it was commonly known in the Fitzroy Valley) was conducted by researchers from Notre Dame University in Broome (Kinnane et al., 2009). Their main findings included:

Twelve months after the implementation of the restriction the quantitative and qualitative data reveals continuing health and social benefits of the restriction for the residents of Fitzroy Crossing and the Fitzroy Valley communities. Almost all respondents interviewed for this report now accept the need for some form of liquor restriction and no individuals wish to see a return to the previous difficulties faced by Fitzroy Crossing and its surrounding communities. Most respondents support the current restriction remaining in place, with fewer people supporting a continuation of alcohol restriction in some form which would be negotiated with the community. (Kinnane et al., 2009, p. 6)

The Aboriginal community of Fitzroy Crossing has been struggling for many years to retain their cultural identity while simultaneously dealing with some of the more destructive aspects of Kartiya life, including alcohol use, which they have taken on as their own. As concluded by the *Fitzroy Valley Alcohol Restriction Report*:

All respondents noted that, prior to the instigation of the restriction of take-away full-strength alcohol in the town of Fitzroy Crossing on October 2 2007, the community was besieged by problems associated with intoxication, including negative impacts on safety, health, education, cultural strength and economic potential (potential employment, productivity and investment). Fitzroy Crossing was over represented, nationally, in regard to incidents of attempted self-harm and actual suicide. In the twelve months since the restriction was instigated there have been significant benefits to the people of Fitzroy Crossing and related communities throughout the Fitzroy Valley in the form of reduced intoxication, increased safety, positive health gains, increased cultural activities and increased engagement with training and community development. (Kinnane et al., 2009, p. 130)

In the three years since the release of this report, the alcohol ban has remained in place and the Fitzroy Crossing community appears to continue to benefit from the changes. While people continue to drink, the town is quieter and the negative impact of alcohol use has certainly decreased, if it hasn't disappeared entirely. However, the report goes on to note that:

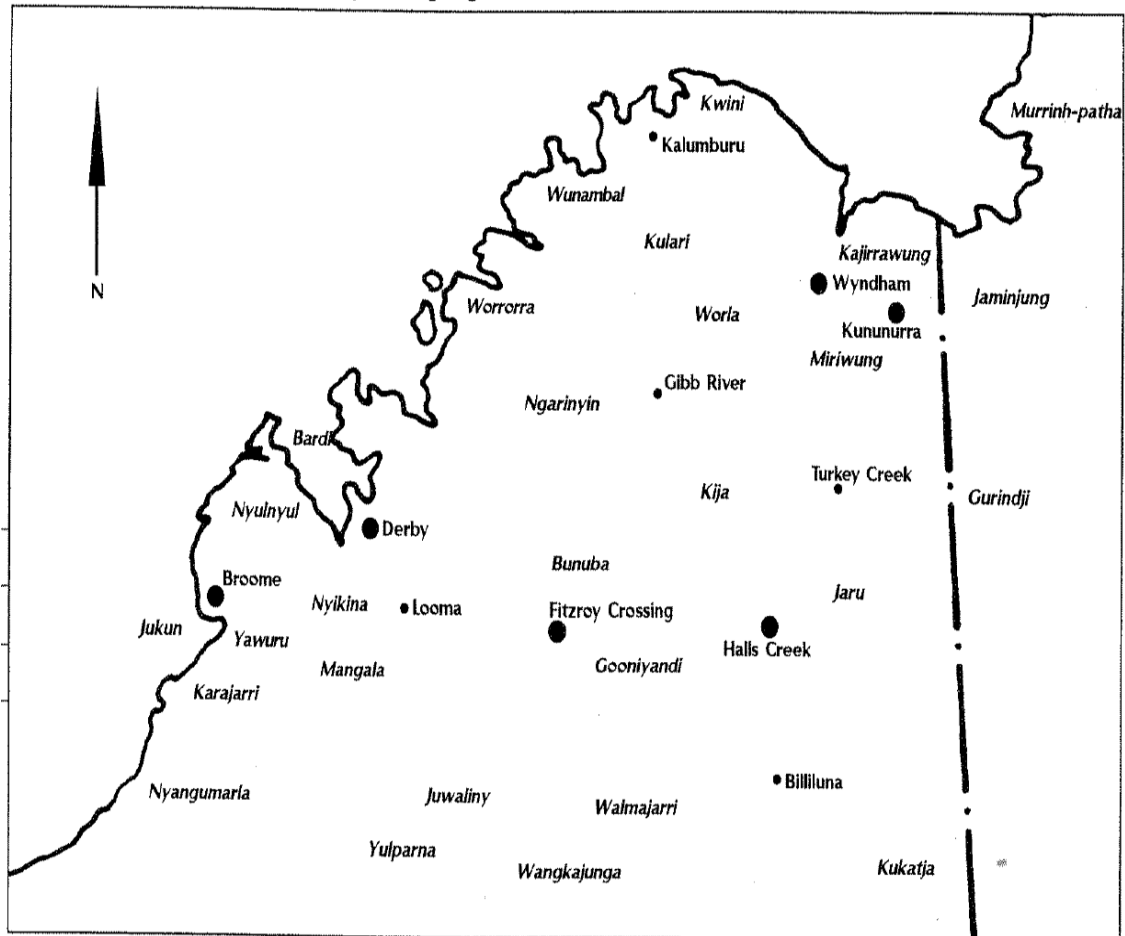
Significant gaps in support services that are needed to enable the social reconstruction of the Fitzroy Valley continue to hinder the community. There continues to be a state of under-investment in the people of the Fitzroy Valley. This gap requires the resourcing of community based organisations operating at the coal face of community development, cultural health, mental health (counselling), education, community safety (Policing) and training, to build on the window of opportunity that the restriction has created. (Kinnane et al., 2009, p. 10)

This final point highlights two issues central to this thesis: the need for increased investment in remote Indigenous communities such as Fitzroy Crossing, but also that any such investment be founded on the community's needs as identified by community based organisations operating at the coal face. This factor is fundamental to the findings of this research, and underpins the research presented in the chapters to come.

Language use in Fitzroy Crossing

By 1983 Walmajarri was the major Aboriginal language spoken in Fitzroy Crossing. According to Richards (2000), this was because the Bunuba and Gooniyandi people had had longer contact with Kartiya people such as pastoralists and police - and had therefore experienced more contact with the English language. There was also the fact that a large number of Walmajarri people had moved into the town from surrounding regions (Richards, 2000, p. 59). Richards believes the main difference between the use of these two desert languages and the two river languages is that desert languages are spoken more consistently so children often have a passive knowledge of these languages because of their increased exposure to them (Richards, 2000, p. 59).

Kimberly region language groups (languages are written in italics).



This map derived from J Hudson, 1987, *Languages of the Kimberley Region*.

Figure 8: Map of Kimberley language groups sourced from McGinty, Jimbidie et al. (2000, p. xii).

Of greater importance to any study of current language use in the Fitzroy Valley is the use of Kriol, a creole language that developed as a result of Kartiija settlement of the Kimberley region. Creole languages are found around the world, often having developed as a result of colonial conquest or commercial domination (Harris, 1991; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Sandefur, 1984; Schultz & Lavenda, 2005). Enforced contact between two distinct speech communities, such as those of the Bunuba or Walmajarri peoples and the Europeans who settled in the Kimberley in the 1800s, meant there was a need for some form of communication to take place, and a new – pidgin – language emerges. Pidgin languages are reduced languages that have no native speakers. They develop in a single generation between groups of speakers of distinct native languages who have identified a means of negotiating the communication obstacle of having no common language (Harris, 1991; Sandefur, 1984; Schultz & Lavenda, 2005). The form of pidgins commonly reflects the context of their origin, with the vocabulary taken from the language of the dominant group and the subordinate language providing syntax and phonology. The representation of gender or number of nouns, as well as tenses of verbs, tends to be lost in the development of a pidgin language. Once this pidgin language is passed on to the next generation, however, it becomes a *creole*, as it becomes the first language of that generation. In this process the creole language also tends to become more like a conventional language, with more complexity in form and distinctly recognisable rules and structures.

Around the world, creoles have historically been viewed as inferior languages, especially where they co-exist alongside the language of the dominant group. This can be seen as an extension of the context within which they developed – colonial domination (Harris, 1991; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Munro, 2000; Sandefur, 1984; Schultz & Lavenda, 2005, p. 105). Creoles tend to be viewed, not only by the colonisers but often by the colonised speakers of the creole themselves, as broken or imperfect versions of the dominant language. This perspective,

and the inequality or injustices which frequently arise as a direct result of it, can have serious consequences for creole speakers:

The situation only worsens when formal education, the key to participation in the European-dominated society, is carried out in the colonial language. Speakers of a pidgin or creole or indigenous language who remain illiterate may never be able to master the colonial tongue and may find themselves effectively barred from equal participation in the civic life of their societies (Schultz & Lavenda, 2005, p. 106).

Long held to be an inferior form of English, the creole language that developed among Aboriginal people in the Kimberley is now recognised as a true language, having a grammar system distinctly separate from that of English (Hudson, 1985; McGregor, 2004). Known as Kriol, it is spoken by the majority of Aboriginal people in the area, although often for older people it is their second, third or even fourth language. It is an accepted signifier of Aboriginality (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d.; Richards, 2000, p. 59), and is a common way of indicating whether someone is an 'outsider' or 'insider'. It is also a 'bridging' language, facilitating communication between cultures, language groups, and generations. As noted in Karrayili's cultural awareness book, "Kriol is the first language of most children in the Fitzroy Valley ... It is expected that Aboriginal people will speak Kriol with each other. It is not acceptable for Aboriginal people to speak English to each other" (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d., p. 13). Most Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing code-switch effortlessly between Kriol, Language and – for younger people at least – SAE, depending on who they are talking to, who is in the immediate vicinity, and what they are talking about.

Many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing find it difficult to recognise differences between Kriol and SAE, often thinking that they are speaking English when they are in fact speaking Kriol. This impacts on people's motivation to learn English, contributes to feelings of 'shame'²² when non-

²² The concept of 'shame' has a broader meaning for Aboriginal Australians than for non-Indigenous people. A website aimed at supporting Yamaji children from the Gascoyne/Murchison area of Western

Indigenous people don't understand them, and creates confusion for Kriol speakers.

The Fitzroy Valley District High School recognises that Kriol is the lingua franca of Aboriginal school children in the town, and incorporates Kriol to some extent in resources used at the school. For example, notices and signs, particularly around the administrative areas, are bilingual – written first in SAE, then in Kriol. Apart from limited acceptance of Kriol at the school, however, there is little recognition in the town of the fact that most Aboriginal residents in Fitzroy Crossing speak English as a second, third or even fourth language. Interpreters are not routinely provided at public meetings, public notices are generally long-winded and lexically dense (i.e., full of difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary), and public service workers are often unaware of the issues facing ESL speakers. In the past, cultural awareness training was delivered by Karrayili to various Anglo-Australian organisations and agencies in Fitzroy Crossing, but in recent years such training has not been delivered, at least not by Karrayili. This has not been due to changes in policy or program directions but has more likely been the result of a combination of lack of requests and the Centre already being under-resourced to cater for the delivery of day-to-day training needs in the community.

In 2010 one of the staff members at Karrayili showed me an example of how inappropriate written text can be for its intended audience in Fitzroy Crossing. The text was a standard letter sent, at that time, to parents by the Fitzroy Crossing District High School if their child had been involved in fighting or abusive behaviour at school. It included phrases such as:

*... preparing students to become responsible and educated citizens
valued by the broader community*

Australia explains: "Shame is more than feeling embarrassed or ashamed; for Aboriginal people it refers to being made to feel different or singled out. Shame can be a matter concerning what can be discussed and by whom, and it can be about gender differences, personal and sexual matters." See http://www.solidkids.net.au/index.php/what_is/

*... draw your attention to the following specific incident that is of concern
... retaliated to another student which caused a fight to occur
... was not the instigator but he did retaliate
... the way in which to handle altercations
... acknowledge receipt of the notice for ...*

As the staff member noted, parents with limited English literacy skills would have little chance of understanding the text given the vocabulary and style employed. In fact, when analysing the text from a linguistic/ESL perspective, it can be seen that the style and content of the letter are highly inappropriate for Aboriginal (i.e., ESL) parents in Fitzroy Crossing for a number of reasons. One immediate impression is the level of complexity of the vocabulary used. For ESL speakers, and in particular those who find reading difficult, words like 'incident', 'citizens', 'specific', 'instigator', 'retaliate' and 'altercation' are unnecessarily complex. More commonly-used synonyms could have been used instead to ensure the text was accessible to all parents, not just those with good literacy skills. This complexity is further exacerbated by the ways in which ideas in the text are presented – the final paragraph, for example, invites the parent to go into the school to discuss the matter with the writer by returning the slip at the bottom of the page, yet the slip itself indicates that it is simply an acknowledgement of having received the letter. There is also space on the slip for parents/caregivers to add comments, but it is not clear to what purpose they would do so.

Of even greater concern though is the use of legalistic, police/courtroom-type language. Many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing have had less than positive interactions with the police and incarceration rates for Indigenous residents in the town – as for Indigenous people nationwide – are high. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics notes that

The rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 15 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous prisoners at 30 June 2012, an increase in the ratio compared to 2011 (14 times higher). The highest ratio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to non-Indigenous imprisonment rates in Australia was in Western Australia (20 times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners). (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

With these statistics in mind, it can be seen that the use of legalistic terms such as ‘incident’, ‘instigator’, and ‘altercation’ is highly likely to serve to intimidate any Aboriginal parents with the literacy skills to decode the letter.

Furthermore, and to my mind this is a point of extreme importance and relevance to anyone involved in any way in Aboriginal education, such experiences with the school system reinforce parents’ own negative experiences of going to school and learning in a second language – they are made to feel inferior because they cannot understand the texts they are given to read. In this way language use can perpetuate, or even exacerbate, imbalances of power in a society. In using words and a style that are incomprehensible to the target audience, those responsible for writing or employing the letter succeed in denying most parents access to the meaning of this text. In doing so they are without doubt (further) alienating parents from the school system as they are then excluded from the circle of people who understand and are comfortable with the ‘high English’ (SAE) used. This alienation is frequently the experience of Fitzroy Crossing Aboriginal adults in their interactions with non-Indigenous society, in particular with regard to government departments. As the Chairperson of Karrayili in 2009 told me:

Yeah, well, that Kartiya can talk in English, but sometime we don't understand that English. Even with the Business. I don't understand. Even all that, just like going back to the constitution, on the community, all the policies, that come through, "Right you gonna do this now" the government say, but what you talkin bout? You got big words there, we don't know what you ... so don't blame me! You know, it's ... you come in with your big words, I can't understand them words. (WS)

Recognition of this situation was a key motivating factor for those elders who started Karrayili. Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing were, and still are, acutely aware of the need to understand ‘Kartiya English’ if they are to be able to participate more directly and meaningfully in determining their own affairs. This was again addressed this in the following interview excerpt:

That's why we grew up Karrayili, yeah. From the old people. They were saying like righto, we set up like interpreter course and things like that. That's important for us. And for ol' people. Why they're saying this, is so young people can understand language, that Kartiya language and the blackfella language. See? Both side. (WS)

It is interesting to note here that WS voices the feelings frequently expressed by Karrayili students and other Aboriginal Fitzroy Crossing residents, that the Centre is not just about teaching SAE. It is most definitely about ensuring that the needs of 'both sides' are met and it is here that Karrayili faces some of its toughest challenges. The predominance of Kriol in Fitzroy Crossing, combined with the lack of meaningful job opportunities, raises the question of why Aboriginal people there would need to learn SAE. In fact, as the research presented in the case study section of this thesis demonstrates, learning SAE and getting a job are not prime motivators for the engagement of the majority of students at Karrayili. Their reasons for attending are frequently far more culturally and socially-based.

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the key historical and social issues that have impacted on both the development of Karrayili and how (and why) it operates today. Historical factors including traditional ownership of the land, the often violent nature of early settlement by Karrayili people, the displacement of other language groups to the area, and above all the dispossession and oppression experienced by many Aboriginal people following Karrayili settlement, have all contributed to shaping not just what Karrayili is, but why it exists and more importantly what it means to the people of Fitzroy Crossing. Contemporary social and cultural issues in Fitzroy Crossing, in particular the continued imposition of mainstream ways and the ongoing efforts of Aboriginal people to negotiate ways in which they can successfully live in the two worlds, also play their part in shaping the nature of Karrayili as an Aboriginal-directed organisation.

The intention of this chapter has been to place Karrayili in a wider context, so that the issues to be explored in Part B of this thesis make sense to the reader. Before going on to take a closer look at Karrayili, however, the next chapter first locates the research for this thesis in the context of the wider literature on power, literacy and learning for Indigenous Australian adults.

Chapter 3: Reading the literature

Chapter Two revealed the very particular social, cultural, geographical and historical contexts in which Karrayili and other organisations in Fitzroy Crossing operate. This context has clearly been influenced by such factors as the sudden bringing together of different language groups, who for many thousands of years had lived very separate lives; the resultant forced sharing of land and resources; the intrusion of Kartiya ways of life and language; the expectations of assimilation into Kartiya culture (including education) and the concurrent undermining of traditional culture, language and values. These factors and others have all played their part in shaping the current context of Aboriginal life in Fitzroy Crossing.

This is the context in which Aboriginal people's lives are lived in Fitzroy Crossing, and it is a context which permeates every facet of their lives, including their learning experiences. As with any other society, the context of people's lives cannot be separated from their learning experiences; the two are inextricably linked, and it was this link between social context and literacy that led me to explore the ways in which learning at Karrayili are interwoven with the meaning and practices of people's everyday lives there.

This chapter reviews the key literature underpinning this research, beginning with an exploration of links between literacy learning and empowerment. As evidenced by the title of this thesis, for many people at Karrayili there is a sense that Karrayili somehow keeps them strong, that it supports them as individuals but also gives them strength as a community. Much has been

written about how literacy learning can empower learners and learning communities, and the first section of this chapter explores the relevant literature surrounding literacy and power.

The chapter goes on to review the theory which has proven most appropriate for this research, that of literacy as social practice. It discusses the literature on theories of literacy as social practice in general, outlining key works and ideas and providing an understanding of what literacy as social practice is. In doing so this section establishes why literacy as social practice was identified as being the most appropriate theory for making sense of the literacy and learning practices that take place at Karrayili.

The third section of this chapter narrows the focus of the literature review to the context of this research, exploring what is known about adult Indigenous literacy in Australia. It reviews key research in this area, focussing particularly on to what extent, and to what advantage, theories of literacy as social practice have contributed to understandings of how and why adult Indigenous Australians undertake literacy learning.

The final section reviews key literature on researching in an intercultural space and the ethics around power, positioning and representation. Given that I am a Kartiya researcher whose work investigates issues of culture and meaning in an Indigenous community, this section is important in that it demonstrates an understanding of some of the ethical issues this unavoidably raises.

The chapter begins, though, with the discussion at the heart of this thesis, that of literacy and empowerment.

Literacy, learning and (dis)empowerment

This thesis is about the context of literacy learning at one adult Aboriginal education centre in Australia. Yet, as noted in Chapter One, the research for this thesis took me to places well beyond simply analysing how and why this group of people learn to read and write Standard Australian English. Despite

my very best efforts to maintain a focus on literacy issues in discussions and interviews with staff and students, the conversations without fail took me to somewhere very different. Literacy, and learning English, I realised, were not much on people's minds. What seemed to be very much on people's minds, and evident in their actions, was how to negotiate their literacy learning so that power and control over their own lives was not lost in the process.

When people talk about literacy empowering learners, there is often the underlying assumption that empowerment and improved wellbeing comes about as a direct result of 'giving' learners the skills to decode (read) and code (write) texts. This viewpoint is often strongly influenced by a 'functional' approach to understanding and teaching literacy. A functional approach defines literacy in terms of the skills an individual needs in order to engage in the types of activities required for effective functioning in his or her group and community (Levine, 1986; Scribner & Cole, 1988). Within this approach there is a strong focus on how literacy is linked to economic considerations, with literacy regarded as an indicator for economic and societal development. Functional approaches largely view literacy as a technical competence, a skill which once learned will open doors and ultimately lead to 'empowerment' (W. S. Gray, 1956; Papen, 2005; C. Walton, 1996).

It is widely believed that ensuring Indigenous people have access to effective and appropriate education programs, and the improvements in literacy that should come about as a result, could make significant differences to their wellbeing and to the achievement of their aspirations (see for example Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, 2011; Australian Council for Adult Literacy, 2001; Council of Australian Governments, n.d.). Literacy is commonly viewed in this way as a powerful instrument for social change. Learners speak of the ways in which learning to read and write have transformed their lives, affording them opportunities for self and community advancement that would not otherwise have been attainable. There is also a widespread belief that providing marginalised children and adults with access to appropriate education will somehow in itself resolve the serious social and economic challenges faced by many disadvantaged people and communities.

This is the case not just in Australia but around the world – the capacity for literacy to bring about improvements in the socio-economic conditions of marginalised people in general is recognised by education and human rights organisations worldwide. In 2005, for example, then head of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, stated that:

*Literacy is a key lever of change and a practical tool of empowerment on each of the three main pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and environmental protection. Experience and research show that literacy can be a major tool for eradicating poverty, enlarging employment opportunities, advancing gender equality, improving family health, protecting the environment and promoting democratic participation*²³.

In Australia, a number of Indigenous writers have also spoken of the positive impact literacy learning (and in particular, learning SAE) can have on improving the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians (Nakata, 1999; Pearson, 2000; Sarra, 2011; Yunupingu, 1999). While recognising the complexities for a colonised people of learning the language of an imposed culture, and the need to simultaneously value and protect Indigenous cultures and languages, these Indigenous authors nevertheless state emphatically that a fundamental key to empowering Indigenous Australians lies in the domain of improved education and English literacy skills. As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, this was very much my own perception of what the learners at Karrayili ‘needed’ when I first went there to teach. I believed that if I could teach them the English they needed for effective communication, whether written or oral, they would be empowered through having a greater ability to negotiate with the government agencies and various organisations responsible for making so many of the decisions that directly affect Aboriginal people’s lives.

But what evidence is there that improvements in adult literacy skills in and of themselves will automatically empower people and improve their wellbeing in

²³ Accessed 12 July 2011 at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sgsm10065.doc.htm>

other areas? In fact, the evidence would appear to suggest otherwise (Balatti, Black, & Falk, 2006; Tett, Hamilton, & Crowther, 2012). As noted in a major NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) report, "... the available evidence suggests that technical skills such as literacy and numeracy (human capital) are necessary, but usually insufficient to ensure that course participation impacts on the socioeconomic wellbeing of the students" (Balatti et al., 2006, p. 11). In its emphasis on teaching the technical skills associated with individuals making a productive contribution to the workings of society, functional literacy in particular has been criticised as being reductionist in nature. Citing the work of Kozol (1985), Lankshear (1986) argues that functional literacy "reduces humans to the status of mere means ... it is antihumane in denying the power of literacy to enable people to discover, express, and enhance their humanness" (1986, p.2). Rather than empowering learners, there is substantial evidence that where the provision of education opportunities is narrowly conceived (as with functional literacy), inappropriate, or does not serve the needs of the learners as perceived by them, then the effect can be one of *disempowerment*, rather than empowerment (Janks, 2010). This is particularly relevant in countries such as Australia, where there is a history of disempowerment and dispossession through colonisation, and where the language of learning is that of the dominant colonising culture.

The impact of colonisation on Indigenous education in Australia has been written about widely, with a number of authors noting a correlation between approaches to Indigenous education and state policies regarding Indigenous Australians at the time (Hughes, 1995; McConaghy, 2000; Sarra, 2011; C Walton, 1993; Welch, 1988). McConaghy (2000), for example, identifies four key 'traditions' within Indigenous education in Australia: paternalistic welfarism following settlement; assimilationism, which institutionalised colonialism; cultural relativism, which included more emphasis on cultural sensitivity and tolerance; and radicalism (elsewhere identified as 'self-determination', e.g. Welch 1988). Furthermore, McConaghy asserts that all four traditions are forms of culturalism, where culture is privileged over other issues such as policy, curriculum and pedagogy (2000), and that regardless

of the policy approach of the time, state policy towards Indigenous education in Australia has always had – and continues to have – an assimilationist agenda. The latter claim is echoed in other significant works which argue that state ideologies have legitimated oppressive, exploitative and racist policies and practices in colonised Australia (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b; J. Gray & Beresford, 2008; Hughes, 1995; Welch, 1988).

The claim made by these authors that government policies in Australia have, in their colonialist approaches, ensured that Indigenous education has remained assimilationist and ultimately aimed at colonial mimicry, or making Indigenous Australians more like the dominant colonial culture (Hughes, 1995; McConaghy, 2000; Welch, 1988), is of particular relevance to this thesis. In many cases the purposes of education for Indigenous people as designed and delivered by non-Indigenous people has been to enable them to function in ‘mainstream’ Australian society *as non-Indigenous people do*. This assimilationist approach to Indigenous literacy has perpetuated a deficit view, implying that “Indigenous adults are, educationally speaking, underdeveloped versions of the non-Indigenous majority, requiring a ‘top up’ to bring them to ‘our’ level” (B Boughton & Durnan, 2004, p. 61). Education, when viewed through the lens of colonialism, could be seen to serve as an instrument by which Indigenous Australians are socialised into accepting inferior status, power and wealth (Welch, 1988). Although education in itself may be considered to be empowering, when the opportunities it is offering are in fact reinforcing an inequitable power balance through an assimilationist agenda then its capacity to empower needs to be questioned.

As well as being assimilationist, Australia’s colonialist approach to Indigenous education disempowers its Indigenous learners in a number of other ways. The lack of any real consultation with Indigenous Australians regarding education curricula, or the particular educational needs or aspirations of various Indigenous groups around Australia, is one example. This lack of consultation, and the subsequent imposition of a curriculum that represents the views and values of one particular culture, has resulted in

Aboriginal Australians having the debatable 'freedom' to choose from a set of variables imposed by the dominant culture (Hughes, 1995; Welch, 1988).

In her discussion of literacy and power more generally, Janks draws similar conclusions, noting that access (or not) to literacy in the dominant language can be a "powerful means of maintaining and reproducing relations of domination" (2010, p.23). And yet, if learners are denied access to the language of power, this can equally work to perpetuate any issues of marginalisation. Janks refers to this as the 'access paradox', and it is a dilemma facing anyone working in the field of Indigenous adult education in Australia (Nakata, 2003).

The increased bureaucratisation of Indigenous adult education is another way in which a colonialist approach to policy design and administration of programs disempowers learners and creates problems for those responsible for delivering programs. Since the 1980s, Indigenous education has become increasingly bureaucratised (McConaghy, 2000), making it difficult for educators and managers to administer appropriate and effective training to adults in remote areas. In addition, policies and regulations change with alarming frequency. In the Northern Territory, for example, between 1976 and 1984 there were seven major organisational restructurings of Indigenous adult education, with an average major change every two years in a twenty-year period (McConaghy, 2000, p.174). The complexities of the administration of courses, and the ever changing policies and regulations involved, seriously undermine the work of adult educators.

Any discussion around the empowerment of Aboriginal learners needs to include an awareness of whose (or which) literacies are being discussed. Literacy, it is important to remember, is determined by the literate. In his description of the 'double power' he has achieved through being bidialectal and bicultural, Mandawuy Yunupingu (1999), educator and the first Aboriginal school principal in Australia, raises some key issues around literacy and power. In talking about his experiences, Yunupingu asks the reader to consider the following questions:

- When am I literate?
- How am I literate?
- Why am I literate?
- Who decides if I am literate? (1999, pp.1-2)

This final question is of particular importance with regard to issues of literacy and power. As well as having the potential to empower learners, literacy programs and classes can also reinforce disempowerment through unequal power relations in the classroom, failure to consult learners regarding their needs or desires, or a lack of acknowledgement and valuing of learners' other skills (for example skills in languages other than English). As Brian Street notes:

Many literacy practices can be used for control and to deny empowerment; merely increasing the literacy statistics is not on its own going to lead to empowerment. Making 'more literacy' available does not necessarily mean that there is 'more power' available to the newly literates (1996, p. 9).

It is important that literacy programs for Indigenous learners look at the ways in which their students are empowered *within* the classroom, as well as how their learning has the potential to empower them once the learning is complete. Who decides lesson content, or course objectives? How is learning meaningful to the learners, and to what extent are they consulted with regard to how they are taught? A failure to consider these questions can result in 'hidden power relations' in our pedagogies and classroom practices (Street, 1996), and these in turn perpetuate power inequities between the literate and those acquiring or enhancing their literacy skills (McMullen, 2006).

The question of 'who decides' is central to issues of autonomy for marginalised learners. It is interesting to note, too, that references in the literature to Indigenous definitions and understandings of literacy are scarce. In his extensive review of literacy and education, Freebody (2007) notes that Australian research into literacy and education has all but failed to

acknowledge Indigenous languages and literacy. Freebody claims that “[t]his silence is a symptom of a particular history of educational practices and policies that is perpetuated with each successive generation of literacy educators, scholars, and researchers” (2007, p. 2), a claim of significance to those involved in Indigenous literacy and training, particularly in remote Australia. Freebody goes on to give an example of how Indigenous artwork, for example, is often an expression of literacy:

Even such a light consideration as this should cause us to reflect next time we hear Indigenous Australian cultures characterised as ‘non-literate’ or ‘illiterate’ or ‘purely oral cultures’. We are also reminded that what passes for effective literacy education can differ depending on the culture, history and technologies of social groups, and that our centuries-long focus on teaching and researching English in print, however rich and challenging that project has been, represents only one possible scholarly tradition. Moreover, it is a tradition that has suited and advanced the interests of some groups over others (2007, p. 3).

The questions raised by this quote, as to whose literacies are under discussion and why, are central to this research and relevant to any discussion of national levels of literacy. When measuring or discussing ‘Aboriginal literacy’ in Australia the literature tends to presume one very specific form of literacy – written SAE – is understood yet the relevance of this to the learners themselves may be very different from that assumed by the dominant language group who are measuring their abilities. Indigenous or First World peoples internationally tend to take a more holistic approach to interpreting literacy (Eady et al., 2010; Philpott & Nesbit, 2010; Smylie, Williams, & Cooper, 2006). For many Indigenous individuals and communities, gaining literacy skills is about far more than steps on a career path – it can be about a range of issues that are pivotal to community wellbeing, such as cultural identity, community development, language preservation, and the struggle for land rights and self-determination (Battiste, 2008; Eady et al., 2010; Inge, Kral & Falk, 2004). The literature base on this subject in Australia is scant.

All of the above are ways in which many current approaches to literacy learning in Australia can be seen to effectively *disempower* marginalised

learners, rather than empowering them. But what are the elements of effective adult teaching and learning that can, as the Karrayili learners so frequently told me, “make us strong”? Literacy learning for Indigenous and marginalized peoples is an extremely complex area, with no easy answers in terms of policy or pedagogy. However, a number of reports have identified ‘best practice’ for Indigenous training and education (B Boughton & Durnan, 1997a; Miller 2005). A major study for NCVET, for example, found that the following key factors played a major role in ensuring successful outcomes for Indigenous learners:

- community ownership and involvement
- the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- the establishment of ‘true’ partnerships
- flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- quality staff and committed advocacy, and
- extensive student support services (Miller 2005, p. 18).

Fundamental to true empowerment of Indigenous learners, especially those in remote areas, is the issue of community ownership and involvement, of learners perceiving that their learning is precisely that – *theirs*. Community Based Education (CBE) is one way in which learners can experience greater control over and ownership of their learning. CBE has been strongly influenced by the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970; 1973), which emphasized an understanding of literacies as being situated within social and cultural practices and discourses, pointing to the central role of power and promoting literacy as a tool through which individuals can empower themselves and reshape their lives (Paulo Freire, 1970; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003, p. 4). ‘Community-based education’ can be differentiated from ‘community education’ by its emphasis on the need to address the impact of colonisation on Indigenous and marginalised peoples. This it sets out to achieve in part by ensuring that participants are actively involved in educational initiatives and play an active role in determining policy and directions of programs. There is also a strong emphasis within community-

based education on promoting self-determination (Corson, 1999; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; May, 1999).

A successful example of community-based education in Indigenous Australia has been the various 'Ranger' programs in remote regions, especially in the Northern Territory and northern regions of Western Australia. Frequently generated by participants themselves, these programs are built around enabling Indigenous people, particularly men, to take part in activities designed to 'look after country'. While not specifically having a literacy focus, the programs nevertheless engage participants in a variety of learning activities that provide opportunities for improving a wide range of skills areas, including reading and writing. The success and sustainability of Ranger programs in Australia are, however dependent on a number of factors, both external and internal, and funding is often difficult to secure and maintain (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). Chapter Seven describes such a program at Karrayili, exploring the benefits to participants as well as some of the difficulties for staff and students in attempting to set up and sustain a Ranger program at a Fitzroy Valley community.

The community-based approach to providing adult education for Indigenous learners was firmly endorsed by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in 1991. The RCIADIC was established in October 1997 in response to the large number of Indigenous deaths in custody in preceding years – 99 deaths in just under ten years (B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b). Its findings drew strong parallels between the disempowerment of Indigenous Australians through colonisation and the disadvantages and discrimination they were now facing. Among its recommendations to government were a number which supported a stronger focus on Aboriginal community-controlled education, where Aboriginal people would have the opportunity to provide education in culturally-appropriate ways. It found that critical to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage would be the decision by government to allow Aboriginal people to make decisions about matters affecting themselves and their communities. The Commission stated that:

... the elimination of disadvantage requires an end of domination and an empowerment of Aboriginal people; that control of their lives, of their communities must be returned to Aboriginal hands ... Too often policies are propounded, programmes put forward, [and] assistance offered in a form which has largely been determined in the bureaucracies of the departments concerned. (in B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b, p. 7)

And yet it appears that mainstream education providers are, on the whole, failing to take into account the wealth of information indicating that Indigenous engagement and success in adult learning, particularly in remote areas, will only come about when the learners have autonomy and control over their learning. Key research (Bob Boughton, 1998; B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b; Geraldine Castleton, 2002b; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012) suggests that there is a considerable gap between the objectives of mainstream education and training and those of Indigenous learners in remote contexts. As noted in a review of the implementation of the recommendations of the RCIADIC in relation to Aboriginal community-controlled adult education, provided to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS),

The Commission concluded that the mainstream education systems had been either unable or unwilling to accommodate many of the values, attitudes, codes and institutions of Aboriginal society. As a result, Aboriginal participation and achievement in education, as defined by the wider Australian society, had been limited and this in turn limited the real choices available to people. (B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b, p. 15)

It is now some fifteen years since the RCIADIC and the review quoted above, yet it would seem that little has changed. Fogarty and Schwab, for example, note in a recent CAEPR working paper on Indigenous literacy policy that "... this [mix of generic and place-based pedagogy] is being increasingly ignored by policy makers and bureaucrats in favour of a test-driven agenda" (2012, p. 11). In Australia, many adult literacy programs remain closely tied to economic outcomes, with little regard for the fundamental need for Aboriginal people to have control over their own learning.

Aboriginal-controlled education centres can offer learners, to some extent, a learning context which reflects their everyday lives and in which they feel that they have some control over the environment in which they are learning (May, 1999). Even with education programs that provide learners with greater control of their learning, however, it should be recognised that the state ultimately retains control through funding and accreditation mechanisms. As noted by Hughes (1995), this results in a political paradox whereby access to self-determination for Aboriginal-controlled or directed education centres remains a structure of the state – ‘self-determination’ is in fact a construct defined and controlled by state mechanisms. While asserting the autonomy of Indigenous people, policies of self-determination that are ‘given’ by the state in fact deny autonomy and to some extent perpetuate a colonial relationship (Hughes, 1995, p.382).

Empowerment through literacy can take many forms, and is not necessarily restricted to the mastering of language skills. Many learners, such as those at Karrayili, are ‘made strong’ through a wide range of factors related to their engagement with their education, not simply through learning to read and write in English. Literacy practices cannot be understood in isolation from issues of social and cultural practices and cultural identity. Much of the literature on ‘best practice’ agrees that key to successful outcomes are the incorporation and recognition of Indigenous knowledges and identities (B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; McGlusky & Thaker, 2006; Schwab & Sutherland, 2001).

Issues of identity are complex and multi-layered, but are of particular relevance to any exploration of language and literacy. It is important, however, to note here that in talking about identity I am not presuming the existence of an ‘Indigenous identity’. Students in all contexts bring diverse identities with them to the classroom, and Indigenous learners are no exception. Identity can be thought of as “one’s conception of self in the world” (LaBelle, 2011, p.174), but our conception of self can vary depending on contextual factors such as our relationships and social roles at any one particular time. This means that we all have multiple identities that are

dynamic, rather than fixed, and this is particularly true with regard to language use (Janks, 2010; LaBelle, 2011). We vary, for example, the words we use, our intonation patterns, and our use of discourse conventions depending on who we are communicating with and why. Through our language use we identify with our social identities (Wenger, 1998) and group, or collective, identities, that establish an 'us' (Janks, 2010; LaBelle, 2011) and enable us to feel part of a social group.

In this way, language and power are inextricably tied to issues of identity, and this is particularly true for colonised people who have suffered loss or suppression of traditional languages. The imposition of one culture's language upon another, or 'linguistic imperialism', is claimed to frequently coincide with heightened power for the linguistically dominant group and loss of status for speakers of the minority language(s) (LaBelle, 2011, p.202). In Australia, the use of Standard Australian English for language standardisation (and this is a good time to ask, 'standard' for whom?) is a good example of a "social process used to naturalise the construction of a national language and a collective identity" (Janks, 2010, p.38). The 'standard' language is invariably that approved of or spoken by the dominant members of society. Many Indigenous Australians, and particularly those living in remote areas, do not have equal access to this language, or this particular 'collective identity', and the idea of a 'standard' language therefore hides issues of inequality and inequity.

Feeling excluded from the majority group can lead to feelings of disempowerment, especially when a lack of access to the dominant language results in diminished access to education, legal and governmental services. Conversely, however, the unifying effect of establishing a collective identity and shared language use can be extremely inclusive and empowering. Of course, as noted earlier the notion of a 'collective identity' is not fixed, but rather is fluid and profoundly influenced by the discourses and contexts within which we live (Janks, 2010).

To be successful, literacy programs need to not only acknowledge issues of learner identities but incorporate them at a fundamental level. This also requires them to recognise the real and specific local needs of the community, reflecting the cultural context and everyday lives of participants. This is particularly true regarding the very locally-specific needs of remote communities, which may not be fully understood by those unfamiliar with this particular context. Michael Christie refers to this point in his claim that policy and government practice have failed to ensure that remote education is successful largely because of two key reasons: that 'remoteness' in this instance implies lack; and that 'justice' implies sameness rather than diversity, polyvocality, and situated judgement (2005, p. 5).

This latter point supports the need for learning to be relevant and meaningful to the learners, allowing the learners and communities to determine for themselves what and how they will learn. This approach is echoed in research into literacy and education for Indigenous adults in other colonised countries, with extensive research in Canada coming to the same conclusions (see for example E. Antone & Cordoba, 2005; E. M. Antone, 2000; Smylie et al., 2006). In their report of the Aboriginal content of a Canadian conference on Literacy and health, for example, Smylie et al state that "Indigenous conceptualizations of literacy need to build on Indigenous understanding and perspectives" (2006, p. S21).

Indeed, when Indigenous Australian students perceive that their learning is not meeting their needs or expectations, they may well empower themselves through demonstrating resistance to education, often through non-attendance. Indigenous resistance to education has been addressed by several education researchers in Australia (Beresford et al., 2012; J. Gray & Beresford, 2008; Groome & Hamilton, 1995). Non-attendance, they note, can be the outcome of a number of factors, including peer pressure and a means by which students may protect themselves against their own perceived failure within the school system (Groome & Hamilton, 1995). It can also, however, be seen as a counter-challenge to a perception of education as the domain of whites (J. Gray & Beresford, 2008). While it is clear that

resistance to education is complex and multi-layered, these studies indicate that there is a correlation between the colonialist, assimilationist education policies directed towards Aboriginal Australians (as noted earlier in this chapter) and resistance to education through non-attendance.

In addressing this issue and others around Indigenous education, many Indigenous Australians believe that while Western education, including the learning of SAE literacy skills, is desirable, it should complement rather than override traditional culture and learning, in the process acknowledging and providing a space for difference and diversity (Arbon, 1998; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Foster & Beddie, 2005; Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004; Nakata, 1999). Where literacy learning is not aligned to community identities, needs and expectations, it is frequently meaningless, and therefore destined to fail. In remote areas, in particular, it is the community itself which best understands its needs and aspirations. As Christie notes in his discussion of education practices in very remote areas of the Northern Territory:

The bureaucrats and academics who argue about relative merits of remoteness indices as measures of disadvantage, become blind to the ways in which solutions to community problems (whether they be remote, rural or urban) emerge from a community knowing its history, its strengths and its goals, and being able to work collaboratively with government to realise them. (2005, p. 4)

True empowerment through literacy comes about when, as identified by the 'best practices' literature, Indigenous Australians are fully engaged in their learning, when they are fully involved in decision-making regarding policy, programs and pedagogy, and when their learning is meaningful according to community and individual values and beliefs. In other words, when they have control over their learning practices.

Such control is demonstrated in a number of ways by what happens at Karrayili. My first teaching experience at Karrayili, as described in Chapter One, illustrates how the KCs made their own decisions about their learning, in the process gently letting me know that I was not their boss. What I had believed to be their first lesson in effect became *my* first lesson, the lesson

being that I was there to work *with* them, not to tell them what to do. The case study analysis in Part B of this thesis further illustrates the ways in which Karrayili students are active participants in – rather than passive recipients of – their learning, and highlights the ways in which having control over their learning works to ‘make them strong’.

Much has been written about ‘best practice’ in Indigenous adult education in theory, but little research has exemplified how that actually works (as well as how it creates problems) on the ground. Part of the aim of this thesis is to make a contribution in this area, by taking an ethnographic, in-depth approach to understanding what happens at this one Aboriginal education centre. The next part of this chapter explores the theory behind such an approach.

Literacy as social practice

In common with other countries, literacy in Australia – including literacy in Standard Australian English (SAE) for Indigenous Australians – has traditionally, though not exclusively, been understood through the lens of functional literacy. Under a ‘functional literacy’ framework there is little acknowledgement of the relationship between literacy and the culture or society within which it is used; instead the value of literacy lies largely in its assumed economic benefits. (W. S. Gray, 1956, p. 24; Papen, 2005, p. 9; C. Walton, 1996, pp. 11-12). Many of the opportunities for adult Indigenous Australians to improve their SAE literacy skills continue to be closely tied to functional literacy and aspects of human capital. In Australia, as in other First World countries, adult literacy policy has traditionally centred on the promotion of human capital. That is, the focus has primarily been on developing an individual’s literacy skills in order to effect a correlating increase in their ability to find work, and to therefore make a productive contribution to the economy (Balatti et al., 2006; G Castleton & McDonald, 2002; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). As noted by Balatti et al, “For more than a decade ... the overriding aim from the Australian Government’s perspective

has been to develop literacy and numeracy skills for jobs and to improve the economic competitiveness of the nation in a globalised economy” (2006, p. 9). Later chapters of this thesis question the relevance of this approach to Indigenous learners, especially those in remote areas for whom job opportunities are few and far between.

The functional approach dominated thinking around literacy learning and teaching from the post-World War II era until the early 1980s. Recent decades, however, have seen the global focus of literacy teaching and research shift towards a stronger emphasis on the relationships between literacy learning, social practices and communities. Thinking about literacy less in terms of the mechanical skills of reading and writing, and more about the ways in which they are used and the contexts within which they are used, has increasingly dominated understandings of literacy in recent years. Literacy is now thought of more in terms of theories such as literacy within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and literacy as social practice (J. Gee, 1996; Levine, 1986; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Papen, 2005; Street, 2003). In Australia research has focused heavily on multiliteracies (Bill Cope & Kalantzis, 1998) and literacy in the health care field (Inge Kral, 2009; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003).

The concept of literacy now encompasses a much broader meaning, including what literacy means to people and what it can do to change their lives. Central to this shift, and of relevance to literacy practices at Karrayili, has been the emergence and strengthening of thinking around the concept of literacy viewed as social practice.

Following on from the earlier work of anthropologists and linguists such as Shirley Brice Heath (1980, 1983) and largely informed by ethnographic research projects, this approach to understanding literacy argued that literacy cannot be viewed separately from the social contexts in which it takes place. It is seen as something people *do* as well as know, as an activity rather than an attribute, and emphasis is placed on aspects of learning such as purpose and meaning. Key to social practice theory is the recognition that literacy is

not a static concept, that it is not a concrete, bounded entity relevant to all learners in the same ways. Instead, social practice theory recognises that literacy is situated in particular cultural and historical contexts, and that these contexts have crucial relevance to the reasons why different people learn literacy and what it means to them to do so (David. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; J. Gee, nd; Papen, 2005; Street, 1984; Street, 2003). Research from this field positions literacy as a “purposeful, context-specific and socially organised practice” (I. Kral & Schwab, 2003, p. 4).

Theories of literacy as social practice originated in Britain, and were strongly influenced by the early work of anthropologist Brian Street and the challenges to conventional understandings of literacy he posed (Street, 1984). One of the founders of literacy as social practice theory, Street was the first to identify a distinction between ‘literacy events’, a term coined by Heath to refer to situations in which people engage with reading and writing, and ‘literacy practices’, which Street defined as the “broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street, 2000). This was an important distinction, as for the first time literacy was seen to be situated in a broader cultural and social context, one which encompassed local differences and diversity.

Street also differentiated between ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ theories of literacy, a key distinction within the context of this study, as will be seen in later chapters. Street defined autonomous literacy as having an underlying assumption that literacy in itself will impact on other social and cognitive practices²⁴. Autonomous literacy claims that introducing literacy to poor, illiterate, marginalised people will automatically lead to improved wellbeing without the need to account for the social and economic conditions that contributed to people’s ‘illiteracy’ in the first place. The ideological model of

²⁴ ‘Autonomous’ literacy in this context is not to be confused with ‘learner autonomy’, a key phrase in foreign or second language education, which generally refers to the idea that learners take greater control of their own learning. In fact, ‘learner autonomy’ is almost the ideological opposite of ‘autonomous literacy’. Much has been written about learner autonomy – for an examination of a range of issues involved see (Cotterall & Crabbe, 1999)

literacy, on the other hand, is more culturally sensitive. It views literacy as a social practice, rather than a technical and neutral skill. According to this model it is not valid to suggest that literacy can be 'given' neutrally, with its social effects appearing somewhat magically as a direct result. It is only when social context and meaning are taken into account that literacy has the possibility to empower people and communities (Street, 2003).

A number of other influential literacy theorists emerged at this time, each with a social practice perspective but each offering their own contributions to the development of the theory. James Paul Gee, an American sociolinguist who produced significant works on literacy from the late 1980s, had a strong focus on discourse analysis and identity perspectives. Gee contributed to New Literacy Studies largely through his analysis of the meaning of language use within what he termed 'Discourse communities' (1996; J. P. Gee, 2003). Discourse, Gee argued, is always socially constructed, never neutral, and as such the literacies employed in discourse are multiple, dynamic, and inherently connected to social practices. David Barton (1994) has published widely since the early 1990s, with a strong focus on the anthropology of writing. He has also published works with colleagues Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic, including the influential *Situated Literacies* (2000). The work of these and other literacy researchers, anthropologists and sociolinguists have become known collectively as the New Literacy Studies (NLS).

As the scope of literacy as social practice studies increased, theories broadened to acknowledge and account for our rapidly changing and globalising world. Multiliteracies theory, in particular, emerged and developed within the field of New Literacy Studies as a way of both making sense of changing approaches to literacy, and of determining appropriate ways to incorporate them into literacy teaching and learning. Given the rapid technological advances and subsequent globalisation seen in recent decades, one of the key ways in which multiliteracies has advanced the work of earlier NLS research is in its focus on the impact of globalisation on societies, and specifically on the diversification of what constitutes the English language.

A recurring phrase in the multiliteracies literature is 'local diversity and global connectedness' (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, & Gee, 1996; B Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and central to the concept of multiliteracies is the need to value the *local* literacies that are specific to certain contexts or communities. A good example of this can be found in Wignell's description of the development of workplace literacy training materials for Aboriginal workers at a remote mine site in the Kimberley. As Wignell discovered, understanding the local context was vital in developing a successful program, and the author makes a plea for negotiated, local models of training, particularly for remote areas (Wignell, 1999). In common with critical literacy theories, multiliteracies theory recognises the perpetuation of inequitable power relations that exists when literacy teaching reflects only the types of literacies representative of the dominant society (Street, 1995).

Development of multiliteracies theory was also influenced by the shape of social change (The New London Group, 1996). Recent decades have seen radical changes taking place in our public and private lives; in the ways we work, communicate our ideas, and interact as members of families and communities. Social change, particularly with regard to employment, is extremely relevant to Aboriginal literacy learners and educators in Australia today because of the strong policy focus on vocational education and training (VET). VET is the main alternative to university for those wishing to enter into further education, and while it does offer basic skills training for social and community participation (aimed mainly at new migrants) its main focus is on training adults to participate in the workforce. As such VET students can undertake a range of courses that provide skills and nationally recognised qualifications for all types of employment. VET courses have proven, for a number of reasons, to be popular with Aboriginal people, and over the past ten years or so there has been a significant rise in the percentage of VET students identifying as Indigenous. Statistics indicate that Indigenous people participate in VET programs and courses at considerably higher rates than do non-Indigenous Australians, the reverse of what is happening in every other education sector (B Boughton & Durnan, 2004; J. Gray & Beresford, 2008).

While there is little evidence detailing Aboriginal students' reasons for attending such courses (and it should be recognised that not all students will be participating for employment-related reasons), the fact that a significant number of Aboriginal literacy learners will be participating in VET programs with a strong focus on employment skills is an important consideration when evaluating the relevance of multiliteracies and social change for Aboriginal learners. Multiliteracies theory recognises that the changing nature of work and workplace systems, and the corresponding changes to workplace language, means that educators need to consider more carefully the implications of their teaching in relation to learners going on to achieve a productive working life. Effective functioning in the workplace depends increasingly on informal oral and interpersonal discourse, for example, and workers are increasingly expected to adapt to constant change; thinking and speaking for themselves and learning how to learn (The New London Group, 1996). The New London Group made the following crucial point in this regard:

Replication of corporate culture demands assimilation to mainstream norms that only really works if one already speaks the language of the mainstream. If one is not comfortably a part of the culture and discourses of the mainstream, it is even harder to get into networks that operate informally than it was to enter into the old discourses of formality. (1996, p. 6)

It is not difficult to imagine the consequences for many Aboriginal people, who may be already marginalised and disadvantaged within mainstream Australian society, of such heightened exclusivity in the workplace. Multiliteracies pedagogy argues that the teacher's role is not merely to address such potential barriers by teaching the new language of work, but to encourage in their students the capacity to "speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 7).

Perhaps though the most significant contribution of multiliteracies theory to understandings of Indigenous literacy is the importance it places on the recognition and valuing of cultural and linguistic differences. This question of

difference is an important one, and has been raised increasingly by Indigenous spokespersons and academics in recent years (Nakata & Nakata, 2002, p. 147). Past efforts to achieve equity for Indigenous Australians have tended to focus on measurable outcomes, and have resulted in common understandings of 'equity' being confused with 'treating everybody the same' (B Boughton & Durnan, 2004, p. 62). In certain contexts, of course, the desire for 'sameness' is admirable – for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to face the same life expectancy or infant mortality rates, for example. Within the field of education, however, the failure to recognise that people are not the same – that they have different needs, experiences, desires and aspirations – compromises learners' access to choice and self-determination, and rather than bringing about equitable conditions and outcomes it in fact does the opposite; it discriminates against the very people it seeks to support (B Boughton & Durnan, 2004; Nakata & Nakata, 2002, p. 147). Only by acknowledging, respecting and catering for difference can the real needs of learners be met and effective learning take place.

Recognising and allowing for cultural and linguistic diversity does not deny that learning and being able to use English to a certain standard is key to learners in Australia acquiring a level of education that will bring about empowerment and increased self-determination. Policy makers, educators, community members, students and parents are among those calling for improved standards of English use by Aboriginal learners, recognising that good use of English is the foundation on which other strengths in mainstream Australian society may be built. In promoting the recognition and inclusion of diverse and multiple foci for literacy learners, however, multiliteracies pedagogy “develops the knowledge, skills and competence necessary to maximise individual opportunities in the complex cross-cultural and cross-contextual negotiations that are required in new times” (Nakata & Nakata, 2002, p. 148). In not only acknowledging difference, but in ensuring it is valued and integrated into curricula content, multiliteracies has the potential to bring about real improvements in literacy outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata has worked in the field of Indigenous education for almost a quarter of a century. In his paper presented at the Eighth International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference in 2002, Nakata argued that multiliteracies is a useful approach for Indigenous learners, largely because of its focus on the links between content, teaching strategies, the learner and outcomes. Importantly it encourages a shift in perceptions of the teacher's role, redefining the teacher-learner relationship and how lesson content, classroom pedagogy and outcomes are to be determined. In particular Nakata notes the limitations implicit in the 'transition' model of Indigenous education – transition from traditional language to English, from Aboriginal English to Standard Australian English, from one set of cultural experiences to another. Instead, Nakata suggests, multiliteracies creates the conditions for a more inclusive approach to Indigenous education. Rather than changing learners' repertoires (in that they leave behind one set of circumstances in order to move on to the next, as in the transition model), multiliteracies allows for learners' repertoires to be *extended*. The outcome of such literacy learning will be learners with a range of repertoires, with which they are able to move successfully in and out of different cultural, social and workplace contexts (Nakata & Nakata, 2002, p. 149).

Recognition of the role played by context in literacy learning and practices is one of the foundations of theories of literacy as social practice. Another common aspect of much of the research into literacy as social practice has been its strong focus on the use of ethnographic research principles. Influenced by Street's early fieldwork on literacy practices in an Iranian village (Shirley Brice Heath & Street, 2008; Street, 1995) and Heath's ethnographic research into children's language use and development in two American communities during the desegregation era (Shirley Brice Heath, 1983; Shirley Brice Heath & Street, 2008), this focus has remained strong in a range of key research studies into social literacy practices (D Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Papen, 2005; Scribner & Cole, 1988; Street, 1995, 2001).

This commitment to ethnographic research methodologies has complemented and strengthened the social practice aspect of the theory, as it allows the complexity of literacy learning and literacy practices within particular and often highly localised contexts to be acknowledged and explored. In ethnographies literacy practices are described as part of a social whole, rather than as decontextualized, technical skills, and accounts of literacy practices and the social contexts within which they exist are able to be closely detailed (Street, 1995). In doing so, ethnographic research into literacy practices frequently explores associations between literacy, power, and notions of self and identity (Papen, 2005; Street, 1995).

This focus on issues of social justice is particularly true of critical ethnography, which has a much stronger focus than conventional ethnography on issues of power imbalances, hidden agendas, and assumptions that may work to hide social inequities (Anderson, 1989; Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography, like other forms of ethnographic research, examines culture, knowledge, and action in a reflexive manner, but while conventional ethnography 'describes what is', critical ethnography 'asks what could be' (Thomas, 1993, p.4). It is often seen as conventional ethnography with a political, emancipatory purpose, interested in how everyday events are part of broader social processes of control and domination (Thomas, 1993).

This interest in issues of social justice has led to critical ethnography, even more so than conventional ethnography, being accused of being value-laden and lacking in validity. Unlike more positivist research, critical ethnographies can appear to lack objectivity and neutrality. Rather than refuting these claims, critical ethnographers argue that to come from an openly ideological, value laden research base is entirely appropriate for explorations of inequality and inequity in society (Anderson, 1989; Lather, 1986; Thomas, 1993). Where validity in critical ethnographies becomes crucial, however, is in the need to ensure that personal bias and enthusiasm on the part of the researcher does not result in distortion of the evidence collected (Lather, 1986; Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnographers must therefore be rigorous in

their application of appropriate methods and methodologies, in particular with regard to reflexivity and thorough checking for the imposition of research values during interviews and analysis.

As part of its social justice agenda, critical ethnography also claims to speak on behalf of its subjects, rather than for or about them, as a means of empowering them through allowing their voices to be heard (Thomas, 1993). This can lead to challenges regarding representation and power balances between the researcher and the researched. The researcher's methods of collecting, organising and analysing evidence will inevitably influence the ways in which knowledge and power are produced (Harrison, 2003; Thomas, 1993), and in regard to Indigenous research in particular ethnographies have been seen to be complicit in perpetuating power imbalances (Harrison, 2003; McConaghy, 2000; Nakata, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In any critical ethnographic research in an Indigenous context it is vital that the researcher rigorously interrogate the ways in which their participants are represented, to ensure that they are not speaking *for* the participants and in doing so perpetuating a history of non-Indigenous domination (Harrison, 2003). Without a sound theoretical basis and thoughtful application of research methods, there is a danger that research will only reproduce the researcher's own prejudices (Street, 1995).

Placing such concerns aside for the moment²⁵, it is clear that the use of ethnography in educational research has developed strongly in recent decades. The use of ethnography, whether conventional or critical, within literacy studies has, over the years, extended beyond the UK and the USA, and has been used widely and broadly to better understand literacy learning and literacy practices worldwide. Ethnographic studies of literacy as social practice have been undertaken in a wide range of countries and social contexts, including South Africa (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996), Nepal (Robinson-

²⁵ I will return to concerns regarding ethical collection and representation of evidence in Chapter Four, when I detail my own use of critical ethnography methods in this research.

Pant, 2000), Mexico City (Kalman, 1999) and the Philippines (Canieso-Doronila, 1996). Critical ethnographies in an educational setting have been undertaken in Sri Lanka (Canagarajah, 1993) and North America (Dei, 1997). A number of ethnographic studies of literacy from countries as far afield as Bangladesh, Eritrea and Peru can be found in an interesting and informative collection edited by Street (2001).

While a number of ethnographic studies of literacy have been undertaken in Australia, these have tended to be situated in school or vocational education contexts rather than the adult learning environment such as that on which this case study is centred. Ethnographic studies in Australia have included investigations of what counts as literacy (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, & Green, 2000), young people's use of digital literacy practices (Bulfin & North, 2007), an after school tutoring program for African refugees (Naidoo, 2008), and multiliteracies pedagogy in an Australian elementary school classroom (Mills, 2007). With the exception of several significant studies published by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Inge Kral, 2012; Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003), however, there has been little ethnographic exploration of literacy practices in an adult Aboriginal context in Australia.

Through their extended periods of fieldwork and commitment to ethnographic principles, ethnographic studies such as those listed above have collectively provided highly detailed evidence that literacy learning and literacy use is indeed a social practice, situated in discourses, relationships and contexts. They have also provided evidence that a narrow focus on literacy development for employment purposes fails to acknowledge the range of literacy practices learners engage with in their everyday lives, the diverse reasons learners may have for wanting to develop their literacy skills, and the wider benefits of engaging in literacy learning for individuals and society.

This overview of theories of literacy as social practice and the use of ethnographic research methods in studies of literacy practice and events has demonstrated the strengths of these approaches in improving

understandings of adult literacy learning and practices, particularly in the context of adult Aboriginal education in remote Australian communities. Studies of literacy as social practice reveal the complexity of literacy learning and use; they facilitate an understanding of the meaning of literacy for the learners; they allow for explorations of power (im)balances; they place emphasis on practice, and on real world experiences of literacy learning and use; and they explore literacy at a local level, allowing for the diversity and local particularities of literacy learning and practice to emerge.

While this emphasis on the local has been seen by many as being one of the strengths of employing a social practice approach to understanding literacy use and learning, it is also a factor in critiques of the approach. Brandt and Clinton, in particular, question the 'limits of the local', asking whether taking a literacy as social practice approach overemphasises the local, "exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy takes" (2002, p.337). Arguing that the literacy as social practice paradigm assumes too great a separation between the local and the global, and that in fact much of local literacy is informed by and interacts with literacies and decisions originating elsewhere, Brandt and Clinton do not take issue with the social practice perspective as such. Rather, they suggest that the social practice perspective be expanded to include greater analysis and recognition of the impact of 'distant' literacies, and in particular literacy as a technology, on local literacy practices. While the point made by Brandt and Clinton has validity, this research nevertheless demonstrates the need for the local, whether homogenous or diverse, to be acknowledged and acted upon if literacy programs are to fully reflect learners' needs and aspirations.

This section of this chapter has identified key studies exploring theories of literacy as social practice. These theories were chosen to inform this research because they provide a framework within which sense may be made of the different ways in which literacy teaching and learning, particularly for adult learners, takes place in different contexts. The research in this thesis is framed by a social practice approach to analysing learning, precisely because social practice theory places the analysis of literacy

practices squarely within the social practices in which the learning takes place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Papen, 2005; Street, 2000). A social practice perspective is particularly relevant to social science research, as it enables researchers to describe how individuals shape, and are shaped by, the cultural worlds in which they live. Social practice researchers are concerned with everyday activity and real-life settings, but with an emphasis on the social systems of shared resources by which groups organise and coordinate their activities, relationships, and interpretations of the world (J. Gee, nd; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Papen, 2005; Street, 2005; Wenger, 1998, p. 13). The focus is on shared meanings in personal activity and identity construction, and on how these shared meanings are produced and reproduced through personal action and interaction. The literature reviewed in this section illustrates the ways in which literacy as social practice pushes for an ethnographic understanding of literacy practices in a particular context, listening to those involved at a level of practice and taking their contributions seriously.

In this thesis I argue that the way to understand Indigenous literacy and learning in remote communities is not through policy or analyses of theories, but through an in-depth understanding of what happens at a local, grassroots level. In this research project the use of theories of literacy as social practice and ethnographic research methods allowed the Karrayili learners to show me what was relevant to them, revealing the perspectives of those involved at a level of practice, and this in turn facilitated a strong focus on what learning at Karrayili means to those involved. In this way theories of literacy as social practice have worked to explain the particular approaches to adult literacy and learning at Karrayili, in that they allow the observer to understand that what happens at Karrayili both reflects and reinforces the social context of people's lives in Fitzroy Crossing. As illustrated by the narrative in Chapter One, to those unfamiliar with such a context the apparent lack of structure or measurable outcomes for learning at Karrayili may at first seem confusing, haphazard, even pedagogically misinformed. When viewed through the lens of literacy as social practice, however, it is possible to see that what happens at Karrayili makes perfect sense to those who are

engaged in it at a level of practice. This is valuable because it enables a better understanding of how different communities might view community-based education, and of the role of culture and social context in literacy practices and learning. Such an understanding is critical to ensuring that the delivery of education services to remote communities is appropriate and effective.

What is known about Indigenous literacy in Australia?

As described in the previous section, recent decades have seen theories of literacy as social practice increasingly dominating and influencing discussion around literacy learning and teaching. Underpinning the theoretical discussion has been the extensive reliance on ethnographic research methodologies, and in particular extended fieldwork, to enable researchers to better understand the complexities of literacy as social practice and the interconnections that exist between literacy learning and the social context of learners' lives.

Yet despite the evident ways in which literacy as social practice, and multiliteracies in particular, might contribute to understandings of Indigenous literacy in Australia, literature describing ethnographic research of this nature is relatively scarce. Australian literacy researchers and theorists have made considerable contributions to the development of multiliteracies theories (Bill Cope & Kalantzis, 1998; B Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Luke, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997), but in Australia there has been a strong emphasis on literacy research at the level of theory, rather than practice. The majority of work has centred on literacy and children, and in particular on school pedagogies and curriculum development (Lankshear, 1997; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Luke, 2000). Within this field, useful and informative work has been conducted on bilingualism and multiculturalism (for example the work of Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). There has also tended to be a strong focus on viewing literacy learning and teaching from a sociological, critical literacy perspective (Lankshear, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1997; C. Walton,

1996), with relatively little emphasis on the use of ethnographic research methodologies.

While research in Australia has not tended to focus on ethnographic studies, there is nevertheless a large body of research which indicates that Indigenous literacy levels are of concern, and further that there is a strong link between literacy and disadvantage. The details of such disadvantage are well known, and Indigenous Australia is increasingly represented in reductionist fashion, with an emphasis on disadvantage and dysfunction (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012).

Indigenous Australians number around half a million people, approximately 2.5% of the Australian population, living in all areas of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Within that population there is an extraordinary diversity of languages and cultures. The Indigenous population of Australia has been impressively resilient given the oppressive nature of colonial settlement, the subsequent loss of traditional lands, and the resulting decimation of many traditional languages and cultural practices.

Nevertheless it is unarguably the case that many Indigenous Australians suffer disadvantage on a daily basis, and current data show that many Indigenous Australians experience unacceptable levels of disadvantage across a range of key factors. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data in 2009 showed life expectancy for Indigenous Australian men to be approximately 11.5 years less than for non-Indigenous men, and for Indigenous women 9.7 years less than for non-Indigenous women. Indigenous Australians on average have a higher level of infant mortality (around three times the rate of non-Indigenous children), children have a lower level of participation in school, and adults experience much higher levels of unemployment (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). The situation tends to worsen in remote areas. As noted in a recent government report on the 'Closing the Gap' campaign, "In remote areas, successive governments have failed to properly coordinate their efforts and to fund them

adequately, resulting in acute and visible need” (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009, p. 8)²⁶.

While this section provides an overview of the statistics of adult Aboriginal literacy in Australia, it is important to note here that literacy is a social construct, and there are inherent dangers in ‘measuring’ it. Rates of literacy depend on how it is defined (Wickert 1993). Hughes argues that as the instruments of measurement of Aboriginal disadvantage and needs all reflect the dominant, non-Indigenous culture, and are therefore based on “non-Indigenous measures and values of justice and autonomy”, the value of any resulting evaluation is questionable (1995, p.380). In a similar vein, Hamilton (2001) argues that data on literacy, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), are based on a particular set of social relations and institutions, and as such the findings become a simplified, received wisdom about what counts as literacy.

However, it is indisputable that Indigenous English literacy levels are of concern in Australia (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012), with the focus of concern tending to rest on children’s literacy (Inge Kral, 2009). Much of what is known about Indigenous children’s literacy levels in Australia comes from the NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) testing system, the means by which Australian school students’ performance in literacy and numeracy is measured. NAPLAN, however, is not without its critics. Highly contextualised, NAPLAN tests have been accused of privileging students from a Western, SAE background, for whom the contents of the tests – as well as the methodologies involved – are culturally and linguistically familiar. Traditional approaches to testing, such as those used by NAPLAN, have been claimed to further disadvantage Indigenous learners

²⁶ ‘Closing the Gap’ is a strategy that aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes (Australian Indigenous Health Info Net., 2012). The ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy is addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

who may not have the linguistic, cultural or economic backgrounds implicit in the tests, but who also may have very different perceptions of the use of education from their non-Indigenous counterparts (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Sarra, 2009; Schwab & Sutherland, 2001). As Chris Sarra, Indigenous Australian educationalist and creator of the “Strong and Smart” philosophy of education, has noted, “...whilst the NAPLAN data is in many ways extremely useful, we should not ‘overestimate’ their value and pretend that this tells the complete story about our children in schools” (Sarra, 2009).

While the validity of NAPLAN data for Indigenous students may be questionable, it is generally accepted that there is sufficient information regarding Indigenous children’s literacy in Australia for the picture, imprecise as it may be, to be understood. As stated in Chapter One, however, little is currently known about adult Indigenous literacy in remote regions of Australia and no thorough survey of adult Indigenous literacy in Australia has been completed. Quantitative data is particularly unhelpful for the purposes of this study, as available survey data either does not identify Indigenous learners, or includes children but not adult learners. Data for remote regions is extremely limited. A national survey of Australian adult literacy, *No Single Measure* (Wickert, 1989), did not address adult Indigenous literacy in remote areas. A 1992 survey of adult literacy generally in the Northern Territory (F. Christie, Clark, Gerot, & Palmer, 1993) did not include non-urban areas, Indigenous communities, or town camps due to difficulties encountered in testing competencies in these contexts (Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004, p. 30) - difficulties which may have also precluded other studies in this area from being undertaken. Some understanding of levels of literacy in remote areas has been provided by assessments carried out by training providers, but data from such sources are generally inconsistent, difficult to locate and biased in that they only provide information on those learners who have enrolled in training courses (I. Kral & Schwab, 2003, p. 1).

Data for adult literacy in Australia generally (i.e., not Indigenous-specific) are derived from several sources. One key source is the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS), last conducted in Australia in 2006 as part of an

international study designed to “identify and measure literacy which can be linked to the social and economic characteristics of people both across and within countries” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a). The survey measured the literacy of a population sample of people aged 15 to 74 years, but did not include people living in remote areas and “was not designed to give reliable information on Indigenous populations”²⁷.

The third National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) was conducted in 2008. NATSISS is conducted every six years, and provides information on a range of indicators related to Indigenous Australians, including education. The survey collected information from approximately 13,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children. While NATSISS included adults living in remote areas, it did not include a specific focus on literacy skills (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b).

The dearth of literature focussing on adult Indigenous literacy in Australia means that much of what is ‘known’ is in fact assumed from statistics on children’s literacy. In utilising statistics on children’s literacy to refer to Indigenous literacy in general, however, little acknowledgement has been made of any specific needs of adult Aboriginal learners, or whether the learning styles and needs of adults and children differ. This apparent imbalance is not always the case in other countries - in Canada, for example, approaches to improving Indigenous literacy are reported to have a strong focus on adults, and work with children and families is regarded as an ‘add-on’ (George, 2001, p. 30).

The situation regarding adult literacy in remote areas is particularly unclear (Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004, p. 22; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003). However, research (Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004; McMullen, 2006) and anecdotal evidence indicates that English literacy levels for adult Indigenous Australians in remote areas

²⁷ Personal correspondence, Bruce Caldwell, National Centre for Education and Training

are not improving. Research studies and anecdotal evidence have consistently indicated that Indigenous adult literacy outcomes, particularly in remote areas, are insufficient to enable individuals and communities to participate in mainstream educational and economic activities as they would like (Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004, p. 61; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003, p. 2). Recent research has shown that 'illiteracy' rates in some remote communities in the Northern Territory can be as high as 93% (McMullen, 2006; Pearson, 2000) and that there is evidence that in Australia levels of literacy and numeracy decrease as the level of remoteness increases (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009; McMullen, 2006). The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, an independent, not-for-profit organisation which aims to improve literacy levels among Indigenous Australian children, states that "There is an enormous gap in the English literacy rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. The gap is even wider for Indigenous people living in remote and isolated communities" (Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, n.d.).

That Indigenous literacy rates are, on average, lower than those of non-Indigenous Australians is hardly surprising. From a linguistic perspective, for example, it should be noted that SAE has only been spoken in Australia for a relatively short time, and (as noted in the previous chapter) for many Indigenous Australians in remote areas, interaction with English speakers only began in the past few generations (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Inge Kral, 2012; McGinty et al., 2000). Given the relatively recent history of contact for many Indigenous Australians, the oral nature of their traditional languages, and the various historical and sociocultural factors impacting on Indigenous Australian society, it is perhaps to be expected that many Indigenous Australians would not be proficient English language users (Inge Kral, 2009, 2012).

What is more surprising is that the significant amounts of government and non-government investment into improving Indigenous literacy, not just in terms of dollar amounts for funding but also research into pedagogy and practice and on-the-ground programs and projects, has resulted in little

change for the better (COAG Reform Council, 2012; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). In fact, not only have Indigenous literacy rates failed to improve significantly, but in some areas there is concern that they are (by non-Indigenous measurement criteria, at least) going backwards. In an analysis of the COAG report, it was noted that:

Only 64 per cent of Aboriginal year 9 students were found to be reading at the national minimum standard at the end of 2010, a result which has dropped by 6.5 per cent on where they stood at the end of 2008 ... The findings, which are based on the controversial NAPLAN program, serve as a warning that it will be harder to halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2018, one of the key elements of the COAG National Indigenous Reform agreement of 2008. (Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, 2011)

This apparent backwards trend in Indigenous children's literacy indicates that current policies and programs aimed at improving Indigenous literacy standards are not working, or at least are not working to the extent that had been hoped with the announcement of the 'Closing the Gap' campaign.

The 'Closing the Gap' campaign originated in 2006, when the National Indigenous Health Equality Campaign was developed by a number of organisations including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and Oxfam Australia. Designed to address discrepancies in Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancies in Australia, its aim was to achieve equality in the areas of health and life expectancy for Indigenous Australians within a generation. The associated public awareness campaign, called 'Close the Gap', was formally launched in 2007 (Australian Indigenous Health Info Net). The campaign had a strong focus on improving education and literacy levels for young Indigenous students, with three of the six stated targets being to:

- ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities by 2013;
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018;
- and halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020 (Council of Australian Governments, n.d.).

As noted previously there is concern that the ‘Closing the Gap’ campaign has so far done little to improve Indigenous literacy in Australia. Concern has also been expressed regarding the alignment of the campaign’s ideologies with the realities of life in remote Indigenous communities. In a recent paper on Indigenous education programs and policy in remote areas, prepared for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), it was claimed that there is an ‘emerging paradox’ between the policy and pedagogy of the ‘Closing the Gap’ campaign, and the realities of Indigenous education, for both adults and children, in the context of remote Australian communities (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012, p. 8). In addressing this paradox the paper presents some forceful and succinct challenges to the government’s ‘Closing the Gap’ campaign, including the observation that:

[There is] a fundamental tension between this goal [of closing the gap], with its emphasis on sameness and homogenisation, and Indigenous aspirations for self-determination, choice, diversity and difference. There is a clear tension between the goals of statistical equality and ethnic plurality, with the former currently in the ascendancy in policy discourse and practice. The powerful neoliberal state is unwilling to consider investment in small and dispersed Indigenous communities or to provide real choice to land-linked Indigenous groups. (Altman & Fogarty, 2010, p. 125)

Qualitative research that has been carried out in Indigenous Australia has aided in improving understandings of such ‘small and dispersed Indigenous communities’. In contrast with available quantitative data, the contextualized nature of data emerging from qualitative research helps provide a deeper insight into the issues facing adult Indigenous literacy learners in Australia (Eady et al., 2010; Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004; I. Kral & Schwab, 2003). Qualitative research locates the statistics in a more meaningful context – that of the everyday lives of Indigenous Australians. Qualitative research has brought to light the lack of appropriate employment and training opportunities in many Indigenous communities, as well as the lack of relevance that education and training may have to the reality of Indigenous people’s lives (Eady et al., 2010; Inge. Kral & Falk, 2004; Musharbash, 2008). Without an understanding of such contexts statistical data can, at best, be misleading, but at worst can lead to the imposition of ineffective and irrelevant Indigenous

literacy policy and programs. Current policy directions, it is claimed, give little recognition to the very particular needs and realities of Indigenous learners in remote areas (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012).

Much of the recent qualitative research into adult Indigenous literacy and training in Australia has centred on the areas of vocational education and training (VET) and the health care field. A major recent literacy research project in Australia was conducted between 2002 and 2006 by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Funded by the Australian Government and linked to the overall strategy for VET, the Adult Literacy Research Program (ALRP) funded a range of research projects in adult literacy and numeracy. While the project outcomes were varied and extensive, only one of the projects (Inge, Kral & Falk, 2004) specifically targeted Indigenous literacy. NCVER research over the years has provided considerable information and statistics regarding Indigenous participation in VET programs, but while VET participation is obviously closely linked to issues of adult literacy these statistics do not in themselves clarify the situation regarding adult Indigenous literacy levels.

The 2004 NCVER project mentioned above, however, made a substantial contribution to understandings of Indigenous literacy and healthcare training. The case study on which the report was based explored a remote Northern Territory community's quest to implement a culturally appropriate form of health delivery, with the researchers taking a social context approach to analysing the use of literacy skills by the community (Inge, Kral & Falk, 2004). While it encompassed a very specific (healthcare) research context, the study delivered several important findings in the context of the research undertaken in this thesis: that there is a "demonstrated trust that the institution of Western education will deliver worthwhile outcomes"; that learning English is believed to be a necessity; and that adult English literacy levels are generally low and do not appear to be sufficient to meet the VET sector's training requirements (Inge, Kral & Falk, 2004, p. 7).

An important theme emerging from the Kral and Falk study, and one that likely would not have emerged had the authors not taken a social practice approach to the study, was that most training does not fit into the meaning and purpose of community life. The study further reports that the community believes integration of education into the social and cultural framework of the community, with careful consideration of the community's goals and aspirations, is essential if it is to be successful. It appears from this and other research (Bob Boughton, 1998; Geraldine Castleton, 2002b; M. Christie, 2005) that there is a considerable gap between the objectives of mainstream education and training and those of Indigenous learners in remote contexts.

The literature reviewed in this section indicates that while the situation regarding adult Indigenous literacy in remote areas of Australia is to some extent unclear, two facts appear to be known: that English literacy levels in these areas are of concern; and that despite efforts to redress these things are failing to improve. What is not really known is what happens in Indigenous adult education or what works for those involved at a grassroots level, and this is where the use of literacy as social practice, and ethnographic research methods, can add value to the existing body of knowledge.

These are all important factors to be acknowledged in a project such as this. However, when undertaking cross-cultural research in an Indigenous context, it is also critical that there be an understanding of how such research might impact on those people whose lives it describes. The final section of this chapter reviews the literature on doing research in an Indigenous context, paying particular attention to the perspectives of Indigenous researchers and relevant writing in this field.

Indigenous perspectives on research

An Indigenous context can be an uneasy space within which to conduct research. Indigenous peoples worldwide talk of how, historically, they have been over-researched. Despite the extent of such research, Indigenous

peoples claim that the majority, and in particular anthropological research, has been of an exploitative nature and that little difference has been made to their lives as a result²⁸. This has generated mistrust and resistance towards research from many Indigenous people, both in Australia and abroad (Abdullah & Stringer, 1997; Martin, 2003; Putt, 2013; L. T. Smith, 1999).

A number of Indigenous authors and academics, among others, have made explicit the links between Indigenous research and colonisation, with research being identified as yet another means to the perpetuation of power imbalances between colonised and colonisers. Key to this argument is that Indigenous people have traditionally had research imposed upon them, and that Indigenous people, and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, have been excluded from the research process. It has been claimed that much of the research conducted has been worthless to Indigenous people, but very useful to those who wield it as an instrument (L. T. Smith, 1999). Western ways of collecting, classifying and representing knowledge, ways which have represented Western cultural orientations, values and conceptualisations, have also contributed to negative perceptions of research by Indigenous peoples (L. T. Smith, 1999). Indigenous peoples are now increasingly sensitive to the colonising potential of academic research into their lives, and of the ways in which Indigenous research can “intrude on people’s lives and impose systems of meaning onto those who are subjects of study” (Abdullah & Stringer, 1997, p.10).

Because of this history, research in an Indigenous context has been positioned as disempowering, and Indigenous communities as powerless. In recognition of this, Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Lester Rigney (1999) began to challenge Western research methodologies, and recent years have seen Indigenous authors, academics and communities increasingly addressing the need for Indigenous research

²⁸ Clearly this is not true of all Indigenous research, anthropological or otherwise. Nakata, for example, notes the positive contributions, past and ongoing, that have been made by anthropological research to issues of native title and land claims for Indigenous Australians (Nakata (1998)

to be undertaken within Indigenous research paradigms (Martin, 2003). In Australia a number of ethical guidelines have been written for researchers wishing to work within an Indigenous context²⁹, although it should be noted that such guidelines may still be framed by Western ways of being, knowing and doing (L. T. Smith, 1999). Indeed, the very act of designing a research framework or methodology could be viewed as a Western way of going about doing research (Martin, 2003).

Several Indigenous authors have also presented models for ethical research which are built on Indigenous perspectives. Smith, for example, provides an illustration of an Indigenous Research Agenda with self-determination at its core, and four key processes of healing, decolonisation, transformation, and mobilisation which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies (1999, pp.116-117). Martin, in her discussion of Rigney's Indigenist research framework, notes that research done by Indigenous people must "centralize the core structures of Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research" if it is not simply to be Western research carried out by Indigenous people (2003, p.5).

It is this recognition of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing that forms the basis of much that has been written about ethical Indigenous research. Martin notes that Aboriginal ontology is based on interrelationships between very specific ways of knowing, being and doing, and that Indigenist research needs to find ways to align this with aspects of Western qualitative research frameworks (2003, p.12). Other Indigenous researchers and authors have also called for research with Indigenous people to recognise, value and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Abdullah & Stringer, 1997; Nakata, 1998; Rigney, 1999; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

²⁹ See for example *Values and Ethics - Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council, available at <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e52>

While specific protocols and worldviews may differ within Indigenous contexts, several factors common to an Indigenous perspective on research can be identified from the literature. Central to these is the idea of respect. The term 'respect', as noted by Smith (1999, p.120), is "consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity". Respect in the Indigenous context refers to respect not only for people, but for all the Entities as identified by Martin (2003), including land, animals and spirits. Demonstrating respect includes, but is not exclusive to, acts of reciprocity, inclusion, collaboration, prioritising Indigenous voices, and showing regard for relevant cultural protocols (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

For the non-Indigenous researcher, the need to understand and respect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing can present challenges. It is not always clear what exactly the correct protocols are, and for various cultural reasons participants may not be willing or able to make these explicit. What the community requires of the researcher, too, can be difficult to understand or identify. Smith, for example, talks of intangible qualities, such as a 'good spirit', that may make a researcher acceptable (or not) to a community (1999).

It is clear, however, that through demonstrating respect in all aspects of their research, by ensuring research is directly relevant to the needs and aspirations of participants, and by prioritising meaningful inclusion of participants, a researcher conducting cross-cultural research with Indigenous people can go some way towards addressing issues of power dynamics during the research process. It is perhaps after the fieldwork stage, when the researcher is analyzing the evidence and writing up the results, that issues of power and representation are at their most vulnerable. Researchers have the power to "distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings" (L. T. Smith, 1999, p.176). In writing up results, it is imperative that the researcher be extremely reflective and honest, mindful of their own positioning and role in the research, and aware of who benefits from any research outcomes.

The cross-cultural researcher, then, has some significant responsibilities to 'get it right' within a wide range of complex and intertwining factors. When working with Indigenous participants, and in particular when the aim is to address issues of equity and power balances, there must be the priority of conducting research which is ethical and which meets the needs of the community as seen by them. At the same time, however, the researcher is bound by constraints of the Western research system within which they are working, and by responsibilities towards other bodies such as those providing funding for the research. The literature reviewed suggests that key to ensuring that Indigenous voices are not lost within such competing demands is that Indigenous people are situated at the centre of the research act, with appropriate and adequate recognition of their systems of knowledge and understanding (Abdullah & Stringer, 1997).

My own struggles with achieving this are detailed in the following chapter, where I recount my efforts to conduct my research ethically and with integrity. I had read the literature, but putting theory into practice is not always easy and while I got some things right from the start, others I learned along the way and yet others I only realised much later. This learning experience was largely facilitated by the Karrayili community, and their patience and tolerance in doing so was admirable.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to this thesis under four main topics: literacy and (dis)empowerment; literacy as social practice; Indigenous literacy in Australia; and Indigenous perspectives on research. This review has demonstrated a number of points that are pivotal to the research evidence and findings presented in the second half of this thesis. The first section outlined the ways in which empowerment of adult Aboriginal literacy learners is about far more than simply providing them with the means to join the workforce: how it includes recognition of the ongoing impact of colonisation on learners and systems of learning, and of how Aboriginal

learners are empowered through ownership and control of their learning; how literacy learning for Aboriginal learners is intricately tied to issues of language and identity; and how locality and diversity can be factors strongly influencing the success of literacy programs. The second section reviewed the ways in which concepts of literacy and learning have developed in recent years, with there now being a strong focus on literacy teaching that provides a space for understandings of difference, local context, and culture. Theories of literacy as social practice, as outlined in this chapter, recognise that literacy learning for adults must be meaningful and situated in people's everyday lives. This section also identified the role played by ethnographic research methods in improving understandings of how and why adult learners learn. Section three identified that Indigenous English literacy in Australia is of concern, but that despite considerable investment in this field little difference has been made to Aboriginal people's lives. This section also identified a significant gap in the knowledge base, in terms of real understandings of what goes on in Aboriginal adult education at a level of practice. The final section of this chapter raised issues of power and representation in Indigenous research, issues that will be further addressed in the following chapter.

This literature review has suggested some of the ways in which teaching and learning SAE in remote Aboriginal communities can be about far more than questions of pedagogy or providing pathways to employment. As will be seen in the case study to come, the Karrayili learners' shared meanings and interpretations of what Karrayili means to them and the Fitzroy Valley community reveal a complex and at times unexpected approach to adult learning, one which is frequently at odds with the expectations of policy and program providers and the wider Australian community. The social practice perspective on which this research is based, together with the ethnographic research methods employed to undertake the research, have made possible the emergence of a rich, complex and surprising picture of adult literacy and learning at work, and of how the Karrayili learners ensure their learning there is all about making people strong.

Chapter 4: Designing and carrying out the research project

This research project is a critical ethnography. The previous chapter explored the literature on theories of literacy as social practice, and the use of critical ethnography as a means of investigating relationships between literacy, learning and the potential empowerment of learners. This exploration identified why these theories and methodologies were appropriate for the research undertaken for this thesis. This chapter describes how critical ethnography research methods and philosophy framed and shaped the ways in which the research for this thesis was carried out. In this chapter I first outline how I addressed the processes and protocols for doing research in an Aboriginal community. I then move on to the methods used to conduct the research itself. I start by outlining the research methods typical of ethnography, and in particular critical ethnography, before going on to detail how critical ethnography methods were applied to the collection of evidence for this project. I address the ways in which my own thinking and ways of working shifted while doing the research, and some of the ethical questions, in particular those that relate to cross-cultural aspects of the research, which needed to be considered at various stages of the research process. I reflect on what happened when I attempted to put into practice the various ethnographic research methods; how what I had anticipated to be a relatively simple, straightforward process presented me with a range of complexities and challenges that both complicated and enriched my research experience. I also reflect on how my own interests intersected and interacted

with those of the people at Karrayili, resulting in my thesis being, in effect, partially shaped by me and partially by the people who participated in this study.

Processes and Protocols in Indigenous Research:

Doing research in an Aboriginal community

Recent decades in Australia have seen changes in the ways in which research with Indigenous communities is conducted. As noted in the previous chapter, Indigenous Australians are among the most researched people in the world, and in Australia there has been a history of exploitation and unethical practices by some non-Indigenous researchers. Issues of research and colonisation have also been addressed by researchers from other colonised countries such as New Zealand (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Irwin, 1994; L. T. Smith, 1999), Canada (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Grenier, 1998) and the United States (Crazy Bull, 1997; Mihesuah, 1998).

Partly in response to such concerns, a number of Indigenous organisations have developed ethical guidelines for researchers wishing to work with Indigenous Australians. As a Kartiya researcher working with an Aboriginal community, it was an essential part of my methodology that I understood, valued, and adhered to the recommendations presented in such guidelines. As a Curtin University student I was required to meet the ethics requirements of Curtin, and also to act in accordance with the guidelines offered by Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies (Curtin University Centre for Aboriginal Studies). In addition, my extended fieldwork was partly funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), which meant there was also the need to meet the requirements of the AIATSIS ethical guidelines (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012).

While these guidelines differ in terms of length and detail, the focus of each is very similar. Both direct the researcher to ensure that their work is respectful

of local Aboriginal people and culture, and that Aboriginal people are fully consulted with at all stages. There must be opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate meaningfully in the research, with collaboration and partnerships established wherever possible. The research must be of benefit to the community, with the researcher reciprocating in some way for the participation of communities and individuals (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; Curtin University Centre for Aboriginal Studies). Descriptions of how I respected and implemented these guidelines are woven throughout the narrative of this chapter.

As part of the candidacy process I was required to submit an ethics application to Curtin University. I also met with staff at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies to discuss my proposal, and to request advice or recommendations regarding how I should go about commencing my intended project with the Karrayili community. The staff I met with were supportive of my proposed research, and approved of the measures I planned to take with regard to carrying out the research. My ethics application to AIATSIS similarly gained approval, and I was ready to start my project.

Research Methods:

Ethnography as a research methodology

From the very beginning of my engagement with Karrayili I had an understanding that literacy and learning had very different meanings for the learners there than they did for, say, the international students I had worked with in language schools in England and in the Australian cities of Perth and Adelaide. I understood that the locally specific context of Karrayili shaped people's reasons for going there to learn, and that there was a strong interrelationship between learning, local cultures, and community and individual identities. In the early stages of planning the research project, ethnography, with its focus on understandings and meanings, and its emphasis on culture, seemed the ideal approach for research of this type.

Ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures, or explanations of how people think, believe and behave, that are situated in local time and space (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). It is these two emphases – the meanings behind behaviour and a strong focus on the locally specific – which identified ethnography as being particularly appropriate for this research project.

Ethnography differs from other social or behavioural sciences in two key respects. Firstly, it privileges perspectives held by the participants themselves, with ethnographic research methods being designed to reveal the participants' stories as they see them. Only once the researcher has uncovered the insiders' perspective do they then go on to analyse the data and give their own interpretations of what is happening. Thus ethnographic research is of an exploratory nature, as opposed to the 'testing of hypotheses' approach of many other methodologies (Fetterman, 2010; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Sarantakos, 1993).

Secondly, ethnographic research differs from many other research approaches in that the researcher cannot control what happens in the field (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This means that it can be difficult to replicate studies to confirm or refute the researcher's conclusions, as ethnographic studies are located in a particular time and place. Future studies are unlikely to involve the same people, and even if they did the dynamic nature of people and communities means that those participants may well have different stories to tell at a different time.

Ethnographic research often centres on three key methods: ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and 'thick description'. I will give a very brief description here of each of these methods in order to contextualise my description of my own experiences in this chapter.

Ethnographic interviews are often considered to be the ethnographer's most important data gathering technique, as they explain and contextualise what the researcher sees and experiences (Fetterman, 1988). Interviews can take

any form, from structured to retrospective, but are most commonly informal, seemingly casual conversations. They do, however, have an implicit research agenda, and are extremely useful in discovering what people think and how different people's perceptions compare. They help identify values attached to particular behaviours, and are also useful in establishing a healthy rapport (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001).

Ethnographic interviews are often a combination of conversation and embedded questions, questions which typically emerge from the conversation (Atkinson et al., 2001; Fetterman, 2010; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Conducting ethnographic interviews therefore requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher, with the need to react appropriately and 'go with the flow', rather than stick rigidly to a pre-designed question format. Questions are built upon responses, with the interviewer continually listening to and interacting with what the speaker has said.

Participant observation refers to the gathering of evidence while living in close contact with members of another social group, generally for a reasonably extended period of time (Atkinson et al., 2001; Fetterman, 2010). This involves exactly what the name suggests – the researcher participates in the everyday lives of those being studied, while simultaneously maintaining sufficient distance to allow them to observe and record evidence. The researcher observes the target population's daily activities, learning how they view the world and witnessing first-hand how they behave. This method allows them to interpret what people say and do in the wider context of social interaction and cultural beliefs and values. In making sense of what the data collection reveals, ethnographers place emphasis on the importance of context. Context can be understood as being those diverse elements that impact on and influence the behaviour of individuals, communities and organizations (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Such elements might include people, history, economics, politics, even features of the physical environment in which people live. As noted in Chapter Two, and as the case study evidence in Chapters Five and Six reveals, without an understanding of the context of learning at Karrayili the findings of this research project would

be near-meaningless. It is the context of the lived practices of those involved with Karrayili that give this study its meaning.

This emphasis on context and interpretation has led to criticism of this method as a 'science', as the researcher's participation in the research clearly has the potential to distort any situation being observed. This is countered by those involved in Social Sciences, who question the supposed 'validity' and 'reliability' of more replicable research projects. As Silverman notes, "Once we treat social reality as always in flux, then it makes no sense to worry about whether our research instruments measure accurately" (Silverman, 2001, p. 34). Some social scientists, in fact, see the potential distortion of 'reality' by participant observation as a positive effect. As noted by the sociologist Michael Burawoy, "The reflexive perspective embraces participation as intervention precisely because it distorts and disturbs. A social order reveals itself in the way it responds to pressure" (Burawoy, 1998).

Engaging in participant observation can also lay the researcher open to claims of a lack of neutrality, to lacking the level of detachment which, according to positive science, is essential if the key factors of reliability, replicability and validity are to be maintained. As noted by Burawoy above, ethnography embraces such a claim, arguing that in any research with people, including apparently neutral survey-based research, the effect of context will always influence the research outcomes to some extent. Ethnography takes context as its starting point and, as I have previously noted, the sociological, historical, geographic and economic contexts of the people at the centre of this study form the hub from which the observations and findings have emerged. The reflexive nature of ethnographic research methods, including participant observation, enable the researcher to reveal a much deeper picture of what is going on than would a more positive, survey-based approach.

The final ethnographic research method, 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), places emphasis on interpretation rather than simply superficial description.

Thick description addresses the context of a described action, context generally laden with meanings and symbolic significance. In thick description, behaviour and meanings are analysed to *understand* differences and similarities, not just explain them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Geertz, 1973). There is a strong focus on not essentialising the target group, and recognising the existence of multiple meanings. Thick description is written to develop particular cultural knowledge and general cultural awareness (Fetterman, 1988; Geertz, 1973). While it is true that not all ethnography is interpretive in this way, I believe that this approach to making sense of my research evidence best suited both my research context and my objectives.

The research for this thesis started out as a fairly traditional ethnographic exploration of adult literacy practices in an Aboriginal community. However, as the fieldwork progressed I began to realise that significant shifts in focus were taking place, and that my research approach needed refining as a result. The next sections examine the nature of this change, and how the project changed to become a more critical exploration of how literacy and learning at Karrayili were tied to issues of empowerment.

Narrowing the research methodology to critical ethnography

My initial research aims had been heavily influenced by my own career path and experience in the field of ESL teaching and teacher-training. My candidacy application indicated that my research would use ethnography to explore literacy practices for adult Aboriginal learners. Specifically, it would explore what such learning meant for the learners, how the case study group learned English literacy skills, and how this knowledge could influence best practices in the provision of literacy training and education for Aboriginal learners in remote contexts. There was a heavy emphasis on the learning and practice of English language and literacy skills, and how these were taught at Karrayili.

Once I engaged in long-term field work at Karrayili, however, the shape of my research began to shift in response to my engagement with the research participants and the research context. Interviews that started out as being about literacy inevitably turned to discussions about the role of Karrayili in the community, and in particular how it makes people strong. If I persisted along the path of questions about learning English literacy, as I did in the early stages of conducting my research, then participant responses became minimal and the resulting evidence was less than satisfying. As I reflected on these experiences, my research focus began to change shape, from a mainly literacy-based focus to a much stronger focus on culture and power and how these relate to adult learning in general. This important change in emphasis prompted me to investigate, and ultimately adopt, a more critically ethnographic approach to undertaking and analysing the research for this thesis.

Doing critical ethnography

Undertaking critical ethnography does not differ radically from traditional ethnography, and in fact the lines between the two can be somewhat blurry (Thomas, 1993). As with traditional ethnography, critical ethnography uses techniques such as ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and thick description to collect, interpret and present evidence. The distinction between the two is that critical ethnography can be seen as a particular style of analysis and discourse that is embedded in traditional ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Thomas, 1993). As identified in the previous chapter, critical ethnography has a more political, emancipatory purpose than traditional ethnography (Madison, 2011). The change in focus in my research, from an exploration of literacy practices to an exploration of how literacy practices are tied to issues of power and identity, indicated that in order to fully explore such issues I needed to apply critical, rather than traditional, ethnographic methods to my research.

Unlike some other research approaches, the application of critical ethnography methodology does not require adherence to a pre-defined set of methods. Critical ethnography methods are not static or rigid; they demand flexibility and adaptability on the part of the researcher, and constant renegotiation of methods at all stages of the research project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The literature on critical ethnography does, however, identify the following key considerations that the critical ethnographer needs to take into account at various stages of the research.

A critical ethnography is about issues of inequality, so the researcher first needs to establish prior evidence of the existence of inequality in order to undertake appropriate research (Thomas, 1993). Evidence of inequality and social injustice for the community involved in this research had been established through an initial literature review, which eventually formed the basis of the third section of Chapter Three. Even though the emphasis of this thesis changed as the field work progressed, the project nevertheless began from a perspective of injustice for the community at Karrayili in terms of the statistics of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

Given that a critical ethnography is about inequality, the researcher needs to be extremely mindful of ethics of responsibility, in particular with regard to representation and power balances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). Central to the design of this project was attention to the ethical factors that needed consideration if the research was to have integrity and be respectful of the social context within which I intended to base my research. My positioning as a Karrayili researcher, in particular, raised several questions of ethics. Firstly, in going into remote communities to carry out fieldwork, I needed to be aware of and respectful of local protocols. Prior to engaging in fieldwork, I first identified and engaged with local people who were able to advise me as to cultural issues of which I needed to be aware. This included knowing when it would (and wouldn't) be appropriate for me to visit Karrayili, key people I should talk to and work with, and how I should go about building relationships. As noted earlier in this chapter, I also sought and received ethics clearances from both Curtin University and the Australian

Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies prior to commencing my research.

A major ethical consideration in conducting my research was regarding the question of who contributed to the evidence base. In order to ensure that this was fair, and that my participant group was sufficiently heterogeneous to represent the broader community, I spent quite some time preparing different sets of questions, identifying various people whom I would like to contribute so that there was a spread of ages, gender, status etc. However, despite my careful planning decisions about who would be interviewed were, in the end, to a large extent either opportunistic or determined by the participants themselves. I discuss this further in the next section. More important than who I sought to contribute, however, was my intention to ensure that the contributions of Indigenous students and community members were given weight at least equal to, if not greater than, those of empirical or established evidence bases.

Early in my research these ethical considerations led me to believe that ideally my research would be a collaborative project with the staff and students of Karrayili. With this in mind, I put together a proposal for Karrayili outlining my research objectives, how I believed it would benefit the community, anticipated outcomes of the research and some of the ways in which I hoped the project would be collaborative. My proposal was received positively, and I was given the go-ahead to return to Karrayili to undertake the research, but in reality that is as far as any collaboration went. My efforts to engage local people in the research were unsuccessful; people listened politely to my ideas, encouraged me to do the research, but were not at all interested in participating beyond agreeing to be interviewed. While this was disappointing, it was not entirely unexpected – as I have noted elsewhere in this thesis, people in Fitzroy Crossing lead very full lives, with their own values and everyday priorities, and while they were happy to tell me their stories they then expected me to get on with whatever it was I was doing, while they did the same.

At all times during this study I needed to be mindful of the power relations between the researcher and the researched – a particularly significant point given the history of Indigenous research in Australia, and the fact that much of this research has not only failed to make an impact on levels of disadvantage but has often further contributed to Indigenous people's disempowerment through its treatment of them as passive objects of investigation (Nakata, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The intervening researcher cannot avoid issues of power while conducting their research, both power over participants and participants' power over the researcher. Power struggles arise, for example, in the process of setting up and conducting interviews, in the types of information being sought and given, and in the way such information is used. Aspects of domination and resistance, albeit for the main part surreptitious and unspoken, nevertheless form one of the many layers of the research process (Burawoy, 1998).

Addressing power imbalances during my research proved to be difficult and troubling for me. For much of the duration of my field work I felt distinctly uncomfortable in the role of researcher, largely because of my awareness of the various power differentials. As a Kariya researcher I had come to the community privileged in terms of my educational background, my understanding of mainstream culture and ways of doing, my understanding of the research I was engaged in, and – most importantly given the line of questioning I initially took – my English literacy. As the researcher, in many ways I held the power during interviews, and I also had the power to interpret what I saw and heard from my etic perspective and write about what I saw and heard in whichever way I chose. I brought to my research certain biases, a worldview representative of my own life experiences (very different from those of the majority of my interviewees), and a very specific personal agenda.

I attempted to address this imbalance in several ways. I endeavoured to acknowledge and value Indigenous ways of being and doing. I sought to conduct interviews on the interviewees' own terms – where they felt comfortable (often outside), when they felt ready, and in ways that were not

intimidating or threatening in any way. I explained to interviewees what I was doing and why, how I hoped that the information I gathered would benefit the Karrayili community, and what I would be doing with the information. During interviews I responded to and valued whatever the interviewees chose to tell me, regardless of whether or not it was informative for my research agenda. Outside the explicit gathering of evidence through interviews, I discussed the progress of my research with various students and staff members, giving participants every opportunity to comment on my work during the research process. And gradually, during my year of engagement in the field, I learned to listen to, and act on, what I was being told.

The power balance, however, was not always in my favour. In coming to the Fitzroy Crossing community as an outsider, in many ways I arrived powerless. I had little understanding of how people lived their everyday lives, and while I could see that things were done differently there I did not understand why. Linguistically I was excluded from many interactions I witnessed, as I did not speak any of the local languages (including Kriol). In these respects I was extremely reliant on several significant community members who 'took me under their wing' and guided my entry into the community. More significantly for the purposes of my research, I was at the mercy of participants when it came to conducting interviews. I had been immersed in daily life at Karrayili for several months before any of the students felt comfortable enough to be interviewed, and I simply had to wait until they were ready. My research agenda was not theirs, and any decisions regarding whether or not people would be interviewed were made entirely by them. Added to this, I was often powerless regarding the content of interviews. If my questions were not appropriate, or people did not feel comfortable answering them, they would generally simply tell me something else, something they did feel comfortable about disclosing. Initially, as I describe in more detail later in this chapter, I found this discouraging. I later came to embrace it, as I understood that in many ways my participants were perfectly capable of addressing the issue of power relations in their own subtle, yet highly effective, ways.

Another key consideration when undertaking critical ethnography is the need for reflexivity (Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). Evidence collection in critical ethnography generally uses the methods of traditional ethnographic research as outlined earlier in this chapter. With critical ethnography, however, there is an added emphasis on reflexivity and flexibility on the part of the researcher, in particular with regard to issues of power and representation. Reflecting on the research process, and being prepared to adapt appropriately in response to what was happening, is also critical as important questions are often not revealed until background evidence has been collected (Thomas, 1993). This was very much the case with the research presented in this thesis, as will be detailed in later sections of this chapter.

How the researcher chooses to collect evidence is not neutral, and this is explicit in critical ethnography. Who researchers talk to, where, and what questions are asked, are all important, and the researcher needs to be highly reflexive during this stage of the research. When selecting participants there is the need to identify people with 'insider knowledge', but these people can change as the research progresses. They may not wish to participate, or the nature of their participation may change. During fieldwork the critical ethnographer also needs to identify and pursue anomalies that arise during interviews and participant observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Thomas, 1993).

Analysis of the evidence raises issues of validity. In critical ethnography the focus on validity rests less on *what* is said, and more on how it is *represented*. The researcher needs to check that there has been no imposition of their own values or beliefs, for example through the use of leading questions in interviews. This emphasis on appropriate representation extends to interpretation and presentation of the evidence. It is important in critical ethnography for the researcher to ensure there is an appropriate balance of quotes and interpretation of the evidence, and that the evidence is allowed to speak for itself as much as possible (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Thomas, 1993).

This section has outlined some of the key techniques, along with my reflections in conducting research at the Karrayili Adult Education Centre, that need to be considered when undertaking a critical ethnography. The remainder of this chapter describes how these methods were applied during the fieldwork for this research project.

Preparing for fieldwork

Before going on to describe the evidence collection for this research, the next section describes my initial engagement with the research context. This section is important in that it lays down the groundwork for the changes in emphasis that were to come once I moved to Fitzroy Crossing and engaged with the participants and the research site on a deeper, and ultimately more informative, level.

My engagement with Karrayili started in 2007, when I first contacted the Principal to express my interest in basing my PhD research around the broad topic of literacy learning in Fitzroy Crossing. She was cautiously welcoming, and I set about trying to find a way to visit the research site to get a better idea of whether or not this was going to work. Fitzroy Crossing is some 2500km from Perth, entailing a fairly long and costly journey, but fortunately I was given an opportunity to travel there as part of my work. At that time I was working for SiMERR (The National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology and Maths Education for Rural and Regional Australia), conducting a project investigating the use of blogging as a teaching resource for rural and remote students (M. Smith, Trinidad, & Biemmi Beurteaux, 2008). Yakanarra, a remote community about 120km south-east of Fitzroy Crossing, was initially one of our research sites, and as Karrayili has an annex at Yakanarra I was able to combine a trip to Yakanarra to collect data for the SiMERR project with visits to Fitzroy Crossing and the Yakanarra annex.

This, my first trip as a researcher, was to prove both successful and challenging in ways I had not anticipated. There were two goals to be achieved on this trip. My priority was to collect the required data for SiMERR by interviewing the coordinator of the telecentre where the blogging project was apparently taking place. My second agenda though was to see what was happening at the Karrayili annex, to meet key people there and to 'scope' it as a potential site for my PhD research. Travelling to a research site to interview participants would appear to be a fairly straightforward process, and despite being a little nervous in my new role I had my questions, I knew who to contact, and I knew the region, so I was feeling fairly confident overall.

Thanks to the candidacy process and requirements I had everything planned, with a good idea of what I wanted to achieve and how I was going to do so. The prospect of returning to the Kimberley was enticing. I had lived in Halls Creek for an extended period as a teenager, making friends among the Aboriginal community there and growing to love the country in all its heat, harshness, and exceptional beauty. I had formed my own connections with the land and the people, and although Fitzroy Crossing is some 300km from Halls Creek, in Kimberley terms it is almost next door.

I returned to the Kimberley having been away for more than twenty-five years, a different person in many ways yet with the bonds and loyalties established in my youth intact. I had, however, returned in a role that was not yet sitting comfortably with me – the role of researcher. As noted earlier, 'research' could well be one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. Indigenous communities in Australia have experienced a long and frequently dissatisfying involvement with non-Indigenous researchers, and I did not wish to contribute any further to this perception.

My trip began on a positive note, as evidenced by my field notes:

The 4-hour drive from Broome to Fitzroy Crossing brings back many memories. The physical environment feels very familiar; the boab

trees, the rocky outcrops, the swooping and soaring kites and the occasional herd of cattle straying ominously close to the road. The sense of space on this journey is very strong, made stronger perhaps by the absence of any towns or visible communities, aside from Willare Roadhouse, for the entire trip. Arriving in Fitzroy Crossing it is easy to find Karrayili, given its central location. My first impression is of how welcoming it feels, with a relaxed atmosphere and an openness I have not previously encountered in a school or training centre. The Principal and I sit at the communal table on the veranda and have a cup of tea, chatting informally about what life is like at Yakanarra and about my PhD plans. She seems interested in and supportive of my research ideas from the very start, but says that she would need to discuss it with the Karrayili Board members before giving me the green light to move ahead.

I discuss the role of the Karrayili Board members in greater detail in Chapter Five. At this stage, though, it is worth noting that right from the start, from my first interactions with Karrayili, the Board were consulted and their approval for the project sought and granted. This was not only a Karrayili requirement, but also a vital element of my ethics approval and essential to my acknowledgement of the power dynamics involved in conducting research with Aboriginal people and organisations.

I had been in email and phone contact with both my interviewees, the Karrayili lecturer at Yakanarra and the Yakanarra telecentre coordinator, prior to my trip, and both were expecting me. The drive to Yakanarra from Fitzroy Crossing is hot, dry and dusty and takes a couple of hours, with more than half of the journey being on a very pot-holed dirt road. On my arrival at the Karrayili annex the Karrayili lecturer, JA, immediately came out to meet me. Greeting me warmly, she explained that unfortunately she only had a short time to spend with me as she was on her way to Fitzroy Crossing for a staff meeting. Having just done the trip myself I was taken aback at the prospect of driving so far for a staff meeting, but JA assured me it was a good chance to catch up with the other staff members face to face, as well as to do some shopping at the supermarket in town.

I was a little confused as to why nobody had told me that JA would not be available for an interview. Coming from the city, where everybody has diaries and timetables, where even making the effort to walk from one end of the university campus to the other for a meeting would entitle you to expect that other attendees would be present and on time, I was mystified. I had been travelling for two days, and had covered more than 2500km – not to mention the costs involved – yet the first of the people I had come to see was only free for half an hour!

This was an important lesson for me. Life in the Kimberley is very different from life in Perth. Not only does life progress at a different pace, but people have very different values and priorities, and as self-important as I might have felt in coming to Yakanarra as a big-shot researcher from a city university, the people in Yakanarra clearly didn't feel the same.

And if I hadn't already learnt that lesson, it was to be further reinforced when I attempted to carry out the interview for SiMERR. The telecentre coordinator I was to interview had recently had a serious car accident and was still feeling rather shaken by the experience, so did not feel up to talking to me that day. I spent the night in the community health centre on a guest bunk, feeling somewhat dispirited by my lack of research success so far, and in the morning set out to have another go at it all. I finally located the coordinator in the community store, where she was standing in for the regular storekeeper. She seemed agitated, and there was clearly some bad feeling in the community that I could sense but that no one was going to tell me about. My interviewee was evidently not at all keen to speak with me. What was I to do? My trip had been paid for by the university, and I had a job to do. I couldn't go back to Perth empty-handed. How would I explain that to the SiMERR group? I decided on a course of action which was to prove to be excellent training for the research that was to come. I decided to sit and wait.

I sat on the wooden bench outside the store and waited. I watched the children and dogs go by, the few customers who came in and out of the store, the hawks whirling over the basketball court, the occasional willy willy

stirring up the dust. Waiting was not a tactical decision, it was rather that I had very few other options. I was not waiting with a purpose, I was simply waiting to see what happened. While I was waiting a woman struggled out of the store with a great many heavy bags of shopping, so I offered to give her a lift home. Whether or not it was this act of 'giving something back' that changed things I will never know, but soon after I had returned to the store the coordinator came outside and apologised for keeping me waiting. We headed over to the telecentre and I finally got my interview.

This was to be the first of many lessons I learnt about how to do research with this group of people in this particular geographic, historical and social context. Perhaps though this was the most important lesson I learnt; that as a researcher intervening in people's lives it had to be up to them if and when they would participate, and the best I could do was be patient, adaptable, and – while I had my own plans – be respectful of other people's lives, concerns, aspirations and expectations.

My initial exploratory visit to Karrayili was extremely valuable in that it forged the beginnings of good relationships between myself and key stakeholders at Karrayili, and also confirmed for me that Karrayili would be an ideal subject for my research purposes. The Principal of Karrayili was keen for me to return, and in particular for me to do some teacher training with the young Aboriginal woman who was then working with the group of elders known as the Karrayili Class, or the KCs. Earlier that year I had applied to the national organisation Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV), in the hope that the skills and experience I had gained in teaching ESL would enable me to be accepted as a volunteer teacher/teacher-trainer in Aboriginal communities. My application had been accepted, and it was through the funding provided by this organisation that in November 2007 I was able to make the first of my working visits to Karrayili.

During the two weeks I was in Fitzroy Crossing on this second occasion, I did little formal evidence collection. Of far greater importance to my research at that time was the invaluable opportunity to meet Karrayili committee

members, the Principal and other staff, in order to establish contact and initiate discussions around the subject of my proposed research. Given the nature of the project, and the context of a Kartiya researcher working with Aboriginal participants, this trip was extremely important in that it enabled me to raise the prospect of my research with intended participants, and to gauge their initial responses to the research subject matter. In doing voluntary teacher-training at the Centre, I was also able to demonstrate reciprocity, and a willingness to engage with the learners in a meaningful way.

Building good rapport and trusting relationships with participants is crucial to ethnographic data collection, as without them representation of the voices, opinions and views of participants is likely to be compromised. This can mean that before conducting interviews the researcher must first spend time at the research site, developing sound and trusting relationships with the people who are to be interviewed. Such preparation can be particularly important when the researcher's background – for example ethnicity, gender, or class – differs considerably from the case study community's (Wilson, 2008). While I had spent time in the Fitzroy Valley in the past, and was known either directly or indirectly by several people in Fitzroy Crossing, I was well aware that I was coming to the research site as a Kartiya researcher.

Coming to the community as an outsider, it was important for me to build my own relationships/connections. Initially I was concerned with incorporating explicit research into every interaction I had with Karrayili students and staff, and I suspect that many interesting and useful snippets of information completely passed me by as I sat intently focussed on coming up with 'the' question to ask that would unlock the door to understanding literacy practices in this context. Gradually though I came to realise that simply *being* with people was equally important, coming to know them and for them to know me, learning about their lives and what was important to them. As a result much of what I did during my fieldwork was not directly related to the research I was undertaking – instead it involved taking people fishing or to the supermarket, sitting with people and talking about their country, their families, walking the land, visiting different communities, training with people,

teaching people. All of this helped build the connections that enabled my research to take place.

As a Kartiya working with Aboriginal Australians, it was imperative for me to acknowledge and integrate Indigenous ways of being and of doing research (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999; Wilson, 2008) into my relationships with the people of Karrayili, and establishing connections was an important part of this. For many Indigenous Australians, as with Indigenous peoples from other nations, a great deal of importance is placed on knowing how people 'fit' – who they are related to, who they know, where they are from, where they have lived and so on (Wilson, 2008). First meetings are frequently guided by questions or conversations along these lines, with the intention of establishing any connections that may exist between the speakers. Wilson talks of his own experiences with this:

One thing that I have noticed of Indigenous people everywhere, though, is that they always ask a new acquaintance where they are from. From this information, an exchange takes place of “do you know ...” or “are you related to ...” or “do you know where ... is?” or “I was at ... there three years ago ...” The person is put into relationship through mutual friends or even through knowledge of certain landmarks, places or events. Shared relationships allow for a strengthening of the new relationship (2008, p. 84).

There are strong family and historical connections between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, so I would often look for ways to drop my own connections with Halls Creek into conversations, talking of the people I had known there and had grown up with. Once a mutual friend, acquaintance (or even first-hand knowledge of a particular place or incident) was established, there was a very real sensation of a shift in our relationship – that on some level at least I had moved a little along the *outsider-insider* continuum, that I was more accepted, that people felt they knew more of who I was and as a direct result were more comfortable talking with me.

For some time after I commenced my research project, my awareness and concerns regarding the appropriateness of undertaking research in an Aboriginal context when I am non-Indigenous caused me some anxiety, at

times to the point of disrupting my research plans. With time, though, I came to see that it was less of a problem than I had anticipated, certainly from the perspective of local people and my research participants. What mattered to people involved in my study was not whether or not I was Indigenous, but whether or not I was perceived to be a part of the community. It was my connections to individuals, and to the Karrayili community, that ultimately enabled me to undertake my research in a meaningful way. The importance to Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing of connections – to people, place and culture – is explored in detail in the case study to come.

In 2008, and early in 2009, I returned to Karrayili for two short (three-week) field trips. On these visits I continued to observe, conduct formal interviews, and participate in Karrayili life. At this stage though I was still feeling confused about what it was that I was there to do, about how my initial ideas about literacy tied in with what I was beginning to understand about how Karrayili works and why. My preconceived notions of what the Karrayili learners 'needed' had been challenged by what I had already seen and heard; I was beginning to see the extent to which literacy learning was entwined with the social and cultural context of life in Fitzroy Crossing, and as a result my research project was beginning to change shape. I was now more aware that making sense of the role of literacy and learning in these people's lives was going to entail far more than simply asking people a few questions. It was clear that I would need to immerse myself in life at Karrayili at a deeper level, and for a much more extended period of time, but with vacant accommodation in the town almost non-existent it looked like this was not going to be possible.

Later in 2009, however, I was contacted by the Principal of Karrayili, who informed me that due to an unexpected and serendipitous series of events accommodation had become available and there was a teaching position for me at the Centre if I was interested. At that time I was in a position to accept her offer so I immediately took advantage of this turn of events and relocated

to Fitzroy Crossing for a few months to see how it all went. I packed up my life in Perth and set off on the long drive to Fitzroy Crossing.

Collecting the evidence

I spent the majority of the next twelve months immersed in life at Fitzroy Crossing. While I had originally planned to travel to Fitzroy Crossing for a few months to conduct interviews and carry out participant observation I had quickly realised that in order for my evidence collection to be thorough, methodologically sound, and respectful of Indigenous ways, I would need to spend a much longer period of time with the people participating in my research.

This extended period of fieldwork facilitated my research in a number of ways. Firstly, and most importantly, it enabled me to develop the relationships and rapport essential to conducting research with Indigenous Australians. I was able to build on relationships developed on previous visits, really getting to know people and demonstrating my own integrity and respect through our interactions. I was also able to demonstrate reciprocity through my work with some of the student groups, and through my social interaction with various people in the community. This reflects and honours Indigenous ways of doing research – a number of Indigenous academics (including Nakata, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) have raised the issue of non-Indigenous researchers failing to address the ‘three Rs’ – respect, reciprocity and relationality – when doing research in Indigenous communities. It was important to me that in doing my research I was able to demonstrate all three of these, and that the relationships that developed as a result were genuine and long-lasting.

Through living in the community for an extended period and working with the research participants at Karrayili, I was also able to gain a much deeper understanding of the issues and processes that impact on people’s literacy practices there, and of the training context in general. Being able to observe

and record daily practices over an extended period gave my evidence collection a depth that would not have been possible had I only stayed the intended 3 months.

One of the key sources of evidence for this research project was the use of ethnographic interviews. Over the course of my fieldwork I conducted interviews, both semi-structured and informal, with thirty-one participants. Two of the interviews were with focus groups, the others were with individuals. All took place in Fitzroy Crossing or Broome, between March 2009 and June 2010. In line with the requirements of my ethics approval for this project, I sought and received written or verbal consent from all participants to be interviewed and for their photographs to be used. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and prior to each interview participants' consent to being interviewed and recorded was sought and granted.

In terms of interviewees' roles at Karrayili, the interviews can be grouped as:

Role at Karrayili	Number of interviewees
Student only	10
Student + staff	5
Student + Director	4
Staff only	6
Staff + Director	3
Other	3

Of these, five interviewees were Kartiya (four staff members, one ex-Principal). With the student interviews, I aimed for a range of interviewees in terms of age, sex, Language group, and courses of study at Karrayili. Rough groupings in terms of age were:

Age range	Number of interviewees
Under 30	8
30 - 50	14
Over 50	9

Getting a broad range in terms of male/female participants was less successful. Twenty-six of the interviews were with women, and only five were with men. This partly reflects the demographics of day-to-day study at Karrayili at that time, where the majority of students were female. Men probably outnumber women on courses such as the intensive Environmental Health workshops, but as I was unable to attend any of these due to teaching commitments I was not able to access more male interviewees as a result. Another group who were predominantly male were my Rangers class, but these men proved to be highly elusive when it came to doing interviews. This was possibly because they felt 'shame'³⁰, and this could have been for a number of reasons including lack of confidence in their English, embarrassment that they'd missed a great number of lessons with me (and tended to avoid me as a result), and feeling uncomfortable talking with me as I'm female (especially the younger men). It could also have been simply that they had 'more important' things to do, the kind of things that led to them missing classes so regularly.

Evidence collection on my shorter visits was focussed mainly on conducting semi-structured ethnographic interviews with staff and students. The interviews lasted, on average, around half an hour. Several were much longer, over an hour, and these were mostly (but not all) with Karrayili staff members. Some, especially those with Aboriginal students who did not know me well, were much shorter, around 15-20 minutes. At that stage I still believed my research was focused fairly narrowly on literacy learning and its impact on employability and community development, and I began

³⁰ As described earlier - in Chapter Two

interviewing people accordingly. How, I wanted to ask them, did people in Fitzroy Crossing use and learn English? Was it important to them? How did they think becoming proficient in SAE could impact on their lives and on the community in general?

At this stage though my problems revolved less around what I should ask, and were centred more on how I could get anyone to agree to be interviewed. Most people avoided me entirely. After being reassured that the interviews would be 'more like a yarn', several said they wouldn't mind being interviewed but were then mysteriously absent at the agreed time and place, leaving me waiting alone with my questions and my voice recorder, feeling discouraged and beginning to doubt my suitability for this type of research.

Part of people's reluctance to be interviewed could have been the culturally inappropriate nature of interviews themselves for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. As noted in the cultural awareness booklet produced by Karrayili:

Don't ask too many questions ... Aboriginal people don't ask questions that are very direct and require yes and no answers ... Find out if the Aboriginal person would like to have someone else to talk sideways (indirectly) to you. (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d., pp. 16-17)

'Talking sideways' is an important part of Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley, utilised in order to approach sensitive issues without causing offence to others. It involves going around an issue, approaching it indirectly, and often involves the use of a third person with whom the person being questioned feels comfortable (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d., pp. 18-19). It was some time before I became aware that my interviewing techniques were less than appropriate for many of my interviewees, but they were kind enough to tolerate my Karrayili ways and be interviewed regardless.

Unfortunately, as my research progressed, even as word spread that the interviews were in fact painless and more people came to talk to me about their learning experiences, my discomfort increased exponentially. Despite

all my best intentions, regardless of how carefully I prepared my interview questions or explained to people what I was trying to find out, the evidence I was collecting and the picture I was starting to see were not at all what I had expected to find. Learning at Karrayili clearly involved learning in English, and there was evidence all around me – in the form of public notices for example, letters from Centrelink, and public meetings regarding matters of direct relevance and importance to people’s everyday lives – of the need for Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley to have English language competency. Yet every time I asked the Karrayili students about learning English, or about literacy practices, I was met either with silence or with a response which didn’t seem to match my question at all.

However, I had a plan, I had my candidacy and my ethics applications, my informed consent forms and my interview questions, and in the early stages of my fieldwork it was these that directed my research. I was not really hearing what I was being told, or seeing what I needed to see – it was as if I was blinded by my idea of what I had to achieve. As a result, for quite some time I persisted with my emphasis on English literacy practices, believing that the reason I wasn’t getting the evidence I needed was that I wasn’t ‘doing the research right’. If I could just work out the right question form, or ask the right person, or better explain to people what I was looking for, everything would be alright. What I really needed to do though was – as the old road safety warnings used to tell us – stop, look and listen.

The Principal of Karrayili, when questioned about the students’ literacy practices, would vary between resigned compliance and polite engagement with my questions, and occasional outbursts of frustration with me. “I don’t know why you keep going on about English literacy” she fumed one day. “That’s not what matters around here”. I heard what she said, but remaining convinced of the value of what I had set out to achieve, I failed at that stage to really listen.

I later came to realise that while the candidacy process, the development of research questions and identification of the significance of my research, had

all helped to guide my research plans, they had also served to make me blind and deaf to what was really happening at Karrayili. I was viewing the 'problem' from a Western, educationalist perspective (as will be seen in Chapter Six, even identifying it as a 'problem' was a problem in itself), and in some ways I thought I already had the answers. In reality I knew nothing, and it took quite some time for me to realise this. It was only after I had immersed myself in the field for several months, living in the community and participating fully in the everyday lives of the students and staff at Karrayili, that I finally realised that my initial aims, my candidacy proposal, the interview questions I had prepared, were not what would direct my research. It was the participants' responses, what they told me and showed me, what they made clear to me and what they did not, that mattered. From that point on my thesis direction started to shift. It was no longer about the pedagogy of teaching English literacy, it was about Karrayili. It began to take on new life as a critical ethnography of the Centre, but more importantly about how the Centre matters to, and empowers, the people who go there.

Once my perception of the research I was doing shifted, so I gradually gained confidence and became more comfortable in my role as researcher. My approach to identifying potential interviewees became more opportunistic – while I continued to seek out particular individuals whose viewpoints and opinions I believed were essential to building a true and comprehensive picture of Karrayili, I also started to just 'be around'. I would sit in on classes, accompany other lecturers, chat to people on the verandas. And I would take every opportunity to ask if someone would be happy to have a chat about Karrayili. My interview questions and techniques became far less planned, far more responsive to situations, personalities, and relationships. I became more comfortable with asking broader questions in the hope that significant information would emerge, rather than using particular questions to try to 'force' people into giving me the information that I was looking for.

Initially, too, I was committed to using qualified interpreters to facilitate interviews, particularly with older interviewees whose use of SAE was limited.

However after several failed attempts, when interpreters either didn't turn up as arranged or tended to take over the interview and interpret the interviewees' responses as they saw fit, I started to rely more on my own relationships with participants to facilitate the interviews. This was particularly relevant given the opportunistic nature of many of the interviews, and the need for me to respond to people's spontaneous offers to participate. Engaging interpreters also posed a potential problem as many of the interviewees didn't want an interpreter, and certainly didn't think that they needed one. Many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing who speak Kriol as their first language believe that they are in fact speaking English, and are often perplexed as to why Kartiya don't understand them. A final observation regarding the use of interpreters, and one that I failed to consider until after I had completed my fieldwork, was that I should in fact have asked participants who they wanted to be present. While qualified interpreters in the Fitzroy Valley are trained to evaluate their suitability for each situation, the complex interrelationships of families and social contexts in the Valley meant that it would have been appropriate for me to have asked participants not only *if* they would like to use an interpreter, but if so who they would like to have present.

My extended stay in Fitzroy Crossing enabled me to also employ techniques of participant observation. This benefited my research in two ways. First it reinforced what I was being told, enabling me to gain a much deeper understanding of what was happening at Karrayili and why, simply by being a part of the Centre. I worked and socialised with staff and students on a daily basis, observed not just classes but other, less formal, interactions at the Centre, and I attended the frequent meetings held locally with visiting politicians, policy advisors, adult education providers and the like to discuss issues surrounding Indigenous adult education in the Fitzroy Valley. Secondly, participant observation allowed me to identify anomalies and paradoxes in what I was being told, or in the literature I had engaged with. For example, I was repeatedly told that students went to Karrayili to learn to speak 'Kartiya way', yet in my observations I saw very little evidence of this. These observations played an important role in shaping the ways in which

my research shifted emphasis, from an exploration of literacy practices to a much stronger emphasis on why people chose to engage with learning at Karrayili.

As noted earlier, though, participant observation has its limitations. The researcher is constrained to an extent by what is visible, or perhaps by what is *made* visible by those engaged in the research context. Choices made regarding who to observe, and when and where, mean that observations are only ever going to be about that particular place at that particular time, and any two people observing the same situation could easily produce two very different perspectives of what was happening. While this does not suggest that my research is invalid or unreliable, it does mean that it is both reflexive and defined by the context in which it was undertaken. As Silverman (2001, p2) notes, “Whatever we observe is pregnated by assumptions”, and remaining mindful of this point proved to be both a challenge and a useful reminder of the existence of different worldviews.

Analysing and interpreting the evidence

The primary research evidence was analysed through the application of two key techniques. Evidence from recorded interviews was analysed through discourse analysis of the transcripts, with particular attention paid to the identification of emergent themes and insights into issues of power, identity and meaning. Reflexivity was also key to effective and appropriate analysis, and I placed strong emphasis on reflection in analysis of observations and informal interviews with participants, and of my own location within the research process. I carefully analysed my field notes, including my own participation, searching for any evidence of bias or of my leading participants’ responses. I also ensured informants had opportunities to read drafts if they wished to, following up with discussions regarding what they’d said and how it had been recorded.

Analysing the interview transcripts presented me with two key challenges. First I needed to identify commonalities, tensions and emerging themes, and relate these back to the theories that framed my research. As with all ethnographies, it was important that such themes emerged from the evidence, rather than being predetermined. This was a key way in which my attitudes towards my research shifted during the research process. Prior to engaging in field work at Karrayili I had thought I already had a good understanding of what was happening there, of why people were learning English literacy and why English literacy levels in the community were apparently not improving. In some ways I went to Fitzroy Crossing to gather the evidence that would support my expected conclusions. The research process – listening to people talk about their lives and about learning at Karrayili, observing what was really happening there, being involved in people's everyday lives, and ultimately analysing the information I had gathered – produced an enormous shift in how I viewed my research and how I prioritised different aspects of the knowledge that I now had. I had entered the research context with a great many assumptions and preconceptions about what I would find. The process of analysing the evidence meant that I left with a far richer, more complex and deeper understanding of what was happening at the Centre from the perspective of those involved, a perspective very different from that I had anticipated during the planning of my research project.

A second challenge was how to transcribe spoken interviews and represent participants' responses in my writing. This necessitated a great deal of thought, as the majority of my interviewees spoke English as a second language. Would transcribing their responses phonetically (for example 'an' for 'and', 'e' for 'he/she') result in authenticity, or would it appear to be patronising? I decided that it was important for interviewees to be able to tell their own stories in their own way, for people's true voices to be able to come through, hopefully without creating problems for readers unfamiliar with Kriol or misrepresenting the speakers themselves. It was also important that my writing demonstrate the value of Kriol as a language, without any attempts to reduce it to a poor version of SAE. In fact as few interviewees spoke in Kriol

it became more a matter of representing the manner in which they spoke English in such a way that the quotes would read as they had been spoken.

Reflecting on the research experience

In many ways undertaking this research project proved to be a daunting experience, one that shook my confidence and taught me much about needing to have trust in myself and in those around me. As an experienced teacher and teacher-trainer, early in my field work I placed a great deal of importance on planning. I planned my lessons, I planned interviews, I even planned apparently spontaneous meetings and conversations with participants. Having a plan made me feel like I was in control of the situation, whether or not I actually was. Despite all my planning however, each day that I was involved with the learners at Karrayili and the community members of Fitzroy Crossing less and less went according to plan. Interviews I arranged didn't happen. I didn't meet deadlines with regard to writing reports or journal reflections, transcribing interviews, reading the literature, or just about anything else. I had previously prided myself on my abilities as an ESL teacher, but in this context I didn't even feel I could teach well. As time went by I understood less and less about my research topic, not more and more as I had expected to do. I had no idea what was going on, and little time to truly reflect on it. My life in Fitzroy Crossing was extremely full, and in addition to adjusting to my new role as researcher I was also adjusting to an unfamiliar teaching context, extreme weather conditions, overcoming my reluctance to manually remove large green frogs from my toilet (but an even greater reluctance to leave them there), and to living alone. I began to lose confidence in my ability to complete this project. Adding to my concerns were other people's comments – Are you *still* doing that research thing? How many words have you written this week? How many interviews have you done?

It wasn't just interviews that troubled me. Participant observation presents the researcher with an obvious dilemma – how to *participate* as fully and as

meaningfully as possible in the lives of participants, while remaining sufficiently objective and detached so as to be able to *observe* for the purposes of the research (Atkinson et al., 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Becoming closely involved in the daily lives of participants meant, for me, developing relationships with them that went beyond those of researcher/researched. For one thing I was given a skin name by the KC students, making me their sister and drawing me more deeply into community life. Initially I felt pleased, while suspecting too that this was a token gesture on their part. Several Kartiya I knew in Fitzroy Crossing had been given skin names yet did not seem to participate in Indigenous community or cultural life on any meaningful level. I am not sure whether it was the close, daily interaction I had with the various family members I had gained as a result of my skin name, many of whom I worked with on a daily basis, my own sense of identity, or particular contextual circumstances that arose during my time at Karrayili, but without doubt my skin name changed my identity in the community. I would now be introduced on communities as 'Nyapana', so that people understood where I fitted in. I now had family connections with many people, including a son ten years my senior, never seen without his cowboy hat and checked shirt, who would always greet me with glad (if perhaps a little ironic) cries of "Mummy!" or "Mother Goose!" and a big hug. I felt very much a part of local life. These new connections were very welcome, but I wondered (and continue to wonder) whether they interfered with my objectivity, or added a depth to my research that I would not have gained without such acceptance in the community. Perhaps the two are not mutually exclusive.

The extent of my involvement at Karrayili gave me other causes for concern with regard to my evidence collection. Initially I was concerned that people who did not know me well might not feel comfortable about talking to me openly about their experiences at Karrayili and about their own aspirations and expectations with regard to participating in classes there. With interviews there is always a danger that interviewees may feel compelled, for whatever reason, to tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what they actually think, feel or believe themselves. This concern became

stronger as my relationships with the people involved developed into friendships. I asked myself whether people who were students, friends, or recipients in some way of my help would tell me the whole truth about Karrayili and about themselves.

Added to this was the change in perceptions of who I was and why I was there. Once accepted by the community as a Karrayili teacher, it was difficult at times for me to move from my teaching role to that of researcher. Some students, especially, reacted with wariness or some confusion when asked if they'd be interviewed, increasing my discomfort with conducting interviews. However, as I became more comfortable in my role as interviewer, as the interviews became more conversational and open, and as I started to compare the content of the interviews with my own observations, I grew to accept that while I may not be getting the 'whole truth' (whatever that may have been), I felt confident at least that what I was hearing was not being concocted for my benefit. Reassuringly for me, in her discussion of literacy as social practice Papen asserts that "Ethnographies are always only part of the truth" (2005, p. 65).

Conclusions

This chapter has provided a description of the methods used to frame and guide this research project, together with the rationale for choosing this approach. Throughout the chapter I have described and detailed how the ethical requirements specific to doing research in an Indigenous context were addressed. Given that it is a critical ethnography, I have also endeavoured to give the reader an understanding of some of the challenges faced in conducting this research, how these were dealt with, and how my own thinking and ways of working shifted while doing the research.

This chapter concludes Part A of my thesis. The following section, Part B, moves into the case study itself, providing a comprehensive description and analysis of what happens at Karrayili and why.

Part B: Exploring literacies in the Kimberley context – a case study of Karrayili Adult Education Centre

Introduction to Part B

The case study information and analysis for this thesis is presented in Part B in three sections, each in a different chapter.

Chapter Five uses information gathered from interviews and participant observation to examine the ways in which Karrayili operates as an adult education centre, and in particular its emphasis on social practice approaches to teaching adult literacy and conducting training. In describing what happens at Karrayili and why, a key issue for this thesis emerges: that much of what happens there is driven by two very different, yet equally demanding, forces. The main driving force of Karrayili is the mission to meet the needs, desires and aspirations of the community, particularly with regard to ensuring the community is supported in its determination to maintain and sustain local cultural practices. At the same time programs, management and enrolment procedures must meet the requirements and expectations of the accrediting and funding bodies without whom Karrayili, at the time of writing this thesis at least, could not continue to exist.

Chapter Six reveals, largely through selected excerpts from interviews, how the learners and staff themselves perceive the role of Karrayili, and of further education in general, in their lives and the lives of community members. Chapter Six reverses the usual 'top-down' approach to analysing Aboriginal educational institutions, allowing those involved at the ground level to explain what the centre means to them. In doing so, this chapter highlights the very different aspirations and expectations held by Aboriginal learners in this remote location from those generally assumed in mainstream institutions.

These two chapters together reveal how Karrayili works and why. However, Karrayili does not exist in a vacuum, and in attempting to meet the needs of both the Fitzroy Crossing community and mainstream Australian education policies and practices tensions and paradoxes are created. The final chapter of the case study, Chapter Seven, explores these tensions, looking at the ways in which the 'mismatch' between what Karrayili wants to do and what it is required to do places constraints on management and teaching staff, and at how Karrayili manages these constraints without losing its integrity and commitment to meeting community needs.

My understanding of the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three runs through the next three chapters. In particular, these chapters illustrate the ways in which the social context of learning in Fitzroy Crossing is woven into everything that happens at Karrayili, and how this social practice approach to teaching and learning in turn facilitates learner autonomy, making the learners and the community strong.

Chapter 5: Doing things the Karrayili way

In Chapter One I introduced Karrayili, relaying some sense of how it is and how it came about. This chapter describes the Centre in more detail, giving a more thorough understanding not just of what people do there but also of the cross-cultural perspectives that define the ways in which the organisation goes about its business. During my fieldwork I came to realise that Karrayili operates very differently from other educational institutions I have experienced, and part of my aim in this chapter is to demonstrate my understanding of how things work there, and why.

As part of my exploration of the ‘why’, in this chapter I will touch on the ways in which Karrayili – and the learning that takes place there – is constructed by those at the Centre. In taking a closer look at what happens at Karrayili, at the types of learning that take place and the themes and attributes that shape everyday practices there, this chapter, Chapter Five, brings to light the importance of knowing the social context within which learning takes place at Karrayili. It reveals the ways in which the culture of the organisation reflects and prioritises local cultural practices, and how the roles of participants and the hierarchies at work can at times be unexpected for those more used to mainstream educational institutions.

At times this chapter is descriptive, and deliberately so. Part of my aim here is to demonstrate what life at Karrayili is like, and how teaching and learning there is very different from mainstream approaches to education. And it must

be emphasised that my point here is *difference*: not better necessarily, certainly not worse, but different, and for very good reasons.

Key to this research, this chapter highlights the ways in which Karrayili takes a social practice approach to teaching and learning, not just acknowledging but valuing the social contexts in which learning takes place in Fitzroy Crossing. At Karrayili there is no superficial 'nod of the head' to the learners' cultural identities; instead their lives, their values, their histories and their relationships form the basis for all that happens at the Centre.

Karrayili has survived, and at various times thrived, for more than thirty years. In the world of Aboriginal organisations in Australia this is a rare feat, and its longevity raises the question: What accounts for its coherence, for its ability to survive the changes and challenges it has faced over the years? This is an important question, and in the next two chapters the analysis of what holds Karrayili together reveals a rich and complex picture of a successful Aboriginal-directed education centre at work.

A day in the life

At Karrayili, as with everywhere in Fitzroy Crossing (and quite possibly the whole of the Kimberley), life moves at a different pace from in the city. For much of the year the intense heat (frequently well above 40 degrees) directs the ways and speeds with which people move. Those travelling on foot tend to move slowly, spending time en route in the shade of trees and buildings, while those fortunate enough to be travelling by car can be seen hurrying from air-conditioned vehicles to air-conditioned buildings.

It takes me a while to adjust to this more relaxed pace of life when I arrive in Fitzroy Crossing. For the first few weeks I rush about in the mornings getting ready for work, feeling I am running late and having to dash the few hundred metres around the corner from my flat to Karrayili in order to get there by 8am. Gradually I come to realise that while in theory the start of the working

day is at 8am, in practice this is – as with so many other aspects of life in Fitzroy Crossing – flexible.

As staff and students start to drift in to Karrayili, the place gradually begins to come to life. The first to arrive is always either the principal, CD, or a key member of staff, ZC. ZC is officially employed as the cleaner, but as a long-term resident of Fitzroy Crossing and Karrayili Director her role in practice is far more complex and influential than her position would imply. CD makes a coffee then goes to her office, turning on her computer and getting straight to work on the usual round of funding applications, submissions, staffing issues and so on. ZC tidies the kitchen, making sure there are good supplies of tea bags, cartons of long-life milk, sugar and biscuits, then waters the gardens thoroughly in her ongoing battle to keep something in the garden (apart from the snakes and frogs) alive.

Karrayili has several vehicles, including a 12-seater bus which is used to collect students from various communities and bring them in to class. In a community such as Fitzroy Crossing, where few people have a current driver's licence or access to a licensed and functional vehicle and there is no public transport, this service is absolutely essential if people are to be able to attend further education classes. While I was living in Fitzroy Crossing collecting the KC students for class every morning was part of my role, and the following excerpt developed from my field notes gives an idea of a typical start to a Karrayili day for me:

At 8 o'clock I collect the bus from the school and head first out to Junjuwa community, on the northern edge of Fitzroy Crossing township. Junjuwa is one of the town's oldest communities, and the people living there are mainly Bunuba people (the area's traditional owners). The woman I go to collect from Junjuwa, DA, was one of Karrayili's original students, and she has had a long and dedicated commitment to the school. As one of the school's founding students she is considered by staff and students alike as being akin to the Centre's 'matriarch', and as such it is deemed important that we show her due respect by collecting her first, before the other students. DA also commandeers the front passenger seat, and woe

betide anyone who tries to sit there instead of her. This has been a long-standing arrangement, and while no-one knows exactly who decided this should be so there is unanimous agreement that it is the right and proper protocol to follow.

Having collected DA my next stop is Bayulu community, 18km from Fitzroy town. The drive itself is never less than life-affirming - counting freshwater crocodiles in the water and on the sandbar as we cross the Fitzroy River bridge, watching birds of prey rising and swooping gracefully on thermal air currents, observing seasonal changes in the grasses and trees lining the road, with the unmistakable Kimberley light and space and always that simply enormous blue sky overhead. The bitumen road leading from the turn-off to the community rings the small collection of mainly fibro houses, but to reach several of the women's houses I need to bump the bus over the concrete kerb and turn onto one of the many dirt tracks that criss-cross the settlement. DA, as always, directs me as to whose house to go to first, who to pick up and who not to. She is particularly adamant that the bus is only to be used for Karrayili students and is not a free taxi service to town for other Bayulu residents.

Negotiating pot-holes, the occasional wrecked car, sheets of corrugated iron and the ever-present multitude of camp dogs, I visit each of the houses in turn. With the exception of one woman who is always ready on time, picking up the students inevitably follows a similar routine: I pull up outside the house in the large white bus clearly identified as 'Karrayili Adult Education Centre' in large black letters on its side. There are usually a number of people (adults and kids) sitting around a fire or table outside, drinking tea and chatting, who look at me for a while and I look back at them expectantly. Finally I wind down the window and shout "Is DD/JC/RT there?" "She inside" they call back. "Oh. Is she coming to class?" At which point everyone shouts to the person in question, who then emerges from the house and strolls over to the bus. Often this isn't the end of the shouting, as the student might bellow something to the people nearby, or in the next house, and they then bellow back.

Once I've repeated this for several students at Bayulu we continue to Mindi Rardi and Kurnangki communities, where the same procedure is followed. Finally we return to Karrayili, and as the women get off the bus they slowly make their way across the wooden veranda to their classroom, their calls of "Good morning" and

their brightly coloured skirts and dresses brightening up everyone's day.

Initially I was perplexed as to why people weren't ready and waiting for the bus in the morning. It was a routine affair, I went to the same places for the same people at the same time every Monday to Thursday morning, yet few people ever seemed to be expecting me. Again, it took me a while to accept that things are done differently in Fitzroy Crossing, that people rarely know what time it is and even if they do, appointments or set times have little meaning for them. Things happen when they happen.

Doing things in their own time could also be interpreted as Aboriginal people employing a strategy of autonomy; in doing things as and when they see fit, perhaps Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are maintaining some sense of control over their lives. This is of particular relevance to a people who have experienced State control over their lives to such an oppressive and destructive degree as the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley have endured.

At Karrayili, as the morning progresses there is a sense of 'ebb and flow', of the numbers of people at Karrayili increasing and decreasing, of people coming and going. Just who will be there at any one time is difficult to predict; the place can be teeming one day and completely deserted the next, with Karrayili staff often unaware of the particular circumstances leading to either situation. There are few regular classes as such, with set lesson times and expected cohorts of students. Instead, learning takes place on a more individualised basis, with students enrolling in units and working in small groups or one-on-one with a teacher.

Always there is much chatter and laughter, especially at morning tea time when the KCs leave their classroom and make their way to the table on the veranda outside the kitchen. Others often join them, family members or friends, visitors or staff members, and the veranda at this time often becomes a busy and vibrant place to be. And always there's the ubiquitous ZC, making cups of tea and food for the older students, checking what visitors are

up to, liaising between old and young, Aboriginal and Kariya, nothing escaping her attention. Often she'll catch my eye, and with a discreet nod of her head indicate something that's going on that I would otherwise have missed.

By late morning most students have left Karrayili, and as staff members head home for lunch the place is suddenly deserted. For most of the year the middle of the day is hot, sometimes unbearably so, and it's a good time to head home to rest and stay cool. Unless there is a meeting happening in the conference room, in the afternoon the Centre remains quiet, with staff members in their classrooms or offices, busy preparing materials or working with occasional students individually.

What is Karrayili?

For many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing Karrayili is far more than simply a building, or a place providing training and education services. When people speak of Karrayili it seems to have an almost organic quality; people talk of '(h)im', and of how Karrayili 'bin grow up', Karrayili 'makes me strong' and it is 'there for us'. These strong connections to Karrayili as a place have come about to a large extent because of historical factors. As described in Chapter One, Karrayili was started by and for local Aboriginal people and people are quick to mention this when asked about the role Karrayili plays in the community. There is a palpable sense of belonging, of Karrayili being here not only *for* local people, but *because of* them. People are extremely proud of Karrayili and it is without doubt a major achievement, having grown from the aspirations and hard work of local people.

To local Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing Karrayili is a place they know well – even if they have never studied there themselves they know someone who has, or they have used the facilities or visited with friends or family. This familiarity is partly facilitated by its accessibility and visibility. Most Aboriginal people in the town do not have access to private transport so they walk, and

Karrayili lies in the path of people walking from the communities of Mindi Rardi, Loanbung or Kurnangki to town services such as the supermarket, police station or hospital, and likewise for those walking from Junjuwa or Borowa communities to Centrelink, Ngiyali Roadhouse or Marra Worra Worra. At the time of my fieldwork the post office, a busy place at any time of day, was temporarily located (following the destruction of the original supermarket and post office complex in a fire in July 2009) at the Shire Offices right next door to Karrayili. People would go there to collect their post, then often wander over to Karrayili to see what was happening, catch up with friends or family, or read the communal noticeboards.

Similarly, at various times Karrayili students and staff wander over to the post office or roadhouse, stopping to chat with local people as they do. The grassed area to the left of the Shire offices and the car park at the front provide common ground for meeting up, and become a shared space for people from all over the town, Aboriginal and Karrayili, to meet and have a yarn. This is an important part of Fitzroy life. Going to the roadhouse or the post office from Karrayili is an opportunity to walk and talk, to cement relationships and to see and be seen. For Karrayili staff it is often an opportunity to bump into students who haven't attended for a while; to ask how they are going, to listen to what's been happening in their lives, and to perhaps encourage them to pop in to the school again for a chat about their studies.

Karrayili students rarely have a focus on completion of certificates or units, yet it is, generally, a busy and popular place. I was intrigued to know why this is so, and in the following interview excerpt ZC explains something of its appeal to local Aboriginal people:

ZC: I think it's more relaxed, you know? It's closer in town for most of the people, and they had family you know, people's friends or people that they know that been through Karrayili and done this an' that. It's more relaxed atmosphere, not like these other [local organisations]. Like, they haven't got much Indigenous mob there working anyway.

MS: Mm. So people, local mob like to go somewhere where there's Aboriginal people working there?

ZC: *Yeah, and who they know an' get on with ... at Karrayili it's more relaxed an' open, you know?*

ZC touches here on two key factors in Karrayili's ongoing appeal to local people. One is the importance of relationships, of knowing and trusting the people who work there. This aspect will be explored further in Chapter Six. The other factor is that people feel comfortable with the Centre, with the physical environment and its relaxed, open atmosphere.

This sense of Karrayili being both familiar and accessible is important to its success as it reflects the way that Aboriginal people live their lives in Fitzroy Crossing. There appears to be little sense of private space there, with home environments often shared by extended family members and families tending to spend much of their time at home outside, either on verandas or on neutral ground under a nearby shady tree. Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing seem to spend a lot of time outside, and when walking around town or driving through communities it is common to see quite large groups of people sitting outside their houses chatting, with children and dogs playing close by. In the same way groups of people can often be seen socialising outside the supermarket, roadhouses, or the various agencies in town.

At Karrayili there is an unstated but clear recognition that this way of living is an important facet of local people's lives, and this is reflected in both its design and in the general ethos of the place. Physically, Karrayili is an open space. From the time the front gates are opened at 8am people are both able and encouraged to wander in and out as they please. People come in to speak to staff members or students, but also perhaps to get a drink at the water cooler, to read the notices on the boards, or to check to see if any important meetings will be happening in the conference room that day. This openness plays an important role in ensuring that local people feel comfortable about being in the physical space of Karrayili. In interviews

people were always very responsive to my questions about how they felt about Karrayili, as evidenced by the following quotes:

I like Karrayili, it's a good environment, it makes you feel comfortable, like being in the environment ... that's why I see a lot of people come here, 'cause they feel comfortable, comfortable with Karrayili ... (JLC, student and Director).

I think a lot of people see Karrayili as a place that you can go to to get help with everyday things, I think that is one of the major things, we also do training [laughs], and I think people also like to go there to learn new skills, but I think it's seen as a really approachable place and I mean it's indicated in, you know we've got the conference room that we hire out and when we have community meetings and generally when they're held at Karrayili there's a great response, if they're held in other places then people don't feel as comfortable to go there, yeah. And I think we have had good interaction with the community through, I mean through the actual facilities, but through staff as well, that we have good interactions with the community (TV, lecturer).

But it's still a place where everybody will come in to use the toilets and get a drink of water. Whereas other places they'd be hesitant, you know you just wouldn't go into the school and use the toilet (CD, Principal).

[People] get referred, like if they go to Centrelink or Job Futures an' they can say "Oh, have you had your white card?" Whatever job you want for they gotta, they gotta ask all these questions or "What year did you go up to at school an you got any qualifications or any certificates to back you up?" [and] they say "No". "You got any licence?" "No." Then they'll say where, where can you go you know? Is there a place in town for you to go to get all these trainings? And where you'll feel comfortable? An they'll say "Oh, we can, we can, Karrayili does us" you know? (ZC, Director).

The veranda at the front of Karrayili, in particular, is a place where people feel comfortable to sit and talk, or just be. This space is a liminal area, a kind of no-man's-land where people can meet without feeling any discomfort about being in a (perhaps threatening) school environment. Yet by being in this liminal zone they have also not committed to anything, and are free to stay or leave as they please; it's almost as if they are standing with one foot in the door but with their coats still on, ready to leave at the first sign of unease. Neither inside nor outside, it is very much a neutral border zone, offering people the chance to be at Karrayili but not at Karrayili at the same time. Those who have not had much previous connection with Karrayili, particularly younger people in their twenties or thirties, tend to hover about

here, not yet ready to take the 'giant leap' inside to enquire about courses or study options, but willing to stay and chat with current students or staff members.

Karrayili is also a familiar, comfortable environment for local people because it makes no attempt to be 'flash'. The physical environment does not have the sterile, impersonal feel of many non-Indigenous institutions – everything appears slightly jumbled, disorganised, from the notices on the boards, with their complete lack of uniformity of design, to the classrooms themselves, which always appear to be only just holding back a potential avalanche of recycled paper and student files. Little appears organised, and the results of any attempts by staff to 'tidy up' the communal areas are usually spectacularly short-lived. The only area that does have a fairly formal, professional appearance is the conference room, perhaps because this room is not only used for Karrayili business but is also hired out to other agencies or visiting organisations for meetings.

Physically, too, there is a kind of 'blending' of outside and inside environments, with less sense of a solid border between the two than is often found in educational institutions. The natural environment encroaches on the built environment here, seeming to flow around and even into the classroom and office spaces. This is helped by the use of wooden decking that leads up a gentle ramp from the car park and extends into the Centre itself, flanking the central grassed area and providing a natural link between the gardens and the building spaces. As with local people's houses, too, there is a blurring of the lines between what 'belongs' inside and what 'belongs' outside. Near the morning tea table on the veranda outside the kitchen is a small bookcase and a couple of tables containing reading material – various newspapers, magazines and Kimberley news bulletins, as well as bilingual booklets made by students at the Yakanarra annex. Further around on the veranda, outside the Business class, is a small table and chair set for children to use, and there is an old sofa outside the Environmental Health room.

It is no accident that people feel comfortable about going to Karrayili. Staff at the Centre make every effort to ensure that the physical environment, interaction and relationships, and of course the teaching and learning that take place there, all reflect the unique local cultures and needs of the Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal people.

Recognising and valuing the very specific cultural identities and aspirations that exist in Fitzroy Crossing is strategic to Karrayili's coherence and longevity. Above all else, Karrayili exists to support local Aboriginal people. Unlike many other adult education centres, the role of Karrayili has always been, and remains, more about supporting and strengthening community than simply about providing education programs. This is clearly demonstrated by the corporation's stated objectives:

Karrayili Objectives:

- 1. To support the social development of its members in all ways.*
- 2. To help bring about the self-support of its members by the development of economic projects and industries.*
- 3. To support education, job training, health services, work and housing for its members.*
- 4. To help and encourage its members to manage their own affairs upon their own lands.*
- 5. To help and encourage its members to keep and renew their traditional culture.*
- 6. To help to build trust and friendship between its members and other people.*
- 7. To participate with other Aboriginal associations in projects for their mutual benefit.*
- 8. To receive and spend grants of money from the Government of the Commonwealth or of the State or from other sources.*

The objectives of Karrayili are very clearly built around social support and development, with an emphasis on the building and maintenance of cooperative partnerships with others in the community. Embedded in these objectives too is the aim of Karrayili to achieve two main goals: to support local Aboriginal people in the maintenance and transmission of their traditional cultures, while simultaneously enabling them to interact

successfully with mainstream Australian society. Unsurprisingly, this latter aim is not without its challenges.

Karrayili was created by local Aboriginal people and exists to provide them with support, help and encouragement in the endeavours that they choose to pursue. Support is given in the form of relevant training delivered in an appropriate way, but can also be of a far less formal or structured nature. People walk in and ask for all sorts of help on a daily basis, and are helped with little consideration as to whether or not they are enrolled in courses. As noted by the Principal in conversation, “People don’t come here for training; they come here to get help!”

Such help can include assisting people to read and understand formal correspondence, making phone calls, faxing documents (for example to Centrelink), dealing with funeral arrangements/pamphlets, resumes, job applications, using computers for bank transfers, or even just a cup of tea and some biscuits. Anyone and everyone feels comfortable to walk in and ask for help, and there appears to be every indication that people consider such help to be rightfully theirs, rather than charity on the part of staff members. One day while I was in the office one student, asking for a Karrayili staff member to give her a lift to work from her community the following morning, even referred to Karrayili policy to support her request, noting that “In your constitution it says”

As will be explained in more detail in the following chapters, although training and literacy learning do take place there Karrayili is about much more than just adult training. It is a link to the old people who have passed on, especially those who were among the first Karrayili students. Sometimes people call in to Karrayili to look at photos of the early days, of community people and family, or to be with family and maintain family bonds. It is also a meeting place, both informally and in the use of its conference room for more formal meetings. Above all, as community elder DA told me emphatically on more than one occasion, Karrayili keeps its students and the community at large *strong*.

Who studies at Karrayili?

As noted earlier in this thesis, there are four main language groups in Fitzroy Crossing – Bunuba, Walmajarri, Gooniyandi and Wangkatjungka – and community life tends to revolve around these groups. Communities themselves are mostly, though not entirely, made up of people from the same language group, and extended families often live and socialise together. No lines are drawn, no boundaries put in place to exclude people from one place or another, but it is generally considered cultural practice to remain within social groups made up of people from the same language background.

In contrast, Karrayili is a place where everyone and anyone can go and feel welcome. Although initially started as a place of learning for a small group of Walmajarri men, over the years Karrayili has come to be embraced by the community as a whole, by people from all language groups. As the Environmental Health lecturer, who has lived in the town for more than ten years, observed, "... it's always been seen as a place for everybody. Many organisations which are Aboriginal organisations in town are seen as specific to certain language groups or families, and Karrayili has managed to steer away from that, it's always been a place for everybody" (TV, 2009).

AY, a Gooniyandi woman from Bayulu community who has had extensive experience with Karrayili as both student and Director (including a stint as Chair of the Board), pointed this out to me as being one of the most important ways in which Karrayili benefits the people of the Fitzroy Valley:

Yeah, ... they had that Karrayili at Junjuwa area an' ... local people from the Fitzroy Valley came together. But you got not only Bunuba, you got Walmajarri, Gooniyandi, all mix now in that one big centre, Karrayili. That's good ... Karrayili is there for each an' every one of them local, language group. (AY, 2009)

Another Karrayili student, PW, who was born and raised in the goldfields region of mid-western Australia, moved to the Fitzroy Valley some time ago following her marriage to a local man and is now studying in the KC class.

Coming from a very different language background from the community members with whom she now lives, she told me of how she appreciates the social opportunities for all language groups that Karrayili facilitates by being a neutral space. In interview she said that “[Karrayili] (h)e nice, (h)e good to mix ‘im up, other people ... So they can all come together.” Karrayili is clearly an inclusive space for local Aboriginal people, whatever their language or family background.

WS, also an ex-Chair of the Karrayili Board of Directors, takes this point further still. During interviews, as well as during more informal conversations, WS would often return to what for him is clearly an issue of great importance – that Karrayili is a place where the local Indigenous people feel not only that everyone is welcome, but that what takes place there takes place on local people’s terms. Karrayili people, as he makes very clear, are “in our turf now”.

Well this is where, you know, through Karrayili again, that’s why this place is very important for us. For young and old, this place, Karrayili. Well least that’s the way I see it. That’s why I’m back here. You know, all the government departments roun’ ‘ere, they are meeting in Karrayili. An’ while they ‘ere, they can see ... ol’ people an’ young people, they just gotta walk next door an’ they ‘ere. They can see that, from over there. They in our turf now. Like, they with ol’ people an’ with young peoples. An’ the government department, we all, the three, see they fit in? They comin’ together, ‘ere in Karrayili. ... Government department, young people and old people. ... For English, and Language. ... It’s a real meeting place!

Old people, young people, men and women, different language groups and Indigenous or non-Indigenous people ... even ‘government mob’ are welcome at Karrayili!

Family connections though do have an impact on what happens at Karrayili. This can be simply because people who socialise closely together tend to be drawn to similar outlets, and people are often urged by friends or family to attend classes just to accompany them. This is accepted practice at Karrayili, with the importance of family relationships in people’s lives recognised and integrated into everyday learning practices. The Environmental Health lecturer, in particular, encourages this, telling me:

So during the workshop week it's never a closed environment, the students' families are often involved - if I've got students which have got young children then I'll encourage them to bring a babysitter with them, so that they can keep doing their studies but have some help with the little one. Yep so kids, babies are welcome, cos if we're not catering for the children then we're going to lose the mothers as students ... and, at times we've had partners come along so if we have had a couple and one says "Oh no you've gotta stay back with me", so the pressure's on to stay together, then I'll say, "Come on, why don't you both come" (TV).

The importance of family connections and interactions for Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing often results in certain courses or classes at Karrayili having a strong presence by particular families. Often if one person enrolls in a unit they will be closely followed by others in their immediate social group, whether in support, out of curiosity, or as frequently happens, especially on the very remote communities where there is little to do, simply out of boredom.

At other times the learning initiative has been generated by a particular community, for example the Bayulu Women's Centre's project. This project entailed a group of women from Bayulu community, who needed a vehicle to get them to and from Fitzroy Crossing and to transport mothers and babies, working with Karrayili staff to understand and complete the documentation required to apply for a Lotterywest Grant. The women enrolled in CGEA³¹ units at Karrayili, which enabled them to access the literacy support necessary to apply for the grant – an arduous but ultimately successful process, due in no small part to the women's dedication and commitment to their families and community. Another community-generated initiative was the Bayulu Ranger group, and their attempts to engage in further education as part of their desire to care for country are explored in detail in Chapter Seven.

Most of the students at Karrayili are enrolled in certificate units of some sort, although completion of a certificate, or even a unit, is rarely their reason for

³¹ Certificate in General Education for Adults

studying there. As already seen, the students at Karrayili encompass all language groups in the region, and there is a wide range of age groups. It is an adult education centre so all students are over eighteen, and many young people are enrolled there – particularly in the Business courses where use of computers is paramount. The oldest students, however, are well into their seventies, and the most prominent of these are the KCs.

The KCs, they're the movers and shakers of our Karrayilli!
(MH, Karrayili Director)

The KCs are integral both to what Karrayili is and to what it does. A closer look at who they are, and what they do, serves to illustrate how literacy learning at Karrayili is highly context-specific, and how taking a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to literacy teaching would be inappropriate – if not impossible – in this context.

Widely considered to be the group at the heart of Karrayili, until recently the KCs were generally referred to as the 'Old People's Class', or more simply the 'oldies', as the students – all women – are aged mostly in their sixties and seventies. It was decided though that calling them the 'oldies' was simply not respectful enough, given their long history with Karrayili and their positions of respect in the wider community. When in 2009 I approached the group to ask what they felt the class should be called, they were somewhat confused. I attempted to clarify: "Well you know how everyone calls you 'the Old People's Class'? We think we should change that name". "What you mean manga?" they said as one. "We not the Old People's Class. We the Karrayili Class!" This was said with some emphasis and evident consternation. "We started this place. We the Karrayili Class." Given that the word '*karrayili*' is both a Walmajarri word meaning 'middle-aged', and the name of the Centre itself, it was unclear as to which definition the students were referring. It is possible though that their affirmation embraced both definitions.

The Karrayili Class



We are the Karrayili Class.

Old people started this place a long time ago for Karrayili (middle-aged) people.

Those people passed away now, but we've got to keep this class going for young people when they grow up.

Figure 9: Poster written and designed by the students in the Karrayili Class, 2010

Respected elders in their communities, the KCs have been coming to Karrayili for many years to study general literacy and numeracy and at the time of my fieldwork were enrolled in a number of CGEA units. They come to Karrayili for two hours a morning, Monday to Thursday, and, although it varies according to what else is happening in their communities they are

often the most regular attendees of all the Karrayili students. During my fieldwork I spent a great deal of time in the company of these women, and consider myself extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to do so.

For the past ten years or so, the Karrayili Class has usually been taught by a local person with the cultural and linguistic knowledge necessary for working with these students, but who may not have had any training in how to teach. My role was initially to mentor the class teacher, helping her to develop her understanding of teaching techniques and building the resources available for the class to use. As with other local Aboriginal employees at Karrayili though, there was a fairly high turnover of KC teachers, and it was frequently left to me to teach the class alone. The KCs were always consulted with regard to who could be employed as their teacher, and they would not hesitate to let the Principal know if they thought someone was unsuitable for the role. Despite being nominally responsible for staffing, the Principal would inevitably need to take such decisions seriously and act accordingly. Suitability could be based on cultural factors, on family relationships, or on an individual's reliability or sense of responsibility. Sometimes there would be cultural reasons that were never made clear to non-Indigenous staff, but the decision would stand regardless. Often the person teaching would need some degree of neutrality, to keep everyone happy, and when it came to teaching English literacy the women were unanimous in identifying the ideal person as being a Kartiya.

The women of the Karrayili Class now live on communities based in and around Fitzroy Crossing – Bayulu, Junjuwa, Mindi Rardi and Kurnangki – and come from a variety of backgrounds. The older students, in particular, have remarkable stories to tell of their early years. As noted in Chapter Two, several of them were born in the desert, leading traditional lifestyles until their families moved to stations and missions in the 1950s or 1960s. During interviews with these women, both with and without the help of an interpreter, I found it difficult to get them to talk about what I wanted to hear – for example about their experiences studying at Karrayili and about why they want to learn SAE. Instead they were keen to talk about what *they* wanted

me to hear, about what was important to them, and they would tell me long (admittedly fascinating) stories about their experiences on the missions and stations, about their parents' lives, their childhood, and about coming to Fitzroy Crossing. They also spoke on many occasions of their fears for their children and grandchildren, and of how they believed 'Kartiya ways' were responsible for much of the disharmony and dysfunction now plaguing their communities.

Many of the KC students are nationally and internationally renowned artists, and would regularly be away from class attending exhibitions of their work in Perth or other cities around Australia. Each day after class the majority of the students would ask to be dropped off at Mangkaja Arts, where they would spend several hours working on their paintings. On one occasion I was in Mangkaja with the students when a tourist from Melbourne suddenly realised who DA was. Reacting as if DA was royalty, or at least a major rock star, the woman clasped DA's hands in hers, gushing that she had one of her paintings on a wall of her Melbourne home and could she *please* have her photo taken with DA? DA seemed slightly nonplussed at first but quickly recovered, responding with much grace and dignity and posing for a great many photos with the whole group of tourists.

The main language group in the class is Walmajarri, but there are also speakers of Gooniyandi and Wangkatjungka. From observation, when speaking together or to other older Aboriginal people the women mainly speak Language and sometimes Kriol. With younger Aboriginal people the emphasis is reversed and interaction is mainly in Kriol with a smattering of Language, and with Kartiya such as myself they try to converse in English. This, though, is problematic for them. Several of the women complained to me, with a degree of perplexity, that Kartiya don't understand them when they speak English, and that they don't understand when Kartiya speak their 'high English'. Certainly I frequently experienced difficulty understanding the women, leading to much frustration and embarrassment on both sides. As we became more familiar with each other though this eased – I became more inclined to admit when I didn't understand and ask for clarification, and

they were more inclined to get cranky with me, roll their eyes, and repeat the same thing but much, much louder.

Given that many of these women speak several languages, it is unclear why they have found it so difficult to master SAE. It is likely though that there are several interrelated reasons for this. Firstly they have had, and continue to have, little practical purpose in learning SAE, and therefore there is little extrinsic motivation for them to do so. As noted in Chapter Three, recent shifts in understanding literacy have led to much greater emphasis on the need for literacy learning to be meaningful and relevant to the learners' everyday lives if it is to be effective (Papen, 2005; Street, 2005). When Karrayili was first started the students' main objective was to learn to write their names so that they could sign cheques, and to learn to read and speak English so that they could participate in meetings with government officials and the like. Most of the students in this class are now able to write their own names reasonably confidently and legibly, although writing in general continues to be a major challenge for all of them. This could be because the other languages they speak are all in the oral tradition, and with some of the students, especially the older ones, it is certainly linked to physical issues such as poor eyesight and having difficulty holding and manipulating the pen. However in terms of being able to actively participate in discussions with Karrayili, and in particular at formal meetings with government-type people, it would seem that little progress has been made. Most of the students' interactions are with other Language or Kriol speakers, and on the occasions when they do need to speak with Karrayili there is often a mediator present – usually a family member or friend – who will act as a go-between. Their main interactions with non-Indigenous people are with people they regularly speak with, who know them well and who are familiar with Kriol expressions and Aboriginal pronunciation.

Working with the KCs was not always easy; in fact at times the cultural divide between us made me question everything I knew, or thought I knew, about teaching English as a Second Language. For a start they have had little or no experience of the kind of classroom teaching I am used to, and I have

been teaching that way for so long that changing my ways proved difficult. Student-centred learning simply confuses them – they are used to copying from the board, or doing (what I consider to be fairly meaningless) simple gap-fill tasks that are almost entirely teacher-led. The students seem to give little thought as to what they are doing or why, and whatever I wrote on the board they copied down, exactly as I had written it, whether or not that was my intention in writing it on the board. Pair-work and group-work tasks were almost impossible as the students' preferred style of learning – when they were working with the teacher – was to be highly teacher-directed; the students looked to me (or their other teacher) for guidance as to every single thing that happened in the classroom. The only time the students seemed able to act autonomously was when they did artwork, when the lesson focus was off SAE and onto their painting.



Figure 10: The KCs doing literacy work with teacher ChD (Photo courtesy Karrayili)

On the occasions when I teach the class my efforts at classroom management are hilarious and exasperating at the same time. The majority of the students have poor hearing and eyesight, with one almost completely

blind, so when I ask them to look at something (eg a flashcard) it can take a while for everyone to work out a) what I have said and b) what they are looking at. And I'm never really sure they know *why* they're looking at it either. Then just as I get them going with a task, for example some 'listen and repeat' type exercises to practise pronunciation and confidence with spoken English, the lesson is invariably disrupted – LU will attempt to get her wheelchair out of the door to go to the toilet, moving desks and other students in the process, or DA will suddenly reach over and put on a scratchy old cassette of gospel singing. Again, perhaps this was a demonstration of autonomy, or rather that I was not going to be allowed to tell them what to do – effectively taking their autonomy away. Once a shouting match erupted between sisters, both in their seventies, sitting on opposite sides of the single boardroom-like table; as they were mainly speaking Language I had no idea what was going on, but became increasingly concerned as their increasing distress became evident. Attempting to take control of the situation, I first clapped my hands to get everyone's attention then loudly said something like "Ok, come on, this is class time now". There was a moment's stunned silence, when every student in the room turned and looked at me in astonishment, then they all erupted in laughter, their 'hee-heeeee's ringing around the school and causing everyone later to ask me what had been happening. Then almost as suddenly it was back to the disagreement, the two sisters shouting and cursing and everyone else looking away, avoiding eye contact with anyone else in the room. My second attempt to take control was kind of successful, although it didn't exactly achieve the aim I had intended. One of the sisters was getting increasingly upset so I went over to her, patted her on the back and asked if she would like a cup of tea. "Cup of tea manga?" the students asked as one, getting up out of their chairs and heading out of the door to the morning tea table. End of lesson.

Recognising Karrayili's role as a kind of interface between the traditional ways and Kartiya ways, and students' stated desires to learn about both, teaching the KCs can be a bit of a balancing act. Teachers of the class are encouraged to incorporate cultural activities into the literacy work, balancing literacy-type tasks with more community-based activities (e.g., school visits,

weekly sessions at the local radio station) and cultural activities they enjoy doing but find it difficult to do because of mobility issues (eg fishing, trips to country).

The KC students encounter few occasions when the need to use or understand written or oral SAE is both necessary and unavoidable. When speaking they get by with Kriol, or they have a family member present to act as an unofficial interpreter or bilingual worker. Forms and letters from agencies such as Centrelink are completely inaccessible to these women so they either ask someone (often a Karrayili staff member) to explain it to them or, more often than not, the piece of paper is filed away in their handbag and forgotten about. They are not interested in reading English for pleasure or interest, and generally have no real need to write anything other than their names or a signature.

So why *do* they attend 'literacy' classes at Karrayili? This question is explored further in Chapter Six, when the staff and students talk more about what Karrayili means to them. From the narratives above, though, it can be seen that the context of learning for this group of students, a group it is hard to imagine Karrayili being without, is unlike that of most other adult education classrooms. At other institutions it is unlikely that such a group of learners would find their place, given that the probability of them completing units or demonstrating measurable learning outcomes is extremely low. Yet at Karrayili they are treasured and accorded a great deal of respect, their needs and aspirations given the priority they deserve. The KCs are regarded by all at Karrayili, whether staff, directors or other students, as being integral to Karrayili's identity, to what it is and why it exists, and the place just would not be the same without them. They are, as WS told me, the 'hidden treasures' of Karrayili.

Who works at Karrayili?

As an Aboriginal-directed, community-driven education centre, every effort is made at Karrayili to provide employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people. There are also, however, several Karrayili staff members, and these people all hold key positions at the Centre. During my time in Fitzroy Crossing these included the principal, the registrar, the CGEA teacher, the Business teacher, and the Environmental Health teacher. Karrayili also has one local Aboriginal person employed long-term at the Centre as a lecturer.

While it was made clear to me on several occasions that many Fitzroy Crossing people would ideally like to see Karrayili staffed entirely by local Aboriginal people, there is also an understanding that this is unlikely to happen, at least not in the current environment, for several reasons. One practical reason is that of neutrality. As explained earlier, Karrayili has managed to avoid the common practice in the Fitzroy Valley of certain families or language groups coming to dominate particular organisations. Having teachers from outside local families can help to maintain some level of neutrality, avoiding potential conflict or discomfort regarding enrolment in particular units. I say 'some level' of neutrality, because all of the non-Indigenous teaching staff at Karrayili have lived in Fitzroy Crossing for many years, and in the process have developed relationships with particular families or community groups, either through their work or through their personal lives. This is to be expected. However these relationships do not, as far as I could determine, affect the position or role of non-Indigenous staff members in the ways in which local Aboriginal people can often find themselves compromised. Chapter Seven reveals some of the ways in which Indigenous staff members find themselves 'caught in the middle' when attempting to take up positions of employment at Karrayili while retaining their cultural identity and place in the community.

The Karrayili Directors and community members are responsible for deciding who will work at the Centre. The fact that there is the stated desire for Karrayili to be staffed by local Aboriginal people, yet the majority of the

teaching staff employed there are Kartiya, reveals an interesting paradox between what people would ideally like and what works best for the organisation. In some ways, having neutral 'outsiders' working there facilitates Karrayili's ability to be a place for all Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Crossing community, regardless of Language group, age, or gender.

Karrayili has been extremely fortunate with its Kartiya lecturers, as they are all long-serving staff members and have a sound understanding of the highly context-specific needs of local students. Without exception, although to varying degrees, they also acknowledge the need to respect and integrate local cultural practices, both traditional and contemporary, into approaches to teaching and learning at Karrayili.

Administrative staff at Karrayili, apart from the Principal and the Registrar, tend to be local Aboriginal people. Roles such as the Student Services and Employment Officer, receptionist, drivers and maintenance workers, and the cleaner are all generally filled by Aboriginal Fitzroy Crossing residents. A significant problem with regard to employing local Aboriginal people at Karrayili is the high turnover of staff and staff reliability.

Despite the difficulties and frustrations involved in this, the Principal and the Directors at Karrayili seek at all times to fill as many staff roles at the Centre as possible with local Aboriginal people. Aboriginal staff members are given a great deal of training, support and encouragement in their engagement with the Centre, and every effort is made to acknowledge the realities of people's lives which make it difficult for them to sustain employment. Nevertheless, it is rare for local Indigenous people to sustain employment at Karrayili for any reasonable length of time, and in fact it can be difficult to find people willing to take on employment there at all. This was one of the many paradoxes about life in Fitzroy Crossing that I found difficult to understand, and I will come back to this issue in my discussion of 'working in two worlds' in Chapter Seven.

“They trust the people that work here”

Vital to the success of Karrayili are the interactions and relationships between staff and students. This is especially true of the Kartiya staff members who are working there as lecturers, as many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing have had negative experiences with school and non-Indigenous teachers or principals, and are hesitant about exposing themselves to potential failure and ‘shame’ in the learning/training environment. Relationships and ‘relational accountability’ play an enormously important role in local Aboriginal people’s lives, and the ways in which non-locals, and non-Indigenous people in particular, interact with local mob can have far-reaching effects on people’s everyday lives. Wherever and whenever possible, local Aboriginal people go where they feel comfortable and talk only to those they feel a connection with on some level. This was evident to me on many occasions, especially in terms of facilitating (or at times impeding) my efforts at conducting training with local people. The following journal extract describes one such occasion:

18 January 2010

Today was my first day back at Karrayili after spending three weeks in Perth over the Christmas holidays. Fitzroy town is very quiet as many local people are still spending time with family at remote communities such as Yakanarra and Looma, and many of the Kartiya who work in local services are still away on holiday. This is likely to change though over the next week or so in the lead-up to the beginning of term 1 at school, and many of the Karrayili students will return to study at the same time as children return to school.

At the moment though we have few students attending classes at Karrayili, and my return to work today was mainly to prepare for classes once they resume. As part of these preparations I drove out to Bayulu community this morning to see if any of the Rangers were around, and to gauge if/when they intend to return to their training at Karrayili.

Towards the end of 2009 the community at Bayulu was experiencing some serious and damaging social issues, largely related to alcohol/drug use and resulting violent and antisocial behaviour. The younger members of the Rangers had not attended Karrayili classes for a

number of weeks and the elder of the group, TD, was at a loss as to how to get them back on track. When we had last spoken, towards the end of December, we agreed that we would try again early in the New Year.

It is therefore with some trepidation that I turn off the main highway and onto the road leading into Bayulu, intending to drive first to TD's house to see what news he has of the Rangers. As I turn into the side road to his house, carefully negotiating the enormous pot-holes (in places the road seems to be made up of more holes than bitumen), I become aware that someone is calling to me from another house to my right. I recognise TD's wife, AD, so stop the troopie and get out to greet her. She seems genuinely pleased to see me back, welcoming me with a huge smile and a bit of a hug, asking how my Christmas break was. TD, it transpires, is in town - as one of the few community members with a valid driver's licence he is much in demand to drive the community bus and other vehicles to and from town for shopping, family visits, or for people to access services such as Centrelink or medical practitioners.

AD has been visiting JC, a Karrayili Director and a regular Karrayili Class student, so I wander over to say hello to her too. JC is sitting on a mat on the ground under a shady tree outside her house, surrounded by half a dozen other women. As we approach the group AD calls out that 'Nyapana' (my skin name) is coming to visit, and they all look over to check which Nyapana it is. JC and I have a good relationship and are very pleased to see each other again, greeting one another with a big hug and having a quick chat about the Christmas break. I am then introduced to the other women, all members of JC's family - three daughters and a granddaughter, plus a couple of younger girls who aren't introduced. The daughters make polite conversation but are clearly keen to place me, an unknown Kartiya woman, in terms of their family and/or community. Once it is established that I teach at Karrayili, and have in fact taught JC's class, the women relax visibly and start to talk about the training needs of their own community at Moongardie, about 100km from Fitzroy Crossing on the road to Halls Creek.

The importance, both for my research purposes and for my work with Karrayili, of developing good rapport, trust, and of having a 'place' in this society is evident once the women realise that I have been working with the Bayulu Rangers. They immediately become very animated, smiling broadly and saying "Oh, you're the woman that TD is always talking about!" TD's wife smiles and says how much I've been trying to help TD and the Rangers, and immediately I feel an almost tangible

shift from being an outsider to an insider. I stay for a long time, sitting on the ground with these women talking about personal subjects such as our children, our families, and about getting older, but also about the training needs of people at Moongardie. I doubt very much that these conversations would have happened if I had not had the opportunity to live and work at Karrayili for an extended period, giving me time to develop the relationships that led to me being accepted into the everyday lives of the people at the heart of my research.

This encounter reinforced my understanding of the importance for Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley of establishing and identifying connections to others, and it was by no means the only time that this happened to me while I was in Fitzroy Crossing. Whenever I was introduced to someone there would be a quick but crucial reference to people I knew or worked with. Once my place in the community had been identified and acknowledged, people became noticeably more relaxed in their manner toward me. Unfortunately this often also meant that their language use would become distinctly more 'Kriol', with the end result being that I struggled to keep up with the conversation.

Karrayili staff members understand the importance of developing relationships with students and other community members, and go out of their way to build rapport and gain the trust of the people they work with. As the Principal of Karrayili noted:

... something that we definitely do is build really strong relationships with the students, and I think well I'd suggest for any learning but definitely for working with Aboriginal people that the relationship comes first, so therefore if you were going to be teaching effectively you need to have a strong relationship with the students and they need to trust you and feel comfortable with you and I think, like everybody's different and do it in different ways, but that's something we always do and encourage (CD).

Two of the Karrayili trainers, too, spoke strongly of the potentially positive outcomes of developing sound and honest relationships with students:

We have to have that, without that ... there are so many barriers to training and people accessing training and training outcomes, good training outcomes whatever, for Karrayili as well as of course for the students, that if we have an environment where people feel comfortable

and feel safe and feel valued and that they're acknowledging that every member has something to bring to that group then we can, we get a group of strong confident people happening and then we get better outcomes (TV).

I've had students keep coming back over five years to do either the same thing, they keep dropping off because of whatever commitments, or they might come back. Or to come and do one thing, and then keep coming back to ask help for other things. And so you end up developing this sort of like ... whole-bodied relationship with this person where you get to help them, develop them, in all sorts of different facets in their life because they're coming to you for different things (EBB).

As noted earlier, most of the Kartiya lecturers at Karrayili have been there for many years and have developed strong connections with the local community. People know them, and feel comfortable about training with them or approaching them for help. Feeling welcomed by staff at Karrayili is extremely important for local people, and this point was raised in numerous conversations about why people go there:

Well because you got them teachers, the Principal who really feel confident of speaking to them, people and their students, they can feel that connection is there with them. That's why they don't feel that shame or ... that's why they just like to go in the teachers just like to welcome them into their classes so they don't have to be afraid of anything, they can get on the computer, whatever, an just go in an use it (AY, Karrayili student and Director).

Decisions regarding who works at Karrayili, and in particular the teaching staff there, are not made simply on the basis of experience, qualifications, or even pedagogical approaches. Key to successful employment at the Centre is how well a person can relate to the Karrayili students and the community, and whether they are open to learning about and integrating into their teaching practices local culture, values and beliefs.

Who makes decisions?

Karrayili is an RTO (Registered Training Organisation), and as such is required to meet national accreditation standards set by ANTA (Australian National Training Authority). This means that all courses offered by Karrayili

must have been previously registered, and that assessment for each must be rigorously recorded and stored so that adherence to Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards can be demonstrated during regular audits.

One of the key requirements is for Karrayili to have a Board of Directors, whose job it is to guide and oversee Karrayili business. Karrayili's governing body has always been Indigenous, and all of the directors must be Aboriginal people from the Fitzroy Valley. To become a Director they must first be nominated then elected by existing Directors. During my fieldwork both genders were represented on the Board, with a wide range of ages and several local language groups present. Some directors are highly literate in English while others – especially the older people – have extremely limited SAE skills. Whenever possible the proceedings of meetings are interpreted, and interpreters are always employed at Annual General Meetings. Directors' duties include overseeing the Centre's finances, making decisions regarding the direction of Karrayili, taking an active part in board meetings, and understanding the objectives of Karrayili and its main business. The Directors generally make every effort to attend, or at least have every intention of attending, AGMs and other meetings, indicating that they take their position seriously.

I was interested, though, to know more about their own perspectives of their role. I spoke with many of the Directors about this, asking questions such as what they were expected to do as a Director and how they felt about being given this responsibility. With each interview I was surprised less by what they told me, and more by what they didn't. Whereas I was expecting them to tell me how they *direct* what happens at Karrayili, their answers rarely addressed this aspect of their role. In most cases the position of Director was seen more as a kind of representative or role model, providing encouragement to others:

MS: And why did you want to be a Director?

ZC: *Well to try an encourage more young people to come along as well you know? Not only young people but more, like ... mothers like me, you know, mothers got kids, kids are in school you know, an some of them are just doin nothing at home as well. Tell them to come along, an get onto the computer or go an do their licence, spread the word around you know? ... Yeah, just to sort of encourage other people an tell everybody what we there for, an what we're offering.*

From ZC's response above, it would appear that the role of a Director has little to do with administration and management aspects of Karrayili. It is possible that her approach reflects the right governance model for her people. As with other Directors, she seems to see her role more as a kind of community liaison person, bridging the gap between Karrayili and the wider community.

The ways in which community members value Karrayili's role in providing support and personal development to its staff and students is also evident in the Directors' responses. As one Director explained to me in interview:

Well, as a Director I see myself, when the Chairperson not there to take on the meeting, well, it's time for me to take on that role, for the Chairperson and carry on that meeting you know? And, for me, I didn't know to do those meeting but ... inside of me I just felt not to be frightened an not to be scared, have to be confident, to step up to do it. Like, to take on that meeting. The Directors have to know ... reading all the paperwork ... and it's real hard cos sometimes you don't know that paperwork but it's good that we been learning all those things, an I don't have to be frightened of it. It's good. I get support from my Principal. She always be there, and my rest of Directors always supporting me. Yeah, it's good. We have to back up one another. We have to make decision about makin plans, an sharing ideas an, an giving the right information back to the people (AY).

In this quote, AY explains an important facet of how Karrayili works. Everything that takes place there is a group effort, with each person being given support and 'backing one another up'. As AY notes, taking on new responsibilities, particularly when they are roles that are unfamiliar, that belong to the Kartiya world, can be frightening. Community members are given opportunities to extend themselves, for example by taking on a Director role at the Centre, but they are not abandoned in that role. In the case of

Directors, people new to the role are given support by the Principal and by their peers, and there is an emphasis on working together for the good of Karrayili and the community.

It was difficult for me to establish whether respondents' apparent lack of awareness of the need for Directors to take an active role in decision-making reflected their attitudes to the role, or their understanding of our interview and what I was trying to achieve. Were they telling me what they felt about being a Director, or what they thought I wanted to (or should) hear? Either way, it was clear that for every Director I spoke to their most important task was to be a positive link between Karrayili and the community.

When I asked questions more specifically related to how decision-making at Karrayili takes place, several of the Directors confirmed that that was one of their roles and were able to elaborate on this aspect of their role. ZC, for example, told me:

Yes, making all these decisions, you know, what courses can be run out there, an if we can provide for it. Especially out there in the very very remote communities, you know, when it's hard to get there sometimes. Because of the remoteness and the ... from the wet an all that you know, when they can't get out there an ... So [DK]'s got that online training. Like Milijidee, Wangkatjungka tryin to get it up and running, even Djugerari ... an it all depends on what staff we've got to go out there at the moment. ... So as a Board of Directors we gotta oversee Karrayili and how to run it and ... all the finances and if we got money to do this or do that you know?

Almost every decision affecting the Centre is taken to the Directors for their approval or comments, whether it is deciding who to employ as the KCs' teacher, which courses to run, or how much to spend on a new vehicle. Decision-making processes at Karrayili, however, are complex and difficult to define. As an Aboriginal-directed organisation, with a Board of Directors, it is a requirement that particular decisions be made by the Board under very controlled circumstances. Yet in reality the Directors are to a large extent guided by the Principal, who is responsible for ensuring not only that

decisions are made according to the regulations, but that all of the necessary information is made accessible to the Directors.

In many ways, although the Directors are nominally responsible for decision-making, it is the Principal of Karrayili, who is responsible for doing all the leg-work regarding critical factors such as funding, submissions, and staffing, who keeps it all together. In this respect the Principal's role is especially challenging. CD was the Principal of Karrayili for much of the period of this research. A Kartiya woman, she has had strong family connections with the Fitzroy Valley for over thirty years, and understands well the needs and priorities of local people. When I asked how she saw her role, CD told me:

... I'm responsible for the ongoing operation of Karrayilli and the way it operates. Which means there's a number of levels; financially I have to make sure that we continue to be viable, which includes not just keeping track of what's happening with finances but making sure that we fit them in for whatever's needed. I'm responsible for the integrity of Karrayilli, for it to continue being ... meeting its objectives as an Aboriginal-directed organisation, and so that means ... for me it's really important the way I work with the board and the community and keep, you know, in contact with people. And then there's all the people management, making sure that the staff are able to do their job but also, once again, do their jobs in a way that maintains what Karrayili's all about.

It is clear from CD's description of her responsibilities that the role of Principal at Karrayili is a complex one. Encompassing all levels of operations at the Centre, the Principal is above all the one with whom responsibility for the Centre's survival rests.

So who is the boss of Karrayili? Well according to DA, community matriarch and one of the Karrayili founders, the answer to this question is perfectly obvious. It's her. Many times DA told me "You know who the boss this place? Me! I'm the boss this place!" In reality, at Karrayili hierarchical systems are far less defined than in more mainstream organisations. As with other aspects of Indigenous Australian life, few decisions are made by individuals and it is understood that everyone is involved to some extent, thereby respecting everyone's autonomy. Some individuals, like DA, are accorded greater respect due to their age or position in the community as an

elder, but ultimately responsibility for decision-making is considered to be a community affair.

Literacy and learning programs at Karrayili

All of the training at Karrayili, whether provided as individualised programs or short courses such as the Work Readiness program and the Certificate IV in Bilingual Work, has an emphasis on local relevance and cultural appropriateness. When determining what training is to be delivered, every consideration is given as to both the perceived need for such training and whether or not people in the Valley have expressed an interest in undertaking it. During one interview, the Student Services and Employment Officer, a local Aboriginal woman, was keen to impress the importance of this on me. As she explained, “We don't just decide to just pick up a course and run with it, we sort of see if there's a need for the course in the Valley first, and then the delivery of it is adapted to suit the local people you know, which is really good”.

The students at Karrayili engage in a wide range of literacy practices and learning, not all of them explicitly related to certificate-oriented training.

These include:

- Writing and compiling funeral pamphlets
- Learning about business
- Conducting projects
- Driver education
- English for specific purposes (eg grant submissions)
- Environmental Health workshops
- Work readiness short courses
- Training in Bilingual work
- Using the phone/fax/copier
- Engaging with personal texts (eg letters from Centrelink)
- Reading notices (funerals, jobs, health info etc)

Few courses as such are run at Karrayili. Instead there are several broad 'umbrella' type VET training packages under which individualised programs are offered, among them the Certificate in Indigenous Environmental Health, Business Certificates, and the Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA).

Teaching and training at Karrayili is structured very explicitly around meeting local people's specific needs, ensuring that learning is meaningful to the learners and has relevance to their everyday lives. This is particularly true of the CGEA program. Typically, prospective students come to Karrayili staff with an objective in mind – for example they may need to get a driver's licence, or may be interested in starting their own business or improving their community. Staff at Karrayili then look at units available in the CGEA training packages which are relevant to the students' needs and devise programs for which students may be enrolled on an individual basis. The training packages are fairly flexible in this regard, and include units such as 'Conducting a Project', which can be used to meet a wide variety of student needs and objectives. The Karrayili CGEA lecturer explains here how literacy and numeracy are approached under the CGEA banner:

[We provide] support for numeracy and literacy under that certificate, in a range of all sorts of projects. So somebody could come to do Driver Education and we could do it under that course, to provide literacy support. Somebody could come to do a funeral pamphlet, or get a birth certificate, or to do a range of all sorts of different projects and we could do it under the CGEA because it's a general literacy curriculum ... we don't tend to have general literacy classes where you have a group of people and you teach them general English skills. It doesn't tend to happen that way. Our strongest thing at Karrayili is providing practical support for people doing practical things. Real life skills. So, you know, people who come to do Driver Education want to get a learner's permit, they want to get their driver's licence so they've got to go through all that process, to reach that end. So while it's not "Sit down, ok now let's write out this sentence, and let's talk about this text", it's all very ... underlying literacy skills, you know? People have to be able to read and write to get through the 150 questions, to fill in the forms, to be able to go to the police station and be able to fill in the forms there, and to go and complete the text. So I can get people through the numeracy/literacy side in that course, the literacy side that they've actually got to do themselves to actually complete the process for themselves anyway (EBB).

This approach is consistent with the social practice theory of teaching literacy as outlined in Chapter Three (Shirley. Brice Heath & Street, 2008; Papien, 2005; Street, 1984). Rather than teaching literacy and numeracy as decontextualized skills of coding and decoding, at Karrayili the development of students' literacy skills is undertaken as a means to something more practical, not as an end in itself. Crucially, too, students are in control of their learning, inasmuch as they are instrumental in identifying their needs and approaching Karrayili for the educational assistance they require in order to achieve their goals.

An ex-Principal and previous lecturer at Karrayili told me about how this emphasis on practical outcomes influenced her teaching there:

MB: I did, I mean it wasn't official first aid training with them, but I did first aid. You know, what to do in various emergency situations. Well, not even emergencies, minor accidents ... everybody really enjoyed that.

MS: So why do you think people enjoyed that program?

Cos it was practical. And to them, the literacy was a very minor part of it, they certainly weren't there to get literate. But they enjoyed the health part, cos I did a lot on diabetes and so many people on their communities had diabetes, they knew they were getting practical knowledge to go on to help people. ... I did quite a lot of consulting with people in the communities and with various people as to what were the main topics, and obviously diabetes came up, and diet came up, and I think ... we did quite a lot of literacy stuff out at Wangkatjungka, on reading letters and packets, you know, Panadol ... very complicated things to read, you know, unless you ... but it's important to take medicines properly, not to overdose people. Yeah, so I remember we had a group of young mums down at Wangkatjungka, and we spent a lot of time teaching them how to read the Panadol packets.

Mm. Cos that's one of the big things isn't it, with learners in Fitzroy, is actually engaging them in the first place, and then keeping them there.

Yeah. Well I, I don't think it's going to happen by telling people they're going to be able to read better. There has to be something practical in their lives that will make them hang in there. And then hopefully, as a side issue, their literacy will improve.

In this quote MB highlights the need for any English literacy training in a context such as that at Karrayili to have a strong practical focus. This is recognised and incorporated by all teaching staff at Karrayili, and as a result

teachers there tend to adopt a very practical, hands-on type of approach, with student exposure to lexically-dense texts kept to a minimum. This is especially true of the Environmental Health program. The Environmental Health lecturer is a Kartiya woman who has spent many years working with remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. She has lived in Fitzroy Crossing for more than nine years, and knows the people and the culture there intimately. Here she reflects on some of the strengths of the program and the way it is run:

So, yeah the way that we do the training is bringing people from across the Valley together into one community to do an intensive workshop, and that workshop will be based around a theme, so it might be germs and dog health, or it might be water supply and sewage, basic plumbing ... the next one we're going to do is rubbish and land care. So we'll do an intensive week-long workshop, everyone comes together, we all live together in some available space on the community, so often we've been given an abandoned house, which we might have to practice you know, all of our Environmental Health skills on before we actually can live there (laughs). And then during that week, usually on the first day we get everybody, muster everybody up and pack up at Karrayili and then move out to wherever we're holding the workshop. We decide where we're going to hold the workshop at the previous workshop to make sure that everybody can move that way. We put it to a bit of a vote about where we should go and ... generally there's been really positive responses, communities are really happy to have us ... we'll go through, if we're doing plumbing then we practice all of our skills on actual environmental health concerns, or we're teaching students to find good things that are happening and then to find if there are any concerns and then work out where they go to with those concerns, so if we can fix them ourselves or if it's outside of what an Environmental Health worker can do then who they can follow that up with. So yeah, generally there's a really positive response, if we do ask to go somewhere we generally will be able to go that way, and so once we've got a community to go to then we get everybody packed up, and on the first day when we're travelling out and get set up, then we go and get a killer [cow], and people are really, generally really excited about going to hunt for a killer and then to get a good feed of fresh beef.

And then because we're bringing people together from across the Valley, it's really important that we, and we've only got a week, I have to make sure it's set up in a way that accelerates rapport building, so we've got to get these students working together and with me and, you know, as part of that we all have to work together as a team and so we, things like hunting a killer together and setting up camp, and everybody eating and sleeping and training and doing things in the same place means, you know, that interactions are beginning and we can develop that rapport really fast.

This model of delivery is unique to Karrayili and it's stayed in place because of strong community support. In other places generally it's delivered in a classroom-based environment where there's a lot of reliance on written-based text and high English. I think you can see [it works because] you can see by the end of the week we've got a fantastic group and interactions within the group and wonderful confident people, which initially came to the group quiet ... I think it's appropriate for people who enjoy more of a hands-on approach and I don't think that's just specific to Aboriginal people, but I think it is acknowledged that generally Aboriginal people are really quite strong in a lot of hands-on activities, and people seem to enjoy that.

I think Environmental Health has a really high unit completion rate. We don't have a high certificate completion rate, but the students that I have, very few of them are lost to Karrayili, they'll come in and out of the course around other priorities, like women that have had children and come back to the course and then graduated, which has been fantastic you know, but they've been in and out of the course over the years. There's also a high incarceration rate; I sometimes have had, I'm sure I could have run another group in Broome Prison, because a lot of my students were you know, on the inside, and yeah, I mean there are other priorities, if people aren't available during that time when a workshop is held then they'll possibly link up the next time. (TV)

Several key points emerge from TV's explanation of how the Environmental Health programs are run. She demonstrates, for example, how learning in these units is made relevant to people's lives, and how the social context of their lives and priorities is not just acknowledged but is integral to the learning process.

One factor which TV does not explicitly acknowledge, but which is crucial to the success of her program, is that of the levels of autonomy her students have over their own learning. Describing how she goes about setting up the teaching and learning context of the Environmental Health program, TV rarely uses the word 'I' or identifies what she alone does. Instead it is clear that the workshops are a community affair. As she states, "We decide where we're going to hold the workshop at the previous workshop to make sure that everybody can move that way. We put it to a bit of a vote about where we should go". Everyone is involved in decision-making, and everyone has a part to play in shaping the ways in which the program is delivered.

But it is not simply the program itself or how it is run that ensure the success of the Environmental Health workshops. TV herself, and in particular her level of engagement with the people and communities involved, is crucial to the success of this program. TV knows these people, knows what will help or hinder them in their training, knows what they need and how best to help them. She understands the importance of relationships and trust in effective training for Aboriginal people, and how to accommodate it in her teaching.

Another important element in Karrayili's success that is revealed in TV's quote is the aspect of flexibility. In referring to students coming "in and out of the course around other priorities, like women that have had children and come back to the course and then graduated", and "there are other priorities, if people aren't available during that time when a workshop is held then they'll possibly link up the next time", TV is acknowledging the fact that, for Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing at least, education and training is not always a priority in their lives. Often it seems that other life events and cultural practices get in the way of students' learning, and it is only through acknowledging this and integrating it into the Karrayili way of operating that learners have the opportunity and confidence to return to study there. In interview, ZC explained how important it is for local Aboriginal people that their culture is understood and catered for in this way:

Karrayili is very flexible, an we don't turn people away saying "Oh, how come you didn't come to so an so" because bein in that close community everyone sort of knows each other you know? An, even the teachers might know them an' say "Oh yeah, yeah we understand why you haven't been in and ..." whether it's Law business and sorry business you know, or have trouble with their spouse ... Or kids, you know? If kids are playin up. Yeah. Stop and start, and you can't do that in other places. People know that they can do that at Karrayili, an like ... death in the family they might go to another community you know, or stay out bush an won't come in for a while til the next rain. So it's more flexible, Karrayili is more flexible for people. They can start an if other circumstances arise, you know, well they can always come back later to do it. Because everything still on file, and they can come back an ask the teachers if they want to resume again. They say "Oh yeah, you have to ... you done some of the units, you're up to here now" you know? If you go somewhere else they might think if you haven't been for a few weeks or months they'll just wipe you off you know ... Whereas at Karrayili they can start something, an if they get itchy feet or fidgety ... like newcomers, they won't stay for the whole three or four hours you

know? They'll probably stay for half an hour to an hour a day til they get more comfortable in that position with people around them ...

At Karrayili there is a strong emphasis on the need for flexibility, both in terms of teaching and in management. Nothing in Fitzroy Crossing goes quite as planned, if indeed any plans are made. People's daily lives are constantly changing, and people's priorities are to respond to the immediate needs of themselves and their family members. The principal of Karrayili noted, during a discussion about student absences, that "There's so much in people's lives that takes them away". Family obligations, in particular, take priority over anything else. As another student told me:

Well, it's hard to turn up every day. Sometimes you got kids goin' to school. Sometimes they might be sick, you know? Or sometimes they wanna go 'ospital, things like that. You know, you got, maybe family, maybe death in the family, things like that. So, that kind of thing will affect people, you know, comin' in. (WS)

Dealing with the chaos that results from the tendency of students to 'get caught up in the moment' and not turn up for training, in particular, requires a good deal of equanimity and flexibility on the part of their teachers, something I found difficult to acquire. On one occasion I had spent a good deal of time with a group of young men, organising for them to do their white card (Occupational Health & Safety) training with Karrayili's Business lecturer. I had seen them that morning and offered to pick them up, but they'd assured me that they would make their own way in and would be there for the class. At the agreed time for the start of the class I went into the Business classroom, only to find the teacher there alone. No students had turned up, and none turned up that afternoon at all. I was exasperated, and expressed my frustrations to the Business teacher. Smiling at me calmly, he said "Don't worry Mel, they'll come back when they're ready" and carried on with what he'd been doing. At Karrayili being able to 'go with the flow' is a definite attribute.

Students may be unable to attend classes regularly for a number of personal or social reasons. These reasons are a priority for the learners, regardless of the priorities of those providing the learning. Attending funerals, for example,

is not optional for Aboriginal people from Fitzroy Crossing, and they may have to travel considerable distances with unreliable means of transport to do so. As one local told me, “Us Fitzroy people we gotta go to them funerals. If we don’t our family gonna be wild with us”.

Social reasons for non-attendance at Karrayili can also include drinking and other substance use. Despite the alcohol restrictions in place in Fitzroy Crossing since 2007, alcohol consumption continues to play a major part in the social life of many people in the town. For the Aboriginal residents in particular, though, there appears to be a strong sense of a social bond created by drinking together – on a number of occasions I have felt myself on the brink of being invited to become more of an ‘insider’ with a family or social group, only to feel the door gently close again when my answer to the question “Do you drink?” is not an enthusiastic “Yes!” Having the occasional glass of wine with a meal clearly isn’t what they were asking about. Drinking, community-style, is a full-blown affair, involving a lot of alcohol and frequently lasting for much of the night, leaving most people not feeling too inclined to get up for work or study the following morning. It is difficult to see, though, how an individual living in the same house or even community as those doing the drinking would be able to do anything other than join in. To not do so, I suspect, would be to wilfully place yourself outside the social group on whom every other facet of your social life depends.

The need to respect and allow for the prioritising of ‘life events’ is understood by everyone at Karrayili, whether Aboriginal or Kariya, staff, students or directors. A community-driven, social practice approach to teaching and learning is evident across the board, reflected in everything that happens there. Another example is provided by the use of computers in the Business class. There is no telecentre in Fitzroy Crossing, and very few Aboriginal residents have access to a private computer or internet. At Karrayili, students are able to enrol in units which allow them to develop their computer literacy skills while at the same time engaging in real world tasks such as using internet banking or preparing funeral pamphlets.

Funerals in the Fitzroy Valley are generally big affairs. As part of the ceremony families prepare pamphlets for distribution, with information about the deceased and contributions from family and friends. The origin of the current trend for funeral pamphlets is unclear, but they are believed to have started in the 1990s. The pamphlets tend to be massive undertakings, at times more than 20 pages of documents made into A4 or A5 booklets, usually with many photos and tributes from family and friends. The CGEA lecturer and adult literacy practitioner, EBB, has had considerable experience working with students as they endeavour to create funeral pamphlets. Here she explains how developing the pamphlets helps learners to simultaneously develop their English literacy skills, but in a meaningful way:

I think a good example of [integrated literacy learning] is the funeral pamphlet, because a lot of them are massive projects that people do, and they create a written document that gets handed out to an entire community, and they're responsible for it. And so it's amazing to see what actually comes out, and how people use English and how people then correct each other's English, and how they work through it, or they might you know, get somebody else to edit it, or they might let things go with Aboriginal English or Kriol uses or whatever ... it's not a task that's done just for the sake of Karrayili, it's a task that's done because it has a real life purpose and meaning ... (EBB)

The use of literacy in creating the funeral pamphlets, and in particular the ways of using SAE, are especially interesting. Many of the pamphlets are quite grand affairs, with much of the text phrased in an almost biblical style. The eulogies, in particular, can be lengthy and detailed, sometimes employing a very standard English style of language and format, with a beginning, middle and end and the person's life story told in chronological order. Others though follow a more Aboriginal approach to story-telling, where from a Western perspective there doesn't seem any sense of logical progression or form to the text.

Decisions regarding who contributes, whose words are included and whose are not, what is said and how it's said, are crucial, and mistakes made can have serious consequences for community members. The creation of funeral

pamphlets can therefore place extraordinary pressures on people to 'get it right', as one of the lecturers explains in this interview excerpt:

... even sitting down and working with students, they'll go "Right well we need to get so and so's [written tribute] cos they haven't done one". And they'll go chase it up and make sure it happens. And there's always a panic, cos the tradition here is to have, the front cover with a picture, then the next one will be like a service order, you know, and then the next page or section will be the family. You know, this person was grandfather to, son to, brother to, cousin to, you know all that kind of... people seem to follow the same sort of format, and in fact I think we might have the template set up so people can use it as a guide if they're not too sure about what they're doing. And with that family page, you know people are really concerned that they don't leave a name out, they don't leave a family group out or an individual out. And you know sometimes it happens, and then people get really quite upset. But not only is it important to get it right for you know, just for respect for that person, but also for getting it right for the cultural reasons as well. And you can cause a lot of trouble if you get something wrong. But spellings don't matter, I mean you know sometimes people have no idea how to spell someone's name, so they just make it up, but the person knows that they've been put in the funeral pamphlet ... And those obligations to the family, to the extended families and stuff and you know you can't leave out that family. And so there's a lot of stress involved in making...not only is there a lot of sorrow and that, but you know that, that risk of really causing a lot of trouble if you don't get it right. So yeah, so that's why people always make a copy, take it back home, and they'll come back saying "Oh we forgot so and so", or "We need to put in this person", or "We need to move that picture, we need to get rid of that". And yeah so they're real confrontational things. (EBB)

Supporting students with creating funeral pamphlets, given the stresses that are often experienced by everyone involved, can be difficult and time-consuming. As EBB notes here, lecturers' hearts can sometimes drop when they realise that the bar for these pamphlets has yet again been raised:

And sometimes when you see one, like you see really flash ones, and they're all colour and they're bound and they've got plastic covers, and we go "Oh god please no, don't start a new trend, the next one comes through here is gonna be like that." (laughing)

Despite EBB's reservations, several Karrayili students made it clear to me that they appreciated not just the opportunity to use the Karrayili facilities to create their pamphlets, but also that Karrayili staff would always make time to help if needed:

Yeah, [DK]'s a real good helper, he'll get those computers and they make them ... now [JLC]'s workin 'ere, an like I work as CGEA here, so if they wanna ask me for anything I can just go an give them a hand then. Well a lot of the staff just always do that, just give the ones that are just starting, an that are not too sure about how to make a pamphlet, so the staff always help them make one. (ETM)

It goes without saying that when people are creating a funeral pamphlet, they are at the same time experiencing a very sad and challenging time on a personal level. Add to this the literacy requirements and social obligations that are an integral part of creating the pamphlets and you can easily see that the support of Karrayili staff members at this time would be appreciated.

This section has described some of the ways in which literacy and learning programs are approached and administered at Karrayili. However, Karrayili provides services to more than just the local Fitzroy Crossing community. As noted in Chapter Two, the Fitzroy Valley is defined by a number of communities, and Karrayili has, at various times, delivered services to communities outside the town itself. The next section describes one such delivery service.

Taking learning to the communities

Probably the most popular training course offered by Karrayili is its Driver Education program. As the Driver Ed lecturer explained in an earlier quote, literacy and numeracy skills are developed implicitly, as part of learners carrying out learning and assessment tasks designed to enable them to gain their driver's licence.

Driver education is also one of the programs offered by Karrayili as part of its commitment to providing training to remote communities in the Fitzroy Valley. Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley have powerful connections to their traditional lands, to their country, and the need to travel long distances from home to attend training frequently prohibits people from undertaking further education. As Michael Christie notes, "There is something in the Aboriginal

imagination which always has, always will link a good quality education to place, and to place consciousness” (2005, p. 4).

In recognition of this Karrayili has, at various times, delivered the Driver Education program either at its remote Yakanarra annex, or through lecturers travelling from Karrayili to outlying communities to deliver the training as a series of one-day workshops. Delivering such programs is not easy, as I discovered when I accompanied DJ, a Karrayili lecturer and local Walmajarri woman, on her trip to Wangkatjungka to set up the Driver Education course there.

Wangkatjungka, one of the remote communities to which Karrayili delivers, or has delivered, educational programs, is an Aboriginal community located approximately 120km south-east of Fitzroy Crossing on an excision of Christmas Creek station. The drive from Fitzroy Crossing to Wangkatjungka takes around one and a half hours. In March, when we travelled there, the monsoon rains – the ‘wet’ – have ended but their legacy remains. Creeks and rivers are flowing with rich, brown, muddy water and the countryside is still green and comparatively lush. Summer may now be officially over but temperatures here remain high, and when we leave Fitzroy at 8am it is already hot enough to produce a thin film of sweat on your brow. At this time of year the roads are quiet, although with Easter fast approaching that will all change in a few weeks and the roads will again be busy with caravans and campers making the most of the Kimberley’s balmy winter weather and stunning natural attractions.

About 100km from Fitzroy Crossing we reach the turnoff, with a sign by the side of the Great Northern Highway pointing south to Wangkatjungka and Christmas Creek station, 19km away. Wangkatjungka is one of the oldest Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley, with the settlement first established in the late 1970s. The population varies from around 145 to 200 people, including those living at Wangkatjungka outstations. The Planning WA website (Government of WA 2004) notes that the population seems to be declining, speculating that this may be related to limited job opportunities in

the community. The website also notes that the community's kinship connections with local towns such as Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, together with the languages spoken in the community, indicate that the people at Wangkatjungka have strong connections with the desert country to the south. The Wangkatjungka/Christmas Creek station area was traditionally a place of great cultural significance as it was a gathering place for law ceremony and cultural meetings over the wet season.³²

In 1994 Karrayili established an annexe at Wangkatjungka, and a considerable number of adult students attended over the next few years to study numeracy and literacy. During the course of their studies there, the students also became very interested in painting as a means of recording stories and culture, and the community has since developed a reputation for producing distinctive and highly-sought-after artwork. A teacher then working with the Wangkatjungka students noted that:

In the four years the elders have attended Karrayili, their self-esteem has increased. Their oral English has improved and they are more able to engage in a conversation with Standard Australian English speakers. (Brisset-Blackley, 2000, p. 57)

At some time the Karrayili annexe at Wangkatjungka ceased to operate, but it is unclear when and why this happened. As Karrayili provides services as and when they are needed, it is likely that circumstances in the community changed, meaning that there was less demand for Karrayili to run classes. Another possibility is that the annexe was closed following the loss of a key staff member.

Approaching Wangkatjungka community you first see the Christmas Creek station buildings on your right, and you'd be forgiven for thinking this was the community itself as you've already passed a sign welcoming you to

³² Artlandish Art Gallery. from <http://www.aboriginal-art-australia.com/c/24968/1/wangkatjungka-region.html>

Wangkatjunga. The sign tells you that, like many remote Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley, it's a dry community, meaning alcohol and drugs are banned. After the station buildings you see the community school on your right, with its brightly coloured playground, attractive teachers' accommodation and a message hand-painted on the side of one of the buildings proclaiming that 'School's Out 4 Summer'.

Entering the community itself you first notice the typical community-type fibro houses, in varying states of disrepair, and the abundance of dogs roaming around in small groups (again in various states of disrepair). Most noticeable on this occasion, however, is the enormous pig sleeping by the veranda of one of the houses, comfortably ensconced with the family's dogs. Irene drives us to the community centre, where we'll be meeting with prospective students who are interested in studying the English and administration required to either get or regain their driver's licence.

The community centre is a large building comprised of two small offices at one end, one of which houses the Centrelink office, and a large adjoining communal hall, open to the elements on two sides via four large roller doors. This, together with half a dozen whirring ceiling fans, ensures that even on a hot, sunny morning there is plenty of fresh air circulating. This room is where the course is to be delivered, so we look for somewhere to set up our things. There are two tables in the room, one with tea and coffee and an urn, the other mostly taken up with people who are taking care of a number of toddlers playing with items from a toy box on the floor.

The Driver Education course offered by Karrayili has been designed to support local people in their efforts to pass the theory part of the driving test. Of course there is no public transport from Wangkatjunga so without a licence and access to a vehicle people in the community are dependent on others for transport to Fitzroy Crossing for shopping or for visits to family and hospital or other services. A driver's licence would also allow people in Wangkatjunga to access job opportunities in other communities and nearby towns. Some of the people without licences in the community are already

able to drive, but few have the language and literacy skills necessary to negotiate many of the questions in the theory test, and this is where Karrayili comes in.

The Driver Education course is made up of six accredited CGEA units. The units are:

- Develop and document a learning plan and portfolio with guidance
- Conduct a project with guidance
- Engage with simple texts for personal purposes
- Create simple texts for personal purposes
- Communicate with others in familiar and predictable contexts
- Use computer language and perform simple computing tasks

While the content of the questions in the theory test is generally not too demanding and the answers are multiple choice, the majority of students – as ESL speakers – need considerable support and guidance with the literacy skills required to read and understand the questions. Today's visit to Wangkatjungka, though, is primarily to identify prospective numbers of students, complete enrolment forms for those who are interested, and give students the materials they will need to complete the course. When we arrive, a number of young women are quick to come over and register their interest. Irene hands out the necessary paperwork and pens, and people start filling in details such as name and address, and whether or not they've previously had a licence.

As with other communities and towns in the Fitzroy Valley the Aboriginal people here speak several different languages, sometimes within the space of the expression of a single idea. The main language used, by people of all ages, is Kriol. Older people tend to speak Language with each other – at Wangkatjungka this could be Wangkatjungka language, or one of the other local languages such as Walmajarri or Gooniyandi – and younger people code-switch from Kriol to English and back again with consummate ease.

The students who approach us to enrol in the Driver Ed course are mainly young adults and it is noticeable that it is the women who are first to come forward, and in far greater numbers than the men. In general the women seemed more confident and purposeful and they quickly gather around us, collecting enrolment forms and pens and jostling for writing space on the small counter already laden with our boxes and files. Few have difficulties in understanding what they need to do and completing the necessary forms. In contrast the men who are present require more help, and having spoken with Irene (all but one of the men elected to speak with DJ rather than me) and collected the paperwork each of them quickly retreats to sit away from the others, and at some distance from us, sitting either on one of the few chairs or on the floor. One of the community women then works one-on-one with them to fill in their enrolment application. The men seem more hesitant than the women, even shy, and they also seem to be more challenged by the literacy skills required to complete their enrolment. It was not clear, however, whether their hesitance was due to my presence (as a Kartiya woman), the lack of any male teacher to speak with (although I doubt this was an issue as the male students at Karrayili have no problems working with female teachers, either Aboriginal or Kartiya), the gender imbalance in general, or if it stemmed more from a self-consciousness about their English literacy abilities. Towards lunch-time people start to drift off again, and DJ starts to pack up our resources. Irene is pleased to have had so many people interested in the course, and feels the day has been a success.

The Driver Ed course delivered by Karrayili to remote communities provides a valuable service to which they would not otherwise have access. It teaches people the language and skills needed to achieve their goal of being able to drive legally on the roads, thereby enabling them to be mobile and able to access services and maintain important family and cultural connections across the vast distances between towns and communities in the Valley. The Driver Ed teachers also help students to negotiate the bureaucracy inherent in the process of gaining or regaining a driver's licence, providing support for tasks such as requesting a birth certificate or contacting the relevant department regarding previous fines. But the course does much

more than that. For Aboriginal students in remote communities the Karrayili Driver Ed course, and the teachers who deliver it, provide a bridge between the community and a mainstream system that would otherwise be, for many, far too formidable and incomprehensible to tackle alone. In Karrayili the students, who in so many instances are excluded from mainstream Australian society through language and cultural differences, have a strong ally that plays a crucial role in supporting them along the path to identifying and meeting their aspirations.

For many Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley, the very real need to stay on country and near family both defines and limits their opportunities for meaningful employment and training opportunities. As noted in the quote below, the training provided by Karrayili, whether delivered in town, via community visits, or online, allows them to access training while remaining in their desired physical and social environment:

There's no TAFE³³ here at the moment, TAFEs are in Broome, Derby, Halls Creek and Kununurra so this mob from Fitzroy they can't even, like they got families here and they don't wanna move. And when they do move they get homesick, you know? They just worry bout their family an friends here. So Karrayili is just here for them, sort of thing. They like comin 'ere. (ETM)

Approaches to teaching at Karrayili reflect local Aboriginal perceptions of appropriate education practices. What is taught, and how it is taught, is determined by local needs and values. Relationships are also of profound importance to the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing, and the ways in which the staff at Karrayili recognise the need for, and work hard to build, rapport between themselves and their students play a key role in the Centre's continued relevance to local people. The staff at Karrayili know that students will only come to training if they feel comfortable with the environment in which they are learning – with the people who are conducting the training,

³³ In Australia TAFE stands for 'Technical and Further Education'. TAFE colleges are owned and operated by state and territory governments, and provide predominantly vocational education and training (VET).

with their peers, with the physical space in which they are learning and with the content of their lessons.

Talkin' that Kartiya way

Yeah, that's that language there I'm talkin bout, that Kartiya English. (WS)

At Karrayili Aboriginal people are generally confident not only about entering the premises but also communicating with others, including Kartiya staff members and visitors to the Centre, while there. In Fitzroy Crossing there is a strong sense of Aboriginal and Kartiya people living in two very different worlds, and the two groups are separated by a multitude of factors. Language use, and the use of SAE in particular, is one of the most powerful dividing forces, given its historical associations and the ways in which it reinforces existing power imbalances.

When asked why they go to Karrayili, many of the interviewees referred to the need to learn how to interact with Kartiya effectively by learning 'high English'. As DA told me on more than one occasion, "Manga, you gotta teach us that high English. That's what we gotta learn." 'High' English was variously translated for me as 'talking that government way' or as 'Kartiya-English'. I think its definition depends to some extent on the speaker's own level of English and their aspirations in speaking English. For someone with fairly limited English vocabulary and understanding it could mean learning to say "Where did he go?" instead of "Where 'e bin go?", whereas someone with greater English competency and plans to set up their own small business might view 'high' English as the language of law and business corporations.

These contested definitions of the English language have existed in the Fitzroy Valley since settlement and the development of what was then called Pidgin English. Confusion persists, in particular, regarding what is English and what is Kriol. For many Aboriginal people in the town, the lingua franca

in Fitzroy Crossing is considered to be English, whereas it is in fact Kriol. What local people perceive to be 'high English' is in fact SAE.

Carrying out discussions in 'Kartiya English' or 'high' English has the capacity to exclude those who are not competent in its use, denying them the opportunity to express their wishes or beliefs:

Like we, we in the one world, with our mob, but we wanna know what those Kartiya doing too. They could be in the community, you know? We, we need to communicate. ... If we can't speak up, or if we can't say, can't make any noise, they don't know what we want. Unless we tell them what we want. (WS)

Many local Aboriginal people, particularly those who are middle-aged or older, may not be able to follow conversations in English – and as anyone who has spent time in a country in which they were not competent in the language will know, this can have the effect of disengaging you from surrounding interaction and discouraging participation in communication with others:

Because we don't understand the words. It could be one word, if we don't understand that word ... we don't wanna know about it. We go like "Go on, get lost! Stay away, we can min' our own affairs". Until we understand what you gonna do. (WS)

Understanding spoken English is a major obstacle, especially at meetings with 'government people' (anyone representing Kartiya bureaucracy). If no interpreter is present, which in my own observations was more often the case than not, people will just sit calmly, making eye contact with no-one, and wait for the meeting to end. When I asked them afterwards if it had been a good meeting, they would invariably say yes. When asked what it had been about, responses would include keywords from the meeting – "Oh, it was an executive meeting" for example. When pressed as to what had been discussed at the meeting, there would suddenly be mail to be collected or an appointment elsewhere (I did not push these lines of questioning too far as there was always the danger of seeming to be looking for an admission to

illiteracy, stigmatic in any society). I do not know for sure, but I strongly suspect that at some point someone, most likely a family member, would have explained to them what the meeting had been about, especially when Native Title or other cultural issues were involved.

An example of how Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are excluded from mainstream communication, even when the topic at hand is of extreme relevance to local people's lives and livelihoods, occurred during a town meeting to inform residents of changes to CDEP (the government's Community Development Employment Projects program, previously referred to in Chapter Two). In June 2009 the government announced that it was about to introduce major changes to CDEP payments, with some payments ceasing as of 1st July 2009, and all CDEP payments ceasing by June 2012. A large number of Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are, or were, eligible for CDEP payments or top-up money as their regular source of income, and the changes were therefore of extreme importance and relevance to local people. A public meeting was called at which government representatives would explain the proposed changes, and on 15 June a large proportion of the Fitzroy Crossing community gathered outside the recreation hall to be enlightened. My thoughts after the meeting record my frustrations – one can only guess at the frustrations of the Aboriginal people present.

When CD and I arrive at 1pm there is almost a carnival atmosphere, with an Aboriginal band (five young men, guitars and drums) playing in the hall, a barbeque underway outside with an enormous line of people waiting for a 'feed', and people everywhere - kids, oldies, various organisations represented, Aboriginal and Kartiya. We find our place on the grass, sitting in the sun under the mandatory cloudless blue sky, kites wheeling overhead, and wait for the meeting to begin.

This eventually happens at around 2pm. Within minutes I am feeling uneasy, and have the sinking feeling that this is not going to go well - the main reason for my concern at this stage being that there are no interpreters present. Here are a group of government representatives explaining the extremely complex changes that are going to see the end of the source of income for many people

present at the meeting, and that will impact on every Aboriginal person in Fitzroy Crossing to some extent, and yet the information is being delivered in such a way that most of the Aboriginal people there (ESL speakers with poor English literacy/oracy skills) are not able to understand or follow the presentation. In fact the inability to understand is not limited to ESL speakers - about halfway through the presentation I turn to CD to ask what she is making of it all. Like me, she has little idea of what is being said or what the implications for local people will be. The information is being presented orally and the sheer volume of information, combined with it being couched in jargon and seemingly not organised in a logical or obvious fashion, makes it extraordinarily difficult to follow. After some disgruntled rumblings from the crowd a request for the information to be provided visually, on a whiteboard or similar, is met with a brief flurry of confusion then quickly put in the 'too hard basket', and the presentation continues with no acknowledgement of people's stated difficulties in understanding what is being said. The only visual material provided is a chart, the mind-boggling complexity of which is astounding.

At the end of the presentation, when the audience are invited to ask questions, the presenters are met with a barrage of comments, the majority of which note that a) we have understood little of what was said, and b) what we have understood appears to be completely illogical. For example the CDEP positions that are to be rescinded first, as of 1/7/09, apparently include those in the school (teacher aides), hospital and municipal work - all considered 'real' jobs by employers and employees alike, and all of which provide a real and much-needed service to the Fitzroy Community. The government appears to be on the one hand demanding that Aboriginal people gain worthwhile employment as a key step to 'closing the gap', yet on the other hand here they are taking away people's jobs, jobs that people are pursuing responsibly and reliably, and which are benefiting their places of employment as well as the wider Fitzroy community. Very strange.

At this meeting the majority of local Aboriginal people were excluded through a number of means. Firstly, and perhaps most profoundly, the use of what Aboriginal people call 'high English' (what non-Indigenous people might refer to as 'bureaucrat speak') served to exclude them from understanding much of what was said. Secondly, the apparent disregard for Aboriginal ways of doing and understanding (such as a more visual approach to presenting

information), even after requests from the crowd, suggested – certainly to the people who had spoken up about not understanding – that the presenters did not believe it was important for local people to understand. In fact when I spoke with the presenters after the meeting to suggest that it would have been beneficial for the meeting to have been interpreted for local people, they said they were already aware of that because they were travelling from community to community and had been met with the same dissatisfaction and negative feedback in each place, and that the issue of interpreting had been raised several times previously. Thirdly, the content of the information given was culturally inappropriate – the message was that people would have to get ‘real’ jobs, and if these were not available on their communities then people would simply have to move to larger towns or mining sites where employment opportunities existed. Such a move would be anathema to many Indigenous people, for whom staying close to family and country is paramount³⁴.

Many Aboriginal students at Karrayili told me of how they find talking with Kartiyas, and talking ‘Kartiya way’, to be quite an intimidating experience. This is hardly surprising when so often very little concession is made by non-Indigenous people to the fact that the people they are conversing with are ESL speakers. While I was in Fitzroy Crossing I attended an abundance of meetings held with visiting politicians, service providers, and other ‘government mob’. Sometimes there would be three or four such meetings in a week, with many of them aimed at consulting with the community as part of

³⁴ Interestingly, by 2012 the government appears to have changed its stance on CDEP, with the FaHCSIA website reporting that on 26 April 2012, it was announced that there would be a new Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP), which will commence on 1 July 2013. This program will “provide a more integrated and flexible approach to employment, participation and community-development services for people living in remote areas of Australia. It will assist in addressing the barriers preventing people from getting and holding down a job. It will also ensure that people who are not working are participating in activities that contribute to developing strong and sustainable communities” Accessed 9 October 2012 at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/community-development-employment-projects-cdep-program>

the 'Closing the Gap' campaign. At very few of these meetings, though, did local people – other than the same few individuals who are confident in speaking up with Kariya – make their views and opinions heard. The Principal of Karrayili suggested this is as much due to cultural factors as it is an inhibition regarding language use:

I think it's an 'our culture' way of operating, and it's only the people who have got that mode of operating, they do [speak up]. That's when you've got the lot who will catch on but at the ground, the bottom, the core group of people, including fairly articulate in English people like WS, it's not what you do. The embedded thing of Kariya knowing and Kariya operating and Kariya saying is so strong, the whole social ... it's generations of 'You don't answer back, or you don't say what you think'. It wouldn't even occur to [DA] to say something because it's really peripheral, it takes up your time but it really is peripheral to what your life's about. And it's just bizarre and it's so time consuming.

All of which means that for local Aboriginal people, going to Karrayili – where it is accepted, even encouraged, for people to communicate in whichever language they feel most comfortable with – provides them with an opportunity to undertake learning and training in an environment in which they do not feel linguistically threatened or challenged. In fact at Karrayili the boot is very much on the other foot, as Kariya staff members are placed in a position where *they* are the ones who are linguistically challenged. With the majority of students and many staff members communicating in Language or Kriol, it is very much a matter of being 'on their turf'.

At Karrayili people use whatever language they feel comfortable with, and are free to code-switch as they feel appropriate. Code-switching between languages is often used by people at Karrayili for practical purposes, but can also be used to indicate inclusivity and as a cultural identifier. On one occasion I was chatting with some of the KCs at the morning tea table when we were joined by a younger relative of one of the women. Seeing a Kariya woman she was unfamiliar with, the young woman started talking to me in very good SAE. At some point in the conversation she turned to the others and made a joke in Kriol. Despite my limited Kriol skills I understood the gist of what she had said and laughed. Looking a little surprised, she continued to talk to me but was now using a mixture of SAE and Kriol. This allowed the

conversation to revert to more of a group discussion, with everyone at the table involved (and me feeling decidedly more included). Throughout the conversation though, there were still occasions when one of the women would say something to the others in Language, effectively excluding me from whatever was being discussed. I understood, and had been subtly reminded, that not everything was my business.

Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing, especially the older generations, often code-switch effortlessly between several different languages, depending on who they are talking to and on the topic of conversation. It may also depend on who is within earshot. At Karrayili this is acknowledged, and the use of people's first languages and Kriol is both expected and at times explicitly incorporated into teaching and learning programs. Staff are there to help with English skills when needed, and much of the learning is conducted in SAE, but it is by no means a major focus of the Centre. This is just one of the many ways in which teaching and learning practices at Karrayili are defined by the socio-cultural context in which they take place.

The case study analysis in this chapter has demonstrated that Karrayili does things very differently from most other education centres. At the heart of what makes Karrayili work is the space it creates for Aboriginal learners to take ownership of their learning, and to demonstrate personal autonomy over what and how they learn. At Karrayili it is the students who, for the most part, direct their own learning. It is the students, Directors and community members who decide what will be taught and who will teach it. The students, for better or worse, decide when they will go to Karrayili to learn, and when other events in their lives will take priority over their learning. In addition attention is paid to the social context of people's learning at Karrayili. Local values are prioritised and integrated into ways of doing and understanding at the Centre. Learning is made relevant and meaningful to students' everyday lives.

People rarely go to Karrayili with the sole intention of gaining an education qualification; they go there for a range of reasons that have much more to do

with community life, and with maintaining strong and healthy ties to traditional culture and to each other. The next chapter, Chapter Six, will reveal in more detail why students go to Karrayili, and how they perceive both the Centre and learning in general.

Chapter 6: Connecting learning to social context

As noted in the preceding chapter, while Karrayili is an adult education centre it is about much more than just training and English literacy. Karrayili is a link. It is a link between local Aboriginal people and family or community members who have passed away. It is a link between Aboriginal people and Kartiya people or organisations. And, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is a link between Aboriginal ways and mainstream/Kartiya ways – ways of learning, but also ways of being and doing (Martin, 2003; Wilson, 2008). In relation to adult education, in particular, it provides an interface between Aboriginal learning and Kartiya teaching, the importance of which to local people cannot be underestimated.

In Chapter One I stated that at Karrayili people's perceptions of the value and role of adult education are frequently very different from those of mainstream Australia. Karrayili students do not 'fit' into any common assumptions of the typical adult education learner. Their reasons for attending are varied and complex, but students rarely have an underlying economic motivation for learning. During my fieldwork I realised that although students were enrolled in units that were in turn tied to certificate courses, it was rare to speak to someone who was studying as part of a preconceived career path. Some would speak vaguely of 'getting a certificate' or even 'getting a job', but there was rarely a plan in mind (or at least not one that was evident). In Chapter Two I outlined some of the social, cultural and historical reasons as to why

this might be so. This chapter, Chapter Six, provides a forum for the Karrayili learners' and staff members' voices to be heard as they talk about what Karrayili, and the training that takes place there, means to them.

A key theme to have emerged from my research evidence, and in particular from the interviews, is that of the importance to the Aboriginal people involved with Karrayili of the social context of their learning, and in particular the connections and relationships that are at the core of people's everyday lives. For the Indigenous learners at Karrayili these connections are what the Centre is all about. Relationships play a significant role in people's everyday lives, defining and giving substance to the very essence of who people are and what they do. As the Principal of Karrayili once told me, "All that Kartiya stuff doesn't matter round here. It's the relationships that matter". Needing to feel connected to others and to the environment around us is not, of course, unique to Indigenous peoples. It is, however, widely acknowledged as being particularly vital to the wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians (L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). As Maori author and academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, "To be connected is to be whole" (1999, p. 148).

It is this theme which dominates the students' responses, and it is the idea of connections which has guided the structure of this chapter. However, themes of relationality and social context also have their place in other chapters; as a result, while I have endeavoured to give clarity and cohesion to the three chapters which report on the case study itself, there is inevitably some degree of overlap.

This chapter takes a bottom-up approach to analysing the role of Karrayili. It is in this chapter in particular that ethnography, with its emphasis on the locally specific and on the meanings behind behaviour, has guided my research. This chapter explores how Karrayili is perceived by the community, and how it both shapes and is shaped by the connections that exist between the Centre and the people who work and study there. It looks at the ways in which personal relationships impact on the lives and learning of students and staff at Karrayili, illustrating how such relationships can serve to strengthen connections to Karrayili but also how, at times, these connections can create

barriers to effective learning and teaching for the people at Karrayili. It explores connections to place, and in particular the powerful and complex connections which exist between the community and the education centre itself. It also tells of the role played by local culture, both traditional and contemporary, in shaping the ways in which learning and teaching take place at Karrayili. As this chapter demonstrates, it is these connections – rather than the provision of training in itself – that define the role of Karrayili for the Fitzroy Valley community.

Connections to Culture

One of the key ways in which Karrayili is valued by the local community is in the contributions it makes to maintaining and strengthening ties to cultural practices and understandings. Culture is central to any understanding of what human beings do, who they are and why, yet as a concept it is not necessarily easy to define. The term ‘culture’ “... does not denote any concrete reality. It is an abstraction and, as commonly used, a vague – but still useful – abstraction” (Van Maanen, 2001, pp. 238-239). Definitions and descriptions of the culture of others, no matter how in-depth the interviewing or how long the immersion in fieldwork used to produce them, ultimately rely on interpretations and assumptions made by the observer. As noted in Chapter Four, as observers of culture we bring to our observations and reflections our own ways of doing and being, in such a way that any description or analysis is bound to be, to some extent at least, subjective and reflective of our own experiences and perspectives.

For the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley, the definition of culture can be simple. “Culture means how you live”, noted Paul Sampi in the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) publication *New Legend* (2006, p. 49). Patsy Bedford, a Bunuba woman who works with the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, expanded on this idea when she explained that:

I think when we say 'culture' a lot of people say, 'Oh, well, that's when you go Law time or Barruru time.' But culture means more than that. It's how you live, how you talk, how you just present yourself. That is all part of culture. What you eat. So, our young people these days don't realise culture not only means ceremonial times. Land, language and culture can never be apart because that is the core that lifts up who we are'. (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006, p. 49)

Culture for Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley is ceremony, it is connection to land and Language, it is family and the ways in which people live their everyday lives. And all these aspects of culture are of immeasurable importance to the Aboriginal people living and studying in Fitzroy Crossing.

Going onto country: you bin get im laughter when you out in the bush

As Patsy Bedford states in the quote above, "Land, language and culture can never be apart because that is the core that lifts up who we are" (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006, p.49). Land, language and culture – three powerful and inseparable features of the identities of Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing. The Kimberley Aboriginal Law, Land and Culture Centre (KALACC) in Fitzroy Crossing makes this explicit in their discussion of native title claims in the area:

... in every Kimberley land claim determined by the courts to date, native title has been recognized on the strength of traditional Law, languages and culture. Nowhere else in Australia have so many successes been achieved under this legislation. (2006, p. 41)

While KALACC goes on to note that these have been hollow victories for the applicants, given that despite recognition of their rights to land people continue to have neither exclusive control over country nor any wider recognition of customary laws, the quote nevertheless identifies the strong connections Kimberley Aboriginal people continue to have with their traditional land.

These connections are evident in the everyday practices of the students at Karrayili. Native title meetings are commonplace, and students are often absent from class because they are attending such meetings either in town or out on their communities. In interviews people, especially the older people, often spoke of cultural practices and their relationship to country:

Dancing I bin learn when I bin be young kid. When we used to sit down for ceremony thing for man, you know? For boys? Like if my brother get picked up, through all the law men, well I have to go and dance, that's a cultural thing for us. The sister gotta dance for is brother. When e goes, you gotta dance roun that night, an when e come back, welcoming time, you gotta dance again. I miss those days, but e still on ... it still happen in some parts, where they got strong culture. In Wangkatjunga they got strong one. Them ol people they still living with it. [But] you got no culture 'ere [in Fitzroy Crossing]. Old time it was better. You know why it was better? Because all dem ol people dey don't use to live one place la home, they use to go out walkabout. They always use to go Fridays, after school, they would wait for kids, an get their ration on Saturdays, an come back Sunday, Sunday afternoon. Go campin out with all those kids. And doing that culture thing. Teaching them to eat, and to hunt, and thing like that you know? Nobody don' do that [now], but some do in Bayulu. You know go out there, take all that mob there out. You bin get im laughter, and you can have a joke with them kids, when you out in la bush, you know? But they know when to light fire, an you don' 'ave to tell em go an do this an that, you don' 'ave to. You can just sit down there under a tree, you can just see everything done there. All them kids can do it. Mm, they telling them, they know it. But they don't like eating bread. They like their own bush tucker. You know what? Damper they like eating. (WW)

In this interview excerpt the student tells how she believes the traditional ways of doing, with their strong connections to country and culture, were better for the whole community, but particularly for the children. A widespread contemporary cultural concern in Fitzroy Crossing is that the 'old ways' are being lost, that the younger generation – as with young people everywhere – are more interested in watching TV and DVDs, in getting the latest phone or technological gadget, in drinking and smoking and 'hanging out', than they are in learning the ways of their parents and grandparents.

Of particular concern to people in this context is the transmission of dying languages and of traditional cultural practices. Older people frequently express their fears that the songs, the dances, the artwork and the languages will be lost when they pass on, but it's not just the old people who are sharing

their concerns. Young people, too, recognise that if they don't learn the ways of the old people soon then there is every chance that it will be too late. When I asked one of the young Bayulu Rangers why he wanted to be a Ranger with his grandfather he told me:

We gotta learn our language and about our country before it's too late, before those old people pass on, you know? (RS)

Issues of culture and country, and of keeping community connections to them alive and strong, are especially important to the older students at Karrayili, and none more so than the KC class. As I have previously noted, when asked why they go to Karrayili, or what they would like to do in the lessons, the KC students almost invariably answered along the lines of "to learn English" or "to do reading and writing". In a class activity they produced the poster below to explain their learning:

What do we do?



We come here to learn to talk English so we can understand Kartiya.



We do reading and writing in class, and sometimes we go on trips to practise our English

Figure 11: Poster produced by the KCs

Here the KCs place emphasis on their learning of English skills. During interviews, though, I was surprised by some of the answers the KC students gave to my questions regarding what they want to learn and why, as they often didn't involve learning English at all but were more about cultural practices. One student (PW) had married into a family at Bayulu, but was

originally from the Kalgoorlie region, further south in the mid-west of Australia. For her, learning local culture and language was paramount:

MS: And why did you think that maybe you wanted to come to Karrayili?

PW: *To learn ... words ... 'bout bush life. 'E good. And when you go out, to country. Cos my culture is different than that.*

So you want to learn about all the different Language and culture here?

Yeah, that right. 'Bout all the different medicine and stuff. How to use 'em, for the people get sick. 'E good, learn about those things. Yeah, yeah. [Her husband]'s mum bin learn me when she was in Bayulu, long time. She bin learn me. That's how I learned, from her. And my boy, he was sick, so I have to learn about that there.

So that's what you would like to learn at Karrayili? (Yeah) What kind of things do you do at Karrayili?

Learn, writing an' ...

Mhm. And is that the kind of thing you ... do you want to learn English? (Yeah) And why do you like learning English?

Cos ... I never learned ... in the school.

Ok ... and what kind of things would you like to do here, like in the future, next year or the year after?

Go to learn about bush, so the kids can learn. Yeah, that's good. Country's really good.

Like when we went to Yakanarra for the *jurnta* (bush onions) that time?

Yeah. That was good.



Figure 12: KC students looking for jurnta (bush onions) at Yakanarra, May 2010 (photos courtesy Gayle Slonim)

Another KC student also spoke of how her ambitions at Karrayili are a mix of learning English and maintaining cultural connections:

WW: Yeah I wanted to do more readin' an' writin', because sometime I get muddled up with spelling and things like that you know? I have problems. So I'm, I just like comin' to school.

MS: And why do you like it? How do you feel when you come to school?

I feel really good, an' happy when we go out la bush, learn different things ...

So what kind of things do you like doing here at Karrayili?

Mmm ... goin' huntin' and goin' to school. An' more paintings. See in that painting I got ... some of the thing we do, like we go dancing. I'm one of them dancers too, for them, um, Wangkatjungka mob.

It was clear from the interviews and from my own observations that while the Karrayili students, and especially the KCs, identify and acknowledge the need to learn SAE and do training in order to interact with Karrayili and participate fully in modern Australian life, their connections to traditional culture and country remain strong motivating factors for their ongoing involvement with Karrayili. These factors are in turn acknowledged by those responsible for programming, enrolments and teaching at Karrayili, who recognise people's connections to land through school activities (including trips to country), recognition and understanding of the need for people to go back to their country for cultural and/or social reasons, and the provision of remote training so that people are able to remain on country while they engage in training. The fact that the reality of local Aboriginal people's lives is so fundamentally integrated into their learning at Karrayili is further evidence of the social practice approach that is at the core of all that Karrayili does.

They got a lot of stories to tell

One of the main ways in which culture is maintained and transmitted is through the use of stories. A strong emphasis is placed on the role of

narrative in people's lives in Fitzroy Crossing, and story-telling is a prominent form of social practice in Fitzroy communities. On many occasions during my time there I found myself being told a story which illustrated traditional ways of being, feeling interested but a little confused as to why the speaker was telling me the story at that particular time or place, only to realise later that I had been taught a valuable lesson about local ways of doing and being. People would rarely give me explicit 'teaching', preferring instead to allude to something I needed to know by telling me a story that illustrated the lesson in point.

This has significant implications for teaching and learning in Aboriginal contexts. While an analysis of Aboriginal pedagogy is outside the scope of this thesis, it is nevertheless an observation worthy of inclusion at this point. In my own teaching practices at Karrayili I was certainly guilty of imposing my own ways of understanding the world, and in particular my own perspectives on language learning and teaching. While the KCs were happy to have me as their teacher, perhaps a greater understanding of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning would have ensured that my lessons were more accessible to them, and also would have helped to address the issue of power imbalances between me, as a researcher, and the research participants.

Stories were at times told as a way of teaching. At other times I suspected that I had been given a story as a way of demonstrating inclusivity towards me, or even as reciprocity for help or support I had given. During my first trip there, for example, I had spent several days doing teacher-training with VC, the KCs' teacher. We had quickly formed a good relationship and I was enjoying working with her and the students. One day, after the students had left, VC and I were discussing some techniques she could apply to teaching the class. VC seemed very receptive to the ideas, then suddenly (it seemed to me) lost interest and without any explanation started playing a video that had been made a few years earlier with a group of local men, showing them on a trip into the desert to look for water the traditional way. VC then carried on with what she had been doing, sorting out paperwork and tidying the

cupboards. I sat watching the video with interest, but was a little confused as to why she had put the video on – was she thinking of using it as a teaching resource with the students? Had she not seen it before? Should I stay and watch or had our training session finished and I should leave the room? After a little while VC started explaining parts of the video to me, what the men were doing and why. Still, though, it seemed to bear no relation to what we had been doing just before she put the video on. I continued to watch, sometimes asking for clarification as to what was happening or what had been said, then when the film finished VC simply packed it away and got ready to leave Karrayili for the day. It was much later in the day that I realised the film had had nothing at all to do with the context of teaching the KCs; I suspect that VC had shown it to me either as her way of reciprocating for the training I had been doing, or possibly of placing herself in the role of trainer and thereby redressing a perceived power imbalance. I also had a very similar experience with one of the Rangers students, who one day in the middle of a lesson, and for no apparent reason, started telling me a Dreaming story about a rock in Jiljardi, the waterhole behind Bayulu.

When asked what they do at Karrayili most of the KCs respond with something along the lines of ‘reading and writing’, a response delivered with a look toward me and a tone of voice that imply I’m not too bright for even asking the question. When asked what else they do, though, they are quick to talk about ‘telling stories’ to one another. One of the students explained this to me with the help of an interpreter:

DA: *Karrayili? Yeah, we go there ... I go there and talk to ... when they come in for writing and reading. We sit down there, and telling our stories.*

GS (interpreter): She enjoys coming into Karrayili ‘cause she’s meeting with the other ladies that come in, and sometimes they tell themselves stories. Also they come to ... you know, what they doing as well, like going as the students.

MS: Mm. What kind of stories do you tell?

DA: (laughs) *Oh, don’t ask anybody!* (all laugh)

GS: Girls’ stories, ladies’ stories!

DA: *Anything we can talk about. Talkin' 'bout the past, the other people, you know?*

Stories, whether visual (in film or art) or oral, play a vital role in the lives of Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing. They are used to teach, to demonstrate inclusivity, to create or maintain connections. They are intrinsically linked to culture, to the transmission of cultural knowledge and to an individual's sense of belonging and identity. This is especially true for the older generations, and for the older students learning is inseparable from culture and stories. AY, the then-Chairperson of Karrayili and Gooniyandi woman from Bayulu, told me:

Well, why they [KCs] go there [to Karrayili] is because they ... it's important for them to show that they can learn about they paintings, and stories, about their father's country, their grandfather's country, grandmothers an ... you know? By listening to them ol people sharing them stories to them adults, and the adults keep carrying on the generations from them, an teaching the younger ones to move forward. By they grandparents' and great-great-grandparents' stories. (AY)

DA, Karrayili elder and KC student, confirmed this connection between story-telling and Karrayili in the following interview excerpt:

MS: And what training do you do here, at Karrayili?

DA: *Mmm ... telling all these stories ... Stories for what we do. When we go out with someone, we come back, we gotta story.*

And in what ways do you think Karrayili is good for Fitzroy Crossing?

Well it good for us, for the old people you know? We sit down 'ere an' talk talk, telling all the stories, everything.

The following extract from my fieldwork journal illustrates the multi-layered power of story-telling, both for the narrator and the listener. It tells of a chance encounter with a Fitzroy Crossing elder I had met previously on several occasions, for whom story-telling was a powerful and (for me) unexpected way for us to finally make a connection.

Monday 19 October 09

After 3 weeks away it feels a bit strange to be going back to work at Karrayili. Determined not to stress or over-plan as experience has taught me to expect the unexpected here. Anyway, Mondays are always easy as the students like and expect to do their diaries, writing about what they did on the weekend, and that takes up most of the lesson. I think they like the repetition, and writing something certainly gives them a sense of achievement. Perhaps they also like the idea of recording what they've done?

I head first up to Junjuwa to pick up DA. Go to two houses looking for her, only to be told she'd already headed in to town. I head back down the road with an empty bus, past Karrayili, and turn onto the road towards Mindi Rardi to pick up some of the others. As I round the corner I see LU's wheelchair parked up under a tree to my right, not far from Karrayili, and a few other people sitting with her on the grass. I slow down, wind down the window, and do my best to return LU's hand-signals (a language in itself. I've seen people have whole conversations from a distance simply using one hand each!) then turn the bus round in the Ngiyali Roadhouse driveway and drive back towards the group. As I get closer I can see the others include DS and SS, two of my favourite locals, so I park the bus and get out to say hello.

DS and SS must be well into their 70s, an exceptionally close couple; both thin as rakes but seemingly strong and fit despite occasional bouts of ill-health. DS generally wears a loose-fitting cotton dress, no shoes, and a bandana tied around her head - she's a striking-looking woman with a quiet sense of determination, strength and wisdom. SS is unmistakable with his neat white beard, cowboy hat permanently perched on his head, light cotton trousers hanging from his tiny frame, clunky boots, and more often than not a riot of colour on his back courtesy of a selection of fabulous Hawaiian-style shirts.

Sitting with them is a younger man with a dot-style painting he's done. The painting is on a canvas about 1m x 0.5m, done mainly in vivid shades of orange and yellow. Three large green circles form a rough triangle, with these circles joined by lines of footprints. The artist, A, is discussing the painting with DS and SS. The painting, he tells me, depicts part of the Canning Stock Route - a place which resonates for many people living in the outback, both Aboriginal and Kartiya. For farmers and pastoralists the Route has been a vital means of transporting stock from station to buyers, enabling them to continue to earn a living from the harsh land that surrounds it.

For Indigenous people of the area, though, this land also has extreme significance. SS, the artist told me, had walked all over that region as a young man, and the waterholes (jila) depicted in green in his painting are of great importance, both practically and spiritually, to the desert people who traditionally lived in that area.

What particularly fascinates me during this encounter is SS's reaction to my interest in the painting. I've spent a fair bit of time in his company, including a 3-day trip to Broome with a group of students in 2008, and I don't think he's ever before said a single word to me. On this occasion though, after A starts telling me about the painting SS suddenly becomes very animated, rattling off his story of the country and the painting at 90 miles an hour - he clearly has something very important to tell me and needs to get it off his chest right there and then. Unfortunately he is talking in Language and despite all A's best efforts to get him to either speak to me in English or at least slow down, and DS's shouting at him and batting him in frustration with her hand, there is no stopping SS once he's started. A starts to explain the main points of the story but what with DS joining in and LU hassling me to hurry up and take her to 'work' it's all a bit much and he soon gives up.

So what makes SS open up to me on this occasion? The subject matter, of course, which is immediately relevant and meaningful to him, and no doubt the fact that he is telling me in Language (even though it doesn't seem to matter to him that I can't understand). It is also his choice to tell me, I haven't asked or expected anything from him. It would seem there are issues of language and social identity at work here, in the way that for the first time SS felt comfortable about talking to me. He was talking to me about *his* culture and experiences, in *his* language. Perhaps too the location has influenced things - we are not in a classroom or even a building, but sitting out on the grass in the place where he had chosen to sit, where I had come into their environment. That is, it is *his* place, much in the same way that WS told me local people are more comfortable about talking to Kartiya at Karrayili because it's 'on our turf'. All important considerations when it comes to successfully engaging Aboriginal learners in Fitzroy Crossing.

This experience is also a reminder of the need to view literacy skills in the plural, as literacies, rather than maintaining a rigid definition of literacy as being competency in SAE. Here was a man with supreme literacy skills not only in his own language (orally) but also in his understanding of the country in the painting and of important connections between country, family and culture. SS is immensely

respected by the Fitzroy community, and being in his company it's easy to see why. Views of Aboriginal literacy in Australia are currently dominated by a deficit approach, and I'm certain this contributes to Aboriginal learners lacking confidence/motivation in the classroom and in using English outside the classroom. Perhaps if their literacy strengths were given equal or greater emphasis, if we appreciated what these people *can* do before we criticised or denigrated them for what they *can't* do, then things might begin to change.

It also supports the argument that it is important to promote and celebrate vernacular literacies. Of course access to SAE (as the dominant literacy in Australia) is important - it enables people to participate in mainstream Australian society, in the systems of workplaces, public institutions and the various government departments with which Aboriginal people inevitably come into contact. But it's not the be-all and end-all, certainly not for the people who live here for whom promotion and everyday use of their traditional languages is of prime importance.

The use of narrative as a tool for teaching and learning is an important part of the maintenance and transmission of local cultural knowledge and practices. It is very much a local way of doing and learning, and it is important that this be recognised and integrated into teaching practices in this context so that learning makes sense to the learners. This aspect of life in Fitzroy Crossing is very much understood by those responsible for working with the KCs, and 'story-telling' forms the basis of a large part of what they do.

Contemporary culture, or 'getting sidetracked'

At this point I would like to return for a moment to the quotes at the beginning of this chapter. Paul Sampi defined culture as "how you live", and Patsy Bedford explained that culture is "how you live, how you talk, how you just present yourself. That is all part of culture ... culture not only means ceremonial times". Taking these definitions of culture as our starting point it is clear that stories, art and Language are not giving us the whole picture of Aboriginal culture in Fitzroy Crossing. If culture is 'how you live' then in this context it is also about reciprocity and sharing, about the strength of family

and kinship systems, and sadly too about the contemporary cultures of drinking and drug use, particularly among younger generations, that are a cause of great concern.

These issues have been written about fairly extensively (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006; Kinnane et al., 2009; Musharbash, 2008), and it is not my intention to cover them in great detail in this thesis. My concern here is with Karrayili, and in this chapter with the ways in which culture and literacy/learning are intertwined. Of contemporary culture, though, there is one particular aspect which has a considerable impact on teaching and learning at Karrayili – immediacy.

In Chapter Four I reflected on my experiences living in Fitzroy Crossing and working at Karrayili, describing what I had learnt not only about my research topic and the process of doing research, but also about myself. I spoke of how my 'year in Fitzroy' had forced me to relinquish control of much of what happened in my daily life, and importantly had taught me to accept that the control I had held so dearly was not, in fact, quite as critical to my wellbeing or my efficacy at work as I had previously supposed. Much of this change came about as a result of my teaching experiences at Karrayili. In all of my previous teaching positions planning had been crucial to achieving success in my role as an ESL teacher and teacher-trainer. I had learnt, and had subsequently taught others, the importance of thorough and thoughtful lesson planning, with particular attention needing to be paid to aims (what the learners would leave my lesson being able to do, or do better than before) and timing (to ensure that those aims would be achieved within the lesson's timeframe). I arrived at Karrayili secure in the knowledge that my understanding of how to plan a good lesson would lead to success in the classroom, as it had for the past twenty-odd years.

As I spoke of earlier in this thesis, I could not have been more wrong. I lost count of the number of plans that were aborted very early on in the lesson, if the lesson ever even got started. What was particularly confusing for me was the way that student numbers and class cohorts varied from lesson to

lesson – I might have a full class at one lesson, then having planned for the same students at the next lesson I would arrive to find nobody at all had turned up. Or a small group would turn up one week, only to be inexplicably replaced at the next lesson by an almost entirely different group of people. And students rarely, if ever, turned up on time or were wherever we'd agreed to meet at the agreed time.

It took me a long time to realise that Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing, while perhaps not living the organised 9 to 5-type routines of many non-Indigenous people, nevertheless have very full and busy lives. In addition, life is lived very much in the moment, and few commitments made are so important that they cannot be 'rearranged'. This, of course, can play havoc with the best-laid plans of teachers at Karrayili – the following excerpt from my journal notes expresses the frustrations I experienced as a teacher, but also illustrates how these frustrations combined with my reflections as a researcher.

28 February 2010

I had a really frustrating week last week. Spent most of my time driving around to students' houses, looking for or waiting for people who clearly didn't want to come in for training. I persevered because, in particular with the Rangers, I really wanted them to come to school. It was not about what they wanted; it was about what I wanted.

Yet the students I was chasing had come to Karrayili requesting training. They'd started courses, and then didn't come in for training. Why not? What were they doing instead? Some had gone fishing (Loanbung), some (young Rangers) had been up all night 'walking round' so were ready for bed at 9am when I went to pick them up, others were looking after their houses/families (DK's students). They had other priorities, and clearly didn't think that regular attendance at training was important.

On reflection that last sentence seems a bit harsh, and perhaps is more indicative of the frustrations I was experiencing than my understanding of why people weren't coming to class. People *did* recognise that training was important – why otherwise would they have come to Karrayili to request it?

But at that moment, in that context, something else took priority and so they simply went with what was most important to them at that time, apparently oblivious to the chaos that this caused for those of us responsible for planning and carrying out their training .

I came to understand that this impression of gentle but constant chaos was not unique to my own experiences of teaching at Karrayili. There is a hint of chaos in everything about Karrayili, but in fact this is very much a reflection of life in Fitzroy Crossing generally. It is a phenomenon frequently commented on by staff members and others, especially those who are non-Indigenous. On numerous occasions, when things did not go according to plan, people would simply shrug their shoulders, give a kind of wry smile and say “Ah well, that’s the chaos that is Karrayili”, closely followed by an observation that it’s the same chaos that one encounters on a daily basis in Fitzroy Crossing generally. This chaos, though, is not seen as a ‘problem’ to be dealt with – it is the way local people live their daily lives, it is part of local culture, and it is certainly a part of working and studying at Karrayili.

Fitzroy is just like that, nothing goes as planned, you set up for the morning and said ‘Oh I’m getting ready to go to Karrayili to do some units on my course’ and then you walk down the street you bump into your cousin and then you sidetracked, and that’s how most people that I know of, they’re like that. Yeah. (JLC, former student, Director and staff member)

This sense of immediacy, of people reacting to the ‘here and now’, is not unique to Fitzroy Crossing. In her book *Yuendumu Everyday: Contemporary life in remote Aboriginal Australia*, Yasmine Musharbash speaks of how immediacy shaped her fieldwork with the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu in central Australia. Like me, Musharbash struggled to accept and live with this immediacy, yet also came to miss it when she left the community. Reflecting on her experiences she notes:

Immediacy meant I could not plan ahead. Specific data collection, language lessons, everything happened when it happened, rather than when I wanted it to happen. Big events ... overruled any other activity, but even without them, everything had to be slotted in with what was happening in the settlement on that particular day, and coordinated with

large numbers of people and their assorted ideas and desires. Appointments simply did not work. (2008, p. 11)

I reflect upon this aspect of life in Fitzroy, and how it impacts on teaching at Karrayili, in the following journal entry:

19 October 2009

Lesson planning in particular has been frustrating - well, not the planning but the fact that as a day unfolds it often turns out to be days or even weeks before that particular lesson takes place, and even then it rarely has the same shape as I'd intended it to have. Driving the bus to pick people up for classes, too, is always a very hit-and-miss affair and we are never informed as to changes in people's circumstances that will change their schooling needs. Most of the time though this failure to let us know is simply because the change has only just taken place - a community meeting's been called, or family have turned up, or someone suddenly needs to travel to another community for family/sorry business.

Musharbash talks about her acceptance of this sense of immediacy meaning that she experienced time in new ways, but also that it influenced her ways of relating to others: "Immediacy meant that rather than seeking to fulfil my own desires ... I learned to have them fulfilled by fully participating in the collective push and pull of 'being in the present'" (2008, p. 11), and many of my experiences at Karrayili were illustrative of this.

For local mob very little of each day is planned, and what plans people have are certainly not set in stone. People get up when they wake up, generally very early in the morning, then see what the day brings. If someone is enrolled in a course of study then when they wake up they may well have every intention of coming in to class. But if something else comes up, a community meeting for example, or someone is sick, or simply something more interesting is on offer, then the plan to study is abandoned with very little consideration. When it came to prioritising daily events, Aboriginal learners in Fitzroy Crossing quite clearly demonstrate personal autonomy in their decision-making. People don't ring or call in to the school to explain their absence either - not because they are rude, or because they don't know

how to, but rather because it simply doesn't occur to them that they need to. They won't be there today but they will (possibly) be there on another day, when it's more appropriate for them to do so. And in the meantime other people will get on with their own lives, making their own decisions and responding to their own immediate situations, and the world will keep turning. Despite the length of time I spent with Aboriginal communities in Fitzroy Crossing it remained very difficult for me, with my own particular life experiences and worldview, to truly understand the way that Aboriginal people there live in the 'here and now'. On one level I knew it, accepted it and would often find myself advocating it during discussions with Kartiya who had asked me what life in Fitzroy was like. Yet still I couldn't shake my own deeply-held and thoroughly embedded expectations of how a student interacts with the learning environment; of a student's responsibilities to themselves, their studies, their classmates and their teacher.

On one of my field trips to Fitzroy I was – yet again – astonished and perplexed to arrive at Karrayili one morning only to find the school practically empty of students. Where was everybody? There were teachers and classrooms, resources, and students were enrolled, so why did the school resemble a ghost town? The only two students on the premises were using the computers so I asked JLC, a former Karrayili student and current staff member whose role was to provide support to students learning computer skills, what was going on. The following notes reproduce part of the conversation we had:

MS: Where is everyone? Where are all the students?

JLC (continuing what she was doing at the computer and not looking at me): I dunno. They got other things to do I guess. This is Fitzroy. You can't make people come in if they don' wanna.

MS: Yeah, but from the Karrayili side, is there anything they could or should be doing to get more students in? Maybe they could think about what they teach, or how they teach it?

JLC (after giving me a long hard look, and with a hint of exasperation in her voice): You mob just don't get it, do you? That's the way we live here in Fitzroy. That's our way of life and that's how we like it.

This exchange, perhaps more than any other I had with Aboriginal people in Fitzroy, brought home to me the world of difference that existed in our cultural contexts. By 'you mob', of course, she was referring to Kartiyas, the non-Indigenous people like me who, however well-meaning, just repeatedly failed to grasp even the basics of everyday life for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. To me the lack of students in a school was a problem to be solved by analysing various aspects of the delivery of services to the students – the interesting thing for me being that until JLC's comment I had not even realised that that was how I perceived the situation. As a *problem*. While to local Aboriginal people not only was it not a problem, or even a social norm that should be accepted as a fact of life, it was actually desirable. "That's our way of life and that's how we like it". As simple as that.

Perhaps though this exchange can be unpacked even further. When JLC states firmly that "That's the way we live here in Fitzroy", she is providing yet another example of how Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing assert personal autonomy over their lives. Immediacy is one of the many practices that shape Aboriginal people's lives in the town, and which allow them to have control over their lives every day. Insisting on living their lives in *their* way is an empowering strategy, and in the quote above JLC makes it clear that this way of doing things is non-negotiable.

As I reflected above, this tendency to 'live life in the moment', to respond spontaneously to everyday situations as and when they arise, can create logistical problems for the teaching and administration staff at Karrayili, and I will come back to this point in Chapter Seven. For Aboriginal communities in Fitzroy Crossing though, the need to respond to the 'here and now', and to prioritise family life, goes without question. I suspect that the practice of immediacy as part of everyday family life and social practices may well contribute to shaping and reinforcing relationships, already identified as being crucial to Indigenous ways of being and doing. In this way prioritising family life – whether it be responding to a crisis, helping out a family member, or even accompanying someone on a drive to Derby or staying up all night

drinking – is critical to the effective functioning of an individual in that particular community.

One thing that came through very clearly in the interviews was that Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are quick to acknowledge the ways in which Karrayili accommodates this immediacy. The flexibility of staff at the Centre and the ways in which it is understood that students will come and go, appearing and disappearing over the course of months, if not years, is appreciated by those who study there:

I enrolled in a Cert III course for Business and Administration ... and then I got a bit side-tracked and just took off, took off to Broome and then Perth and then eventually I got homesick, came back to Fitzroy and then Karrayili let me come back and to continue to pick up on my course, that was good. So I came back to Fitzroy and I started on the course again, which I'm nearly finished now after three long years. But it's been good because it's flexible, they don't force you to come in, you can come in at your own time and work at your own pace. (JLC)

Karrayili is very flexible, an we don't turn people away saying "Oh, how come you didn't come to so an so" because bein' in that close community everyone sort of knows each other you know? An, even the teachers might know them an say "Oh yeah, yeah we understand why you haven't been in and ..." whether it's Law business and sorry business you know, or have trouble with their spouse ... Or kids, you know? If kids are playin up. Yeah. Stop and start, and you can't do that in other places. People know that they can do that at Karrayili, an like ... death in the family they might go to another community you know, or stay out bush an won't come in for a while til the next rain. So it's more flexible, Karrayili is more flexible for people. They can start an if other circumstances arise, you know, well they can always come back later to do it. Because everything still on file, and they can come back an ask the teachers if they want to resume again. They say "Oh yeah, you have to ... you done some of the units, you're up to here now" you know? If you go somewhere else they might think if you haven't been for a few weeks or months they'll just wipe you off you know ... Whereas at Karrayili they can start something, an if they get itchy feet or fidgety ... like newcomers, they won't stay for the whole three or four hours you know? They'll probably stay for half an hour to an hour a day til they get more comfortable in that position with people around them. (ZC)

This acknowledgement and accommodation of the reality of students' lives is one of the many ways in which Karrayili ensures it operates in a culturally appropriate manner. It is also one of the ways in which Karrayili students are able to maintain control of their own lives, demonstrating autonomy by

making decisions that are appropriate to themselves and their family responsibilities, without fear of losing out on opportunities for training. A Karrayili student tells here of what this means to her:

An also I've done a bit of computer training here. I mean I never finish it but at least I still, you know, like ... whatever you ask you know that, you know that you won't get the answer "No" because Karrayili, it's an open centre for anyone to learn. Yeah. And we know that, we know, we never get, you know we'll never get knocked back for any training course. (PD, Karrayili student)

The assurance that they will never get 'knocked back' is clearly one of the factors that has contributed to the success of Karrayili as a community-driven education provider. Of course while this flexible approach to the provision of training meets the needs of the local community, it often doesn't 'fit' with conventional mainstream pathways to training and employment. The tension that this creates for staff members at Karrayili is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Connections to Community

Karrayili Adult Education Centre is not, as its name would suggest, just about learning. It also serves as a kind of social centre, a meeting place. It's a place where people can keep in touch with others in the community, swap stories, share, reciprocate and support one another. In this way it plays a significant role in the town, being as it is a neutral, shared space where people can meet up and keep personal and family connections strong. As one of the staff members explains:

Yeah, like they can just sit, sit outside and just talk, when people come in they just say hello to strangers, "Hello this is Karrayili" and they just introduce themselves, you know? But mainly this place is about, well I see it they always introducing themselves to a lot of people, you know? Get to know people. (ETM)

A place of learning and social gathering

The verandas at Karrayili are often busy places, especially the area near the main entrance. There are always a few chairs left here, although people are generally more than happy to sit directly on the decking or to stand leaning on the railings while they catch up on what's going on in the town. Often people here are not even conversing; sometimes they are simply there together, with no small talk necessary or desirable. It is also an area where people can sit with babies or young children, where the different generations can get together and chat, while still watching the world go by.

It's a place of learning and social gathering, I'd say, Karrayilli. 'Cause ... we do get some that you know still walk through and they're not doing no course or anything and they'll sit out the front and have a yarn. (DC)

I used to come in, like the afternoon when I finished [working] at school, used to come and take a look around, there used to be a lot of people here you know? And you just walk up and they all friendly, they talk to you and tell you things, and you got a lot of things like noticeboards, to tell you what's going on around the Valley. (ETM)

The 'morning tea table', too, provides a place for meeting up with others and sharing stories. Further round on the veranda from the main entrance, outside the office spaces and the kitchen, this table is commandeered each morning at around 10.30 by the Karrayili Class and their teacher. Seating about 8 people comfortably, the table is in a central position between classrooms and offices and offers the KC students a prime position to be 'in the thick of things' while they are having their well-earned cup of tea and mangarri – a Walmajarri word meaning food or a meal generally, but for the KCs at 10.30 it's morning tea. Mangarri for the KCs usually consists of a cooked snack such as toasted sandwiches or bread and tinned meat, nothing grand as it's prepared by the class teacher between teaching the students and dropping them off after class so there is little time (or money) to provide a more substantial meal. But this is fine because morning tea time is not just about food. It's a valuable chance to relax together, to chat and to inevitably

laugh, to swap stories of who's doing what on the communities and to discuss their concerns about family, friends and the community in general.

The women live on different communities – Junjuwa, Bayulu, Mindi Rardi and Kurnangki – so coming together at Karrayili is one of the few opportunities they have to interact socially and keep social connections strong. These social interactions should not be misconstrued as simply 'gossiping', although naturally there is a fair bit of this that goes on. It is amply evident from their discussions that coming together with their peers is also an opportunity to cement their status in the community as elders and as nurturers who are often responsible for the well-being of the members of their extended families. Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are frequently placed under considerable pressure by the consequences of socially dysfunctional behaviour. Alcohol abuse, in particular, has resulted in the parents of young children often being absent from their families, whether because they are in jail, visiting other towns to drink, or are simply 'distracted' doing other things (Kinnane et al., 2009). When the parents go missing it is often left to the grandparents, most often the grandmother, to take responsibility for the child or children left behind. During the time I spent with the KC students this was a fairly common topic of conversation, with the women not only expressing their concerns for their children and grandchildren, but also for themselves as they felt they no longer had the strength, energy or good health to care for young children. Coming together at Karrayili as they do, they are able to offer one another moral support in a situation for which they feel little optimism.

The 'old girls', as they are commonly known by others at Karrayili, frequently direct things from their chairs at the morning tea table, whether it is instructing their teacher in the fine art of getting the mangarri right, commenting to the Principal as she passes as to what should or shouldn't be happening at the Centre, or calling staff members over to check that they are aware of relevant community business.

The morning tea table is also a general communal area. It is a place to share a cup of tea with visitors to the Centre, a place for people to wait to speak with staff members in the office area, and at times it is a place shared by the whole Karrayili community when there is a birthday or other special occasion to be celebrated. At these times the Centre provides a mangarri for everyone, with a huge spread of biscuits and dips, fruit, cold meats and cake being enjoyed by students, staff, and anyone else who might be nearby. Birthdays are marked with a card, present, and a cake with candles, and of course 'Happy Birthday' is sung and photos are taken. At these times everyone mixes together – young and old, students and staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous – and there is a real feeling of Karrayili as a family, sharing significant occasions together, laughing and chatting and in the process establishing or strengthening important personal connections as families do. These social traditions at Karrayili also serve to make people feel valued, not just as staff or students but as human beings in their own right.

Knowing everybody else's business

The terms of people's connections with others in Fitzroy Crossing are not constrained by the unspoken rules of privacy common to the Kartiya world. In her book *Yuendumu Everyday*, a study of the values that shape the everyday lives of the Warlpiri people she lived with, Yasmine Musharbash talks of the 'immediacy of sociality' (2008, pp. 146-147). This term refers to the highly public nature of people's lives in remote Indigenous communities; the way that much of what happens is conducted outside, with others and in full view of others.

This closely mirrors the way Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing and its surrounding communities live their everyday lives. Aboriginal people in Fitzroy are rarely alone, something that was very noticeable to me while I was living there. At the time I was living alone, in a small one bedroom unit supplied by Karrayili, next door to the Principal who was also a single woman living alone. Every day I would walk to work on my own, walk home for lunch

and back to work again alone, and walk home alone at the end of the day. Some days I would get together with my neighbour for a chat after work, with one or both of us often in need of a 'de-brief' about the day's events, and occasionally we ate dinner together. For much of the time at home, though, I was alone.

In contrast, I almost never saw Aboriginal people alone in Fitzroy Crossing. People there live in large groups of extended family members, often with far more people in one house than would seem possible – although this is frequently the result of the housing crisis as much as from choice. As you walk or drive around town you see small groups of people sitting together in their yards or at the roadhouses or tourist bureau, chatting and watching the world go by. You also see groups of people walking from community to town, or going to or from the hospital or school, but you almost never see Aboriginal people walking around town alone. My 'aloneness' was commented on once or twice, but only ever in a sympathetic way – "You livin' alone manga? Oh, poor fulla!" Perhaps my only redeeming factor was that I had my dog with me, and I could often be seen out walking around with her trailing along behind or bounding off ahead through the long grass after an interesting smell. This people could understand, but choosing to be alone was very 'Kartiya'. I remember once giving one of our students a lift home to Bayulu community. I had worked closely with this woman and knew her family and home situation well, and was very aware of how tired and (to my eyes) put-upon she was. As we neared her house we pulled over to chat to another community member, who informed my friend that all her family were out of the house in various places. "Great!" I said. "You can have a bit of peace and quiet for a change". My friend thought for a moment then said "Mm. Drop me over at my sister-in-law's house". Clearly the thought of a bit of time alone was not quite as attractive to her as it was to me.

This communal knowledge of where everyone else is at any one time is another aspect of the immediacy of sociality. Musharbash also refers to this in her study of Warlpiri people, noting that "During the day Yuendumu is a hive of social activity, humming with news, and everybody knows everybody

else's business, from fights they are involved in to who they were 'running around with' last night" (2008, p. 146). In Fitzroy and its surrounding communities I was continually amazed by the extensiveness of people's knowledge about other people's lives, and also by its currency. At any one time I could stop and ask if someone had seen whoever I was looking for, and would always get an informative answer – "She home", for example, accompanied by a gesture with the lips to indicate which house I should go to. Sometimes a lot of information was given – "They gone Noonkanbah in the Bayulu bus for that funeral", sometimes just an indication of where, roughly, they'd headed – "She gone townside". But people always knew where others in the community were, and who they were with.

People spend a lot of time outside, chatting and observing the movements of others – who's stopping in whose camp, whose car has just been seen leaving town on a shopping trip to Derby, who's moved house after a family fight, who is playing cards at the local 'casino' (under a shady tree on one of the town communities) and who's on a winning streak. Relationships and personal situations are also common knowledge. Arriving back in Fitzroy after an absence of several months I was told that one man was happy now because he was 'married' and living in a different community with "the ex-wife of that man who died, you know, he hung himself, he was the brother of X". Little of people's lives, it seemed to me at least, is kept private. Health, family relationships, intimate relationships, experiences of employment or training and – of particular importance – whose 'pay day' it is today, all are common knowledge to other community members. One woman I knew would regularly inform me of the details of students' financial situations, particularly if I was looking for someone. "Nah, you won't see her today. She gets her cheque today, she'll be with her family", or "That one's hanging around to humbug [h]is mum, she gets paid today". The same woman would also keep an eye on those humbugging me, sometimes letting me know "Don't go giving X any money today, her pay day was Tuesday and she lost it all already at cards. She gotta learn to manage her money".

But this is not mere gossip; people are not discussing each other's business for any kind of voyeuristic pleasure. It is a way of reinforcing community and family connections. By discussing and knowing each other's whereabouts and daily events there is a strong feeling of belonging, of looking out for each other and of looking out for oneself. This 'immediacy of sociality' and the extent of each person's involvement in, or at least knowledge of, everyone else's lives, serves to maintain and strengthen people's feelings of being part of a strong community. Knowing this gives people the comfort and security - as well as, of course, the obligations and expectations - that come with being part of a large family.

Family connections play a very important role in people's lives in Fitzroy Crossing. Family though, for the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing as with many other Aboriginal groups, can be very different from Kariya understandings of the term. As I referred to briefly in Chapter Four, Aboriginal people in the Kimberley belong to 'skin groups'. There are eight different skin groups in the Kimberley, and a person's skin name is generally determined by the mother's skin group. The skin system determines not only who can marry whom, but also how people should relate to others in the community. Based on their skin group, people will know who in the community they can or cannot speak to (for example men cannot speak to their mothers-in-law), who they should respect and who is their mother/brother/sister/grandparent and so on. Skin relationships can involve strong taboos and obligations (Karrayili Adult Education Centre, n.d.; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2006). The skin system means that people have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to others in the community, whether or not they are related by blood. The Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre in Fitzroy Crossing identifies kinship and skin systems as being crucial components of customary Law, noting that:

Mutual obligations of ritual, emotional, educational and economic accountability are also determined on the basis of skin relationships. In this way, the skin system ensures the social and economic welfare of the group as a whole and allows for a wide range of constructive associations to take place between people of different generations. (2006, p20)

For Kariya, family relationships in the Kimberley can be difficult to fully comprehend. Not only is the skin system complex, but family relationships do not always conform to those of non-Indigenous expectations. A child's aunties (the mother's sisters), for example, are considered to also be that child's mothers. Mothers can often be heard calling their young children 'Mum'. I was frequently astonished by the ways in which people identified family relationships in Fitzroy Crossing. On asking a woman my age about the baby she was holding, I was told it was her grandmother. Assuming this was a linguistic mistake, I tried to clarify: "Your granddaughter?" "No manga", was the reply, with a laugh. "My grandmother." I quickly learnt to simply accept what I was told about family connections in Fitzroy Crossing, as trying to make sense of it got me nowhere.

As I noted in Chapter Five, family connections – as defined by the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley communities - are not inconsequential to learning and teaching at Karrayili. People's obligations to family members, even should they disrupt an individual's learning or employment at the Centre, are not questioned. It is understood, and sometimes even encouraged, for family members to participate in some way in others' learning experiences. And above all it is understood that family connections come first, above all else, including attendance at Karrayili.

We got the elders behind us

Key to the concept of family in Fitzroy Crossing Aboriginal communities are the elders, or 'old people' as they are commonly known. This is implicitly understood at Karrayili, where the elders who started the Centre and those who still regularly attend, in particular, are held in high regard.

What are the strengths [of Karrayili]? Well we got, one part we got the elders behind us you know? (ZC)

Karrayili strong just, just by them ... well you got all them elder leaders there, that really pushing that Karrayili to be strong, you know? An keep

going to meetings and listening and committing themselves and getting them, getting them organising. (AY)

Yeah, that's why I need this place, because our old people started this place. (DA)

From my very first introduction to Karrayili, when I came across the book *Karrayili* (2000) and read of how the Centre first came into being, I was struck by the way the Centre maintains and strengthens connections between past and present generations. Stories of how 'the old people' got together to first request that the school be started, then to ensure that it was a success, are told not as a part of history but as a connection to the present. The pride that current students feel in the achievements of those who started the school is palpable, and it is a pride that is shared throughout the Fitzroy community regardless of language groups or family affiliations. As noted in Chapter Two, three of the key Indigenous operations in the town – Karrayili, Mangkaja Arts Centre and Wangki Radio Station – all came about as a result of the vision and perseverance of this determined group of people.

When asked why Karrayili is important to people in Fitzroy Crossing, the value it holds in the community was rarely expressed in terms of the access it can provide to job opportunities, or to the ways it contributes to improving English literacy in the area. Instead people's responses to this question were almost unanimously about keeping alive and strong the connections to the past, to Karrayili students who have since passed on; about keeping strong connections to 'the old people' who started Karrayili, and to the remarkable achievements they realised. When I asked one of the KCs why she came to Karrayili, she told me:

Me? Well it's for our ol' people. Because our ol' people ... people like me ... we support them. For Karrayili, and for Mangkaja. We started 'im Mangkaja. (DA)

During an earlier interview with the same student, the interpreter present explained this link as follows:

GS (Interpreter): Karrayili was put here for a reason. Like first of all, the name of Karrayili is representing the middle-aged people. So they the one who came forward to build this community. This building I mean. And a lot of the memories, a lot of the Council members – like one of them, she [DA] still one of the Chairperson in the Council, she still going, and they hold the key for this Karrayili.

DA: That's right!

Others also spoke of their connections to the 'old people' who have since passed on:

Because them ol people, I still go back an talk to them an, you know? Yeah, yeah, they welcome me an they always tell me "Come on, Nyapana" they bin tell me. "You gotta join in now for dance". They always sing out to me, them ol people. Because most of them ol people from there they gone now. But I bin know them. (WW)

The old people they really worked hard to get this centre up and going. An' it's really good. (AY)

It is clear that many Karrayili students, and in particular the older students, place a very high value on this connection with family who have since passed on. Ensuring that Karrayili continues to be strong, to be there for current and future generations, is a way of honouring the efforts and aspirations of community members who worked so hard to do something positive for the Aboriginal people of the Fitzroy Valley. But more than that, it is a way of keeping alive the connections to people who have passed on, keeping them close and ensuring they are not forgotten.

The KCs in particular have very strong connections to community which are strengthened by their engagement with Karrayili. These students rarely use SAE in their everyday lives, and have no intrinsic motivation to learn English, so the big question is – why do they come to Karrayili? Their answers to this question were always straightforward – to learn reading and writing – but from my observations and interview data it was clear that the answer held far more contradictions and ambiguities than that.

One of the CGEA lecturers commented that:

[They come] because they have a specific need, or want, that they've come to Karrayili for. I mean they're a totally different category of class, that class. I mean they're not really here for a qualification ... I think a lot of them are here because it's a bonding experience with other people of similar age. Also a sense of obligation to Karrayili - I think those old people come because they, you know, they saw a sense of pride and ownership of the place and they want to be a part of that still, so there's that too. I mean how do you fit that into a curriculum? (EBB)

A Karrayili staff member who has lived in Fitzroy Crossing for many years and is related to several of the KC students told me:

I think they so used to comin now every morning, they get up an you know, come in to Karrayili ... I think it's how they used to do in the old days, it's important to them. Cos they started it off. For many for themselves, to learn to read and write, and understand the way of the world, you know? An in old days they used to just come in from desert an all that, didn't know how to communicating with white people an everything, an used to sign their names with crosses an all that an now they can, they know all the letters of the alphabet, know how to read an write, know how to sign they name. I think it's just ... yeah I don't know what it is, they just come to ... to mingle with people eh? It's the social as well you know? They sit down, they come in the morning at Karrayili an they see people comin in an out, in an out, an ... they still learning as they goin along. Each week as well they still learning. Like writing they journal, you know, what they did on the weekend. And they got a lot of stories to tell, it's just the way of tryin to get it down on paper. I mean it's easy for them to talk into a recording machine ... but they still learning how to write it down. They try really hard too, to write in their diaries ... I mean if you take photos of countryside and of people they'll tell you oh all about them an they story an they background and wherever they come from an ... I think, it's there, they want to come to school. (ZC)

Clearly the 'learning' part of the KCs' interactions at Karrayili is not inconsequential. The students enjoy coming to the Centre to learn, regardless of how much they are actually learning or for what purpose. To some extent too though coming to Karrayili every day gives purpose or structure to their day, it is something to do and somewhere to go. This was corroborated by the Principal when she said:

And same with [DA] ... she's not the least bit interested in all the Kartiya side. So she has a strong sense of the importance of Karrayilli, not even from education in our terms, but it's a place where she and the others go every day. It's almost like, you know we have this idea that you go to places for a purpose, you know to learn, or to work, or to do this, but it's like say with that group, it's what you do every day. In the morning you

get picked up, you go to Karrayilli, you do some reading and writing stuff, you have morning tea, and then you to Mangkaja, or depending on the week you go down the store, it's just what you do. (CD)

For the KCs, coming to Karrayili is also a means of maintaining important social connections to others in the community, both living and deceased. And perhaps most importantly it is a means by which they can continue to teach others the stories that define and give meaning to the culture that keeps them and their families strong. In 2010 the KCs' teacher, TM, told me that:

... they [the KCs] real good working with, an they share a lot of they stories, but mainly too by paintings. An like when you ask they just explain it to you, tell you about their country an ... you know, that real good, that's why we gotta work with the old people here. (ETM)

The following quote further illustrates this point. MH is a trained teacher and Walmajarri woman, who at the time of my research was working at the Fitzroy Valley District High School teaching and coordinating the LOTE (Languages Other Than English) classes, but she has had connections with Karrayili since its inception. Originally working there as a teacher of the KC class, she has maintained her links with the Centre through her membership of the Board and now as a Director. Here MH tells of her mother's experiences at Karrayili:

I mean, before my mum passed away she always used to say to me, I said to mum ('cause she couldn't read and write) and she only could sign her name – put a cross next to her name – and so did my aunty, her sister. ... and I said to mum I said “Why don't you go to Karrayilli mum, you know?” and she said “What I want to learn to read and write for? I got my language, I don't need to go to school”. And then eventually she started going but the reason why she wanted to go there was for her to learn to paint, to do her painting. It had nothing to do about her learning to read and write or learn English, she reckoned she was happy enough with her own language, and she was happy enough to sign you know? In the end she could – finally in the end – she could sign her name you know? But she passed when she was 72 and she could do that. So I think there are ... this must be because it's a place for them to go, I think that's what it is, and it's bringing those people together and they're having some form of making decisions for themselves. Because when I look at it sometimes, it's like as if they don't feel needed out there. They, I think that got taken away from them, that's got taken away from them. (MH)

MH talks of the old people not feeling needed, saying that their sense of worth has been taken away from them, and this was corroborated by my own observations. In contrast, while working with the KCs I had a very strong impression that they feel a deep sense of pride in coming to Karrayili. There was an awareness that they were carrying the baton by continuing the work started by important people who had since passed on, work that was of enormous benefit to the whole community, work that would contribute to the sustainability of their people and their culture. In fact it was noted by several members of the Karrayili staff that the KCs referred to their classes as 'work', possibly a hangover from the days when they would receive Abstudy payments for attending³⁵. On more than one occasion I heard the KCs berating students who said they were too busy to come to class with "Manga, you gotta come to Karrayili. You gotta come to work!" The Driver Ed lecturer made the following observation in regard to this:

And a lot of them see it as being their work. "I'm going to work, I'm doing my job, which is to go to Karrayili and learn better English...for my grand kiddies or my community or for myself, but it's my job, and I've got to go and do it." So they can be quite strict on each other. (EBB)

When asked about the KCs, the Environmental Health lecturer commented that:

I think Karrayili is a beautiful example of a true community based organisation and the way that it should be. [And] I think the passion of the old people is one of the major influences, that they've been the strength of Karrayili and when I first began at Karrayili that group was like everyday drive, if you went to work and you felt a bit off or something

³⁵ Abstudy is an Australian Government payment to assist Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians who are studying or undertaking an apprenticeship (see <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/abstudy>). While details of Abstudy payments at Karrayili are now difficult to source, current staff members advised me that prior to around 2002/2003, the KCs – along with other Karrayili students – received Abstudy payments for enrolling in and attending classes. Abstudy entitlement for these students was apparently withdrawn for two reasons: changes to the Centrelink system of payment; and the fact that students could only be enrolled in each unit once and needed to complete within a certain timeframe. Both of these payment criteria were inappropriate and unworkable in the context of learning and teaching at Karrayili. While government funding at the time of this research funded students' enrolment at Karrayili, students themselves did not directly benefit financially from their enrolment.

then when you had some sort of interaction with the old people you felt the passion of Karrayili, they could just refresh your spirit and you knew why you were there, you knew what they wanted, and it was just such a strength. (TV)

She went on to note that, as a result of changes in students' lives, and key community members passing on, this has changed in recent years:

Yeah, that's changed a lot I think because, I mean I guess it's getting on to 10 years ago you know, and in that time then that group, many people have passed away. A lot of people have, because they've been the leaders of the Valley, they've been pulled to other organisations as well, other needs within the community. And also I think another factor was the withdrawal of Abstudy, because I think the old people they'd seen Karrayili as their work, it was like their lifework, but before there used to be a monetary reward for that as well, and there's still that, that it is their work, but there's not the monetary side and they need to have an income so people like [DS] now spend a lot more time at Mangkaja [Arts Centre] because she needs her painting money, you know. And that sort of happened more and more and people being drawn to other meetings and organisations as well. (TV)

While they may be diminishing in number the KCs remain the beating heart of Karrayili, and are treasured by everyone whether staff or student, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, young or old. As the then-Chairperson of Karrayili, WS, told me:

[The KCs] that's history there, we lookin at. Especially comin from younger, younger generation like that. We look at them, and that's all our treasures there. I mean, some are hidden treasures, what, what we look at ... bit like the Language. The young people wanna see that Language on that paper. Like, this is where Karrayili helps our older people with their literacy and numeracy. And they can, they can write their Language on there. They write their own Language ... and English. Both, yeah. And ... that way they can ... they do stories and things. In Language. And the kids read them in the school. So that's delivering that Language progress. So this is where they really valuable to us. Yeah, I've worked with them for long time and like, what I look at it is like ... they, they're valuable to us for that Language and culture ... I'm just hoping they can just bring it to us. (WS)

As noted by the Environmental Health lecturer, various factors including age and economic considerations mean that the KCs cohort is beginning to dwindle. Several have passed away in recent years, and those who remain may have health issues or are simply too tired to attend classes regularly. It

remains to be seen whether a new generation will step up to take their place as the Karrayili elders, or whether the influence of this current generation of KCs will disappear with their passing.

Looking ahead of them

Perhaps this is why the KCs so often raise the issue of getting the 'young ones' involved with Karrayili. A further connection between Karrayili and the community, one which helps reinforce and give life to its 'organic' qualities, is the way in which Karrayili plays a part in community life across several generations. It is not uncommon for grandparents, parents and children from the same family to be at Karrayili at the same time – not necessarily studying there, but certainly engaging in interactions as part of the Karrayili community. In this way Karrayili has become a part of family or generational experiences, playing a role in family life, key life experiences, and memories of those who have passed on. Here JLC, student and staff member, tells how Karrayili has played a part in her own life experiences and those of her family members:

Yeah I basically grew up around Karrayili [laughs, sounds happy], yeah now my kids are growing up around Karrayili, cos I'm working here, and um, I spin out about it sometimes because it's like I'm following in [DJ]'s footsteps, cos she started off as myself as the lecturer at the age of 25, 26 with her kids, you know always around Karrayili around her, and um, and that she is, she worked her way up to the principal and then but now, she left Karrayili, and then she came back as a lecturer again. So but, it's good to see local people here, and that are um, want to help their own people, like learn them for this stuff. (JLC)

JLC has further family connections to Karrayili – her mother is a staff member and Director there, and her grandmother is a member of the KC class. Doubtless too she has many more family members who have undertaken study or training at Karrayili at some point, and this situation is not uncommon among Karrayili students.

There is a real sense of Karrayili having been a part of the community 'through the ages' – it was started by the 'old people', some of whom are still

attending, then with new generations the student cohort has expanded as family members have also become involved with training and education provided at the Centre. This sense of continuity came across in interviews as being very important to the current students at Karrayili, who when asked how Karrayili was valued by the community frequently raised the question of training for the younger community members.

Well you could say the older people that all passed on now, they created the Karrayili, well they knew that in the future, when they leave, they know the young, younger people grow behind an can always come to a place like this to use, an to get educated an stuff like that. Well that's what I heard through old people, is that elders, they tol' us that they made Karrayili, they built Karrayili, just to like, just a sort of a TAFE thing you know? For study? But they was lookin ahead of them, not themselves when they always wanted to learn to read and write but now you got a lot of young people involved with the place. (ETM)

Karrayili is bla young girls, from 16, 20 and bit older. That what it for. An more trainin'. (WW)

Like when we have our big AGM meetings ... you'll see most of 'em [old people] still hanging, an still want to continue on with the ... they want the future for the young people you know? An they wanna encourage them an get them to come along. (ZC)

Karrayili does not just meet community needs in a number of ways, it is very much an integral part of the community. In particular, the ways in which the Karrayili staff understand, value and integrate people's connections to their community serves to ensure that the Aboriginal people of Fitzroy Crossing feel empowered to live their lives as *they* see fit, and to incorporate training into their lives as and when it is appropriate for them to do so.

Connections to Language

As evidenced in the earlier story about SS and the Canning Stock route painting, language use can play a powerful role in creating or defining one's identity and sense of belonging. In the context of Karrayili, an Aboriginal education centre where few of the students speak English as a first language

yet most of the training is done in SAE, the question of language use is of particular importance.

Tensions which arise between the use of traditional languages and the need to learn and use the language of the dominant culture can create or contribute to significant issues for those learning the dominant language. As noted earlier in this thesis, Aboriginal people recognise the need to be able to communicate in English, to understand Kariya and in particular the demands placed on them by mainstream bureaucratic systems and processes. Being able to interact in English can give Aboriginal people a sense of power, of being able to make informed decisions and to inform others as to their beliefs, expectations and aspirations. As DA responded when I asked what she hopes to gain from learning English:

Yeah – he [English] made me strong, you know? (DA)

It is clear that being able to interact competently in English is not underestimated by Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing. Yet when I asked people how they felt about learning English, how important they felt it was to their everyday lives, the conversation invariably came back to learning and using their own languages:

But it's good to have your language, as your back-up too you know? Not forgetting your culture as well ... that's the way you have to teach your children, your grandchildren, an they have to know your language by your older people, by that generation. (AY)

That's ... I don't know. I think they, they do need to [use English] now, now that everything's changing, but it's good for them not for, you know, forget about their language and culture. So, maybe just use it when you're in your workplace or what not, and then when you're at home you can speak however you want (laughs). (JLC)

[Learning English] is important, but it's also important to have both your own cultural identity in that as well because without that sometimes you seem to be floating in between the two worlds but if you have the support of your elders and I guess you know having them there behind you, you can have both of them. Because at the moment I think a lot of the stuff is getting eroded, without having you know the base of having our old people there. Because they saw – education to them was very important. And they wanted to learn, they wanted to learn English, because they couldn't understand all of it you know. Because nowadays,

everything is in English. And I think having the both two worlds you can understand clearly what the features of SAE is and understanding the features of your own language and marrying the two it makes it really clear and making Aboriginal people take control, you know, of their own learning as well. (MH)

These quotes demonstrate the inseparability of language and cultural identity for Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing. In operating as a community-controlled learning centre, those responsible for designing and delivering services to the community understand this important connection, and integrate it into everyday literacy learning and practices accordingly.

Language is who I am

MH, Karrayili Director and teacher at the Fitzroy Crossing school, speaks of language learning and use from a uniquely informed perspective. Currently running the language program at the local high school, MH grew up learning Walmajarri from her mother and English from her Karrayili father so was bilingual at an early age. Growing up, though, she moved away from Fitzroy Crossing for school and work, and as she spent more of her time in an English-speaking environment she began to fear that she had lost her fluency in her traditional language. She explains here how she felt about regaining her language, and how it impacted on her sense of identity:

And I actually did the two-way teaching [with the KCs] because I understood Walmajarri very fluently, and to be able to go across and help them with um you know understanding what the English was like. So that was a plus for me, I learnt a lot from them, which cemented my own belief as a Walmajarri person ... Because I had that break ... I thought I lost my language. You know, how to speak it fluently because being away at school, going to mission, and a lot of those stuff. And speaking English fluently like the way I do, I thought I lost the whole, you know my belief in that I could speak my language fluently. But then when I went back, started working for the old people, the Karrayilli gang, it brought back that I can because my language was still there, and this sort of led me to the road now running the language program. Strengthened my being able to talk my language fluent again and to understanding my own cultural beliefs ... and I guess they sort of was directing and leading me in a way that I was gonna be the leader that they wanted me to be you know? ... It was really great because it is who

I am and where I was from, cementing that you know. I'm from here not somewhere where people thought that I wasn't from Fitzroy because of the way I spoke and all of those sort of stuff. I'm Fitzroy bred and born, went to school here and elsewhere, and the ... cultural knowledge and my own cultural identity was something that was important to me and has really given me the strength to be able to be where I am now. (MH)

MH talks about how regaining her Language skills had a positive impact on her cultural beliefs and her sense of who she is. Being able to speak Walmajarri fluently meant that she felt more a part of the community, and more justified in taking on roles of responsibility in the community. Language can play an important role in determining how included people feel in a community. Earlier in this chapter one of the KC students spoke of how she wanted to learn 'words about bush life' at Karrayili. On another occasion the same student told me of her desire to learn more Walmajarri and Gooniyandi so that she could better understand the local culture, as she had moved to the Kimberley from Kalgoorlie. She was especially interested in learning the words for different bush tucker and how to find it, as well as how to find and use bush medicines to treat illness. For this student the acquisition of more Language had a very practical basis – so that she would be able to learn more about the traditional ways, and would then be able to put these into practice in her daily life. Although she didn't say so I also suspect that this would help her to feel more of an 'insider' in her adopted community, as the vast majority of people in the community she now lived in had lived there for many years, if not their whole lives.

At the time of conducting this research one of the participants was working with the Women's Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing, Marninwarntigurra, running a mobile playgroup which regularly visited communities in the Fitzroy Valley as part of an early childhood learning program. She spoke of how teaching Language was an important part of her work with the children (all under 4 years of age) and their mothers:

PD: Well, we tryin to encourage more [Language] in that program so that, you know, we definitely want our Language back, alive again, to teach the ... younger mums ... so we listening when they passing on that

knowledge to the ol', like to the younger womans. Younger mothers. Um, so that we feel comfortable. We got that Language in our program.

MS: And why is that important, to keep that Language?

Well, if we don't know our Language now then it'll be really sad for us that ... you know, who gonna learn us when our older people gone? So it's, it's important now that while we've got the elder one alive, like you know now that we still got them good that we wanna get them, that knowledge now, to pass it on to us. So that we carry on for the younger ones.

And do you do any work in English as well?

Yeah, we ... if we gonna promote healthy services ... well we gotta, like English we gotta say well like you know "Wash your hands, blow your nose, you know, throw your rubbish in the bin" so that give us better understanding on that English way. But it's good, again, important that we put, that we turn that around into our ways of talking.

Here PD talks about the importance of keeping traditional Language alive, and of ensuring Language skills are transferred to the next generation. Interestingly, while also acknowledging the need for children to learn SAE, she is adamant it be taught and used in ways that make sense to local people. This is just one of the ways in which Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal people maintain some level of control over their lives in the face of ongoing oppression by mainstream systems and cultural beliefs, including those surrounding language use.

DA, Karrayili matriarch and Fitzroy Crossing community elder, was always quick to stress the role of Karrayili in teaching local people English language skills. When asked on one occasion though what kind of things she wanted to learn at Karrayili, DA's answer was concise and emphatic. "For Walmajarri" she said. First and foremost she wanted to have Walmajarri classes at Karrayili. DA did follow this up with "And for English. And for the work", but her first answer, what she wanted most to study at Karrayili, was her traditional Language.

The need for teaching and learning at Karrayili to reflect not just English literacy skills, but also elements of traditional Language and culture, came up again and again in interviews. The benefits of improving their SAE skills are

acknowledged by students, and learning 'high English' is often identified as being one of their learning objectives. But working in and about their own language and culture is never lost in this; if anything it is prioritised. As MH said so powerfully in her earlier quote, "[Learning English] is important, but it's also important to have both your own cultural identity in that as well because without that sometimes you seem to be floating in between the two worlds but if you have the support of your elders and I guess you know having them there behind you, you can have both of them."

WS, Karrayili student and ex-Chairperson, also refers to this notion of Karrayili representing both worlds when he says:

That's why we grew up Karrayili, yeah. From the old people. They were saying like righto, we set up like interpreter course and things like that. That's important for us. And, for ol' people. Why they're saying this, is so young people can understand language, that Kartiya language and the blackfella language. See? Both side. (WS)

As a community-driven organisation, it is the local cultures and Language groups which determine the languages used at the Centre. Language use, and in particular the use of SAE, is not imposed at Karrayili, and people are not judged on their language skills. In this way Karrayili ensures it is a safe, inclusive learning environment for local Aboriginal people, and in some ways it contributes to the maintenance and strengthening of traditional Language use.

Conclusions

This chapter has drawn together threads from interviews and observations which indicate the ways in which Karrayili, its students, and the Fitzroy Crossing community are interconnected. It is clear from the evidence in this chapter that above all else it is these connections, rather than simply the training offered by Karrayili, which give meaning and value to students' learning experiences there. The stories, quotes and analysis provided in this

chapter also add to the evidence given in the previous chapter, where I described and analysed what happens at Karrayili and how it works. Together these two chapters have portrayed Karrayili from a learner-centred perspective, demonstrating that for Aboriginal adults in this particular context engaging with further education is about far more than simply learning SAE and ultimately gaining employment as a result.

These chapters have explained how and why Karrayili does things differently from mainstream education organisations. The next chapter, the final chapter in the case study of Karrayili, changes tack a little. Building on the information in previous chapters, Chapter Seven examines and evaluates some of the ways in which 'doing things differently' while having to operate under the auspices of mainstream bureaucratic systems creates tensions and contradictions, and how the staff and students at Karrayili work to manage these tensions.

Chapter 7: Working in Two Worlds

In Chapter One I spoke of how this research is an ethnography of an institution, and of how my aim has therefore been to describe the *social life* of Karrayili in relation to the literacy and learning practices that take place there. In the preceding two chapters I have described and reflected on some of the ways in which Karrayili works and of the connections that bind students and staff to the Centre, in the process shedding light on what Karrayili means to the people of Fitzroy Crossing and the role it plays in the community. But Karrayili is not just about the people who work and study there. It is an institution, and as such is to some extent defined and constrained by the rules and regulations that bind all such organisations. “Organisations”, as noted by anthropologists Gellner and Hirsch, “do not exist in a vacuum. They operate in a wider context which both provides them with the aims they pursue and sets limits to the way they may operate” (2001; p. 4).

This particular organisation, however, could be seen as operating in not one but two wider contexts, or if you like two worlds – the local Aboriginal world with its own particular values and perspectives, which I have described in some detail in the preceding chapters, and the *Kartiya* world of mainstream Australia. Viewing the quote above in relation to Karrayili, in fact, a clear, if somewhat simplistic divide can be seen: ‘the aims they pursue’ being defined by the needs and desires of the students and the wider Fitzroy Valley population, while the ‘limits to the way they may operate’ are imposed to a

large extent by the *Kartiya* bureaucracies by which Karrayili must abide in order to survive. This juxtaposition of two very different operational contexts within the one organisation is unlikely to be unique to Karrayili; in all probability it is experienced by any organisation providing services to marginalised groups under the auspices of the dominant culture.

Chapters Five and Six demonstrated how Karrayili goes beyond the usual scope of an education and training provider in the ways in which it provides learning opportunities that are culturally appropriate and community-driven, yet doing so in a manner which reflects current theoretical approaches to adult literacy education. These chapters have also revealed the ways in which Karrayili operates in a manner which endeavours to respect learners' fundamental rights to determine the type of learning that is most appropriate for them and their communities. Operating simultaneously within the two worlds of Indigenous and mainstream Australia, however, presents the Centre with some specific conflicts or tensions that need to be addressed in order to bridge the divide between the two very different ways of doing and being.

This chapter looks at the implications of this divide, and at some of the methods employed by students and staff to work with (and at times around) the constraints imposed by some of the mainstream ways of doing which are an unavoidable part of everyday life at Karrayili. It suggests that while Indigenous learners will seek ways to ensure some degree of personal autonomy in their learning, when this conflicts with the ways in which learning programs are provided it can lead to inefficient and ineffective program provision. Organisations such as Karrayili are placed in a position of trying to meet the needs of two very different cohorts; their students, and the systems within which they are required to operate. In attempting to deliver services that are locally appropriate, while simultaneously maintaining responsibilities to mainstream funding and accreditation bodies, Indigenous education providers such as Karrayili are severely constrained in terms of what they can achieve for the benefit of individuals and their local learning community. While staff and students may find ways to manage the limitations of the

bureaucratic systems in which they operate, these limitations nevertheless create tensions and frustrations for all those involved at ground level in the delivery of education services to marginalised adults.

Directing Karrayili

All organisations are based on rules. As an organisation Karrayili has a number of rules and regulations, some externally imposed (for example by the accreditation body, by funding mechanisms, and by government bodies such as the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations) while others are determined by the needs and wishes of members and the wider community. The rules which are externally imposed represent, in this case, 'the Karrayili world', with all the bureaucratic systems and processes that this implies. In order to continue operating as a registered training organisation (RTO), for example, Karrayili must routinely provide particular evidence to an accreditation body so as to maintain its standing and therefore be eligible for government funding. It also conforms to mainstream organisational processes by having a five-year strategic plan, complete with 'mission statement' and 'vision statement'.

Karrayili became incorporated in 1985. As an Indigenous Corporation it must comply with the requirements of the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). These requirements include specifications regarding who can be a Director or a member, which financial documents must be maintained and how they are to be kept, and how frequently and when it must hold Directors' meetings. Meetings must have a quorum of attendees, and Directors must be given notice of meetings in writing within a specific timeframe.

As Karrayili's current contact officer with ORIC, it is the job of the Principal to ensure that these compliances are met, and this is not always an easy task. Ensuring there is a quorum of Directors for Directors' meetings (a minimum

of four meetings per year), for example, can be extremely time-consuming and frustrating, given that each Director is required to be given a letter with details of the meeting. The Directors live in Aboriginal communities; they often do not have a phone (mobile or landline) and like all Aboriginal people in this context are frequently highly mobile. As with the students, too, immediacy comes into play – a Director may well say, a few days before the meeting, that they will be there, but on the day there may be other priorities requiring their attention and presence. A staff member needs to be available to do a ‘pick up’ run as most people do not have easy access to private transport. These factors also impact on Karrayili members attending AGMs.

Added to this is the complex, and at times farcical, requirement to notify Directors about meetings in writing. Many of the Directors have poor written literacy skills, which means that the Principal needs to ensure that the information in the letter is accessible to them. One way of doing this is to grade the language in the letter, simplifying the vocabulary used and minimising the letter’s content. Often, too, the Principal will go to some lengths to ensure that whoever delivers the letter is willing and able to explain its contents to the recipient in a way that will be understood. In reality, while the relevant information may have been adequately conveyed using other means, the letter may never even be read – but regulations have been seen to have been observed.

Similarly, the Principal needs to ensure that information provided to Directors at meetings is accessible to everyone present, including people with low English literacy skills. To this end oral or written information is generally supported by a visual representation of the material, for example using graphs, diagrams and pictures. Whenever possible an interpreter is present at Directors meetings, although if this is not possible there is usually someone present who is capable of interpreting key issues.

Reflecting on the role of the Directors in relation to her own role as Principal, CD noted that:

I'm responsible for everything, even though it's Aboriginal-directed. Part of what I see my role as is to work with the Aboriginal Directors to support them in taking more responsibility, you know in being able to truly direct, and I think that's really important because the people that I work with, the Aboriginal Directors that I work with, there are none who could take full responsibility and understand all the financial implications and compliances that we're required ... It's just such a bloody complicated system, 'cause they're not... it's the mainstream requirements that they don't have the experience and expertise in dealing with. Understanding and dealing with. Especially the finances... And I guess another thing that as the Director it's not your main job, you know they're all involved in other things...

One of the key tensions revealed by CD's quote above is the need for local Aboriginal people to be in a position to make important decisions about the bureaucratic systems and processes governing the organisation, while possibly being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the concepts that these represent. That is, Karrayili Directors are expected to make decisions about Kartiya ways, when they may not fully understand those Kartiya ways themselves. Bridging the divide at Karrayili is clearly not just about language issues, but also about helping local people deal with important conceptual differences and ways of understanding.

In conversation, CD drew several conclusions from the Directors' difficulties with understanding the Kartiya ways under which they are forced to operate. She feels that the Directors are not entirely comfortable with the responsibility they hold, and as a result are quick to agree with proposals that are put forward, to defer responsibility to staff members. She also believes, however, that a lack of literacy skills and unfamiliarity with mainstream language and systems are not the only reasons for this reluctance to take responsibility. With membership changes through the years, and in particular the loss of strong people who have passed on, she wonders how committed this new generation are to Karrayili. "With the current Directors" she says, "I don't know how much really strong ownership they take for Karrayili as opposed to, say, [DA]".

The Karrayili Directors play a vital role in the organisation, although not necessarily through the directorial decisions they make. In practical terms,

for example in order to comply with accreditation requirements, they are essential. They also represent the views of the wider community, ensuring that decisions made about Karrayili have not just an Indigenous voice, but are determined by people who have an intimate knowledge of community needs and aspirations. In some ways too though they are crucial to Karrayili simply because they are there. The majority of decisions made about the functioning of the Centre must go through them, giving not just the Directors themselves but the wider community, whom they represent, a strong sense of continued ownership and control of Karrayili. This in turn gives the community some sense of empowerment, of asserting control over their lives.

Deciding what can be taught

Other constraints are placed on Karrayili through it being a registered training organisation. For example, while most of the training at Karrayili is carried out under individualised programs, at times Karrayili runs short courses such as the Work Readiness program and the Certificate IV in Bilingual Work. As outlined in Chapter Five, in delivering these courses every consideration is given as to both the perceived need for such training and whether or not people in the Valley have expressed an interest in undertaking this training.

However, staff at Karrayili can't simply identify a particular need for training in the community and organise for such training to take place. All training courses must first be registered (put 'on scope'), and here the Principal explains some of the complications inherent in this process:

Yeah 'cause until we're registered to run a program then we can't run it, we can't get funded for it. But to get registered to run a program, you have to show that you can run it, you have to show that you've got all those assessments already made up, you have to show that you've got all the resources, you have to show that you've got the staff member or members who have the qualifications who can do it. Now, you have to do all of that before you can get the money for it. (CD)

Compiling all the necessary paperwork to get a course on scope can be extremely time-consuming, and with Karrayili staff already under the pump it is rare for anyone to have the vast amounts of time required for the task of preparing assessments and resources. In addition, in a remote town where suitable accommodation is like gold dust, where temperatures regularly soar above 40 degrees, and where the nearest large town is 400km away, hiring teachers suitably qualified to teach such a course can be challenging.

I think it's difficult for people to see that in responding to training needs, that it is a long term approach, that it takes us, you know it can take a couple of years to get something on scope and then ... I mean like when we applied to get Childcare on scope and we were successful in getting funding for it but then we couldn't get accommodation to have a lecturer, so we couldn't run it. [We respond to] community needs but we're not able to respond as fast as we'd like to because we have to in some way be funded for it and with it being an accredited course then we also have to go through that bureaucracy to be scoped for it so... that continues to impede Karrayili. (TV, lecturer)

Karrayili makes every effort to respond to the training needs of the community, often as identified by community members themselves. It is clear though that under current registration and administration requirements they will continue to be 'impeded', as TV notes above, in their efforts to respond to those needs in a timely and effective manner.

Funding issues

Once a program is 'on scope', Karrayili needs to get funding to pay for it. At the time of this research, students at Karrayili did not pay fees. Instead, funding was gained through the CAT program (Competitive Allocated Training), operated through what is now the Department of Training and Workforce Development. Under this system Karrayili was paid a certain amount when a student enrolled in an accredited unit, with the amount paid being based on the nominal hours allocated for that particular unit. During my year of field work, most of the training at Karrayili was funded under this program.

With the recommended timeframe for completion of a unit averaging at around twenty hours, it is not difficult to predict how this can create problems for Karrayili. Given the cultural, social and literacy issues in the Fitzroy Crossing community, as described in previous chapters, it is not surprising to learn that the twenty hours of a unit could take students months, if not a year or more to complete.

... if you count the times that they come ... you know a 20 hour unit could be completed in a few weeks, or over a lot of weeks, until they've come for the 20 hours. However, well the fundamental reason why most of the units aren't completed within the nominal hours is because of the students' literacy levels. (CD)

Added to this, only a percentage of the funding per student was paid on enrolment, with payment of the remainder being finalised on completion. With so few students completing units, this impacted severely on Karrayili's financial situation. This clearly raises questions of equity. As noted in the preceding two chapters, at Karrayili teaching and learning practices reflect and are frequently shaped by the social context of learners' lives, and by the ways in which strategies of autonomy are played out in the context of literacy learning and training at the Centre. In basing funding allocations on enrolment and completion of units, government providers are, in effect, disadvantaging education providers such as Karrayili whose student cohorts are unable – for reasons which are both socially and culturally necessary - to complete units in the required time, if at all.

Funding is also an issue for Karrayili Directors and staff members in that it can be difficult to secure. This aspect of disadvantage was acknowledged by the 1991 Report by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which recommended that in order to simplify the administrative and management problems facing Aboriginal-controlled organisations, there should be “a system of block-grant funding of Aboriginal communities and organisations” and a “minimum level of funding on a triennial basis” (in B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b, p. 11). Sources and amounts of funding at Karrayili tend to be inconsistent and fragmented, requiring extraordinary

amounts of time, generally on the part of the Principal, to ensure that the Centre has sufficient funds to continue operating. Perhaps in this respect, more than anyone else at Karrayili it is the Principal who must walk in the two worlds.

CD: For most of [the Karrayili] objectives there would be an element of training in it. But it's training to achieve social and economic outcomes, it's not training to get a retail certificate or a business certificate or improve your reading or writing. I don't even for me think in terms of putting reading and writing first, it's about learning how to negotiate and deal with mainstream culture and ways. And a very important part of that is being literate and fluent in oral English.

MS: So how does that fit with the way that Karrayili has to fit into mainstream in terms of funding and ...

It doesn't (laughs). That's my role, that's the biggest ... 'Massaging' they call it. The biggest part, 'cause that's one reason in spite of my desolation... at sometimes going in saying 'I just can't do this job because I get too tense and frustrated by that job of 'massaging' but I think one important thing to have me in this position is that I really do think that I do have the big picture of what Karrayili's about. And I think it's important for somebody in my role to really hang on to that and then massaging, working the funding in order to achieve these objectives, and working and supporting the staff in order for them to be working with people in this way. And then supporting, really listening carefully, to pick up what it is that members, and Directors, and general community want. And any community-directed grassroots organisation struggles for funding. Once they start going mainstream like [another local organisation] then it's much easier to get the dollars ... because you can more easily be compliant. Yeah you can get an efficient show of money. You can employ all Kartiyas that are there every day, that know what to do, that get everything done, get all the filing done, get all the reports in. It's across the board, not just in Indigenous areas, but the compliance requirements of NGOs, or not just NGOs, in the health system it's everywhere, they've increased. And so that adds to the workload and it also increases the difficulty of people who aren't schooled in mainstream ways and don't have the literacy and numeracy skills in mainstream, to be able to grapple with and deal with it and understand.

As evidenced by the Principal's quote above, while securing adequate and dependable funding for Karrayili is a time-consuming, frustrating and untidy practice, it still takes second place to ensuring that Karrayili maintains its integrity and commitment to the community it serves. This inevitably results in almost insurmountable contradictions and tensions for those responsible for ensuring the Centre remains financially viable. Balancing adequate funding of Karrayili while simultaneously retaining its integrity and values is

not the only tension created by working in two worlds, but it is without doubt one of the most serious.

Meeting conflicting needs

For staff members especially, daily life at Karrayili can be all about juggling conflicting roles, needs and priorities. This is in all likelihood true of most remote teaching. In his discussion of working as a teacher linguist with the Yolngu people of the Northern Territory, for example, Michael Christie notes that:

As teachers in remote places we are often left to juggle resources and standards imposed from outside with aspirations generated locally. Configuring these together appropriately, and allowing the students to position and perform themselves with respect to them is our primary task as educators in this context. (2005, p. 10)

At Karrayili it can be particularly difficult for staff members to reconcile the needs of the students with the requirements that come with being an accredited training provider. For one thing the units available may not match the students' stated needs or aspirations. This is particularly true when students come to Karrayili as representatives of their community, requesting help with a community development project for example, as will be seen in the case of the Gooniyandi Rangers later in this chapter. The needs of groups such as the KCs, as described earlier, are also difficult to fit into training packages. As EBB noted in Chapter Six:

I think those old people come because they, you know, they saw a sense of pride and ownership of the place and they want to be a part of that still, so there's that too. I mean how do you fit that into a curriculum?

Fitting students' real world needs into a curriculum is just one of the problems facing lecturers at Karrayili. Problems also arise with returning students as there are strict regulations around students re-enrolling in the same unit, and at which level they can be enrolled. Here one of the CGEA lecturers explains the difficulties with which she is presented on a regular basis:

... so sometimes somebody might come to you and you sit there and you're thinking, "Ok I want to help this person, what am I going to enrol them in? How can I enrol this person? What can I use to assess that person for the task that they're doing? Or the task that I'm going to help them with to get them through that process?" So it sometimes can be tricky, or you might have, as the case with me is, I've been here for five years and I've had students come back over time to do different things, and I've already enrolled them in the basic stuff that I want to enrol them in, you know it's all the basic reading and writing and stuff. And so they might come back for something else which is at a similar level. And I'm going "Right, ok, well I can't enrol them in that, and I can't really go up to the level higher because the task doesn't warrant it or they're not at that level. What can I enrol them in?" So that, and that's been the challenge for a lot of students, is figuring out exactly what I'm going to enrol them in, that's appropriate, that they're going work through, and that meets the task that they want to actually complete. (EBB)

The regulations governing enrolment, assessment and completion that Karrayili needs to comply with are typical of any Western organisation concerned with the provision of education services. They are intended to ensure transparency and consistency across service providers, and are driven by the need for measurable outcomes in order to justify the existence of the education provider. All of which are standard and expected in the Kartiya world.

To the people who access these services in Fitzroy Crossing, however, they are concepts that belong to another world entirely; these Kartiya rules simply don't exist in their everyday lives, and as a result they are little understood or valued. As evidenced in the earlier discussion of immediacy, for example, Karrayili students are not governed by timetables or commitments to meet outcomes that have no relevance to their everyday lives. Their priorities and responsibilities are to family, to culture, and to living in the 'here and now'. The resultant dichotomy in which Karrayili must exist creates tensions which at best confuse and frustrate staff and students, but at worst can threaten the very existence of Karrayili.

The following vignette describing the training experiences of the Gooniyandi Rangers provides a good exemplar of the ways in which conflicting responsibilities and expectations can result in frustration and confusion, at

times to the extent that they obstruct completion of units, for Karrayili students.

The Gooniyandi Rangers

In 2008 a group of men from Bayulu community had formed a Rangers unit to care for their country and community. Although they were going from strength to strength, they were in desperate need of a suitable 4WD vehicle so that they could travel through the bush to manage country (including monitoring important waterholes, fixing fencing and negotiating land access with local station management) and to ensure that cultural traditions were maintained and passed on to younger members of the community.



Figure 13: The Gooniyandi Rangers in 2010, with Marcus Finn from Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (Photo courtesy of TRaCK)

In mid-2009 Karrayili was approached by the Gooniyandi Rangers for support in submitting an application to Lottery West for a vehicle grant. The Rangers had been inspired by a group of Bayulu women known as Bayulu

Goornbooyarndi Wirri, who in 2008 had enrolled in literacy training at Karrayili for the same reason. The Bayulu Goornbooyarndi Wirri women provide services to women and children in the community, and had been working together with The Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) at the University of Melbourne, and Kimberley TAFE, as part of the Children, Carer and Country project. Instead of taking the faster and easier route of seeking the services of a consultant to write the vehicle grant application, the women chose to work through the process themselves with the support of a Karrayili teacher. A complex and demanding task, it took the group over a year to complete the submission, but in the process they had gained a number of important skills and felt empowered by having done the work themselves. In March 2009 the women heard that their application had been successful.

Bayulu community lies 18km south-east of Fitzroy Crossing, on the road to Halls Creek. A compact community, it has a store, a clinic, an office (from which Centrelink operates) and a community bus that takes people to and from Fitzroy Crossing. The population of around 200 people are all Indigenous, and although it is made up of people from Walmajarri, Bunuba, Wangkatjungka and Gooniyandi language groups almost half identify themselves as Gooniyandi people (Morphy 2009).

Like many other Indigenous communities, Bayulu has a strong community focus. A 2005 Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) notes that:

The community has a number of priorities including: better health; improved school attendance and educational outcomes; a safer and cleaner community; better sport and recreation activities for young people; a facility for women; better community governance through training; and the maintenance of language, lore and culture. Through its SRA, the community is working with the Australian Government to organise activities including breakfast and lunch programs and recreational and cultural activities that will involve everyone in the community. The community will supervise activities and the use of community resources. (The Australian Government, 2009)

Such a community focus is not just a recent phenomenon at Bayulu. During the 1970s Community Development Officer Stan Davey and his wife Jan

Richardson helped the women form a highly successful 'Home-makers' program, where the community women participated in activities such as making lunches for the schoolchildren, making bread, growing vegetables, and facilitating a community laundry. Community members worked together, and in spite of poor facilities they worked hard to improve their lives. "We didn't care much about money, we did it for the community. We chuck in money"³⁶.

Before discussing the Rangers' training at Karrayili it is important that I first give some background information to contextualise the discussion to come. In recent years Rangers groups have flourished across the Kimberley. Often established on an informal basis by community members themselves, they are a means for traditional land owners to maintain a healthy environment through coordinated land care initiatives while simultaneously ensuring that traditional culture and practices for caring for country are followed and sustained. Caring for traditional country is crucial to the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley. As noted in a booklet produced by the Kimberley Land Council's Land and Sea Management Unit and the Department for Indigenous Affairs (DIA) in 2006:

Kimberley Aboriginal people have an unbroken history of caring for their traditional lands. Now, as in the past, maintaining a healthy environment is central to the wellbeing of the land's people, and to ensuring a sustainable future. (p.1)

The booklet goes on to explain that Ranger activities are also seen as a means to engage young people in the maintenance of traditional culture. The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) believes that almost every Kimberley community has expressed aspirations for their young people to be actively engaged in land management. Senior community members see ranger programs as the natural process to link their young people back to country

³⁶ Anonymous contributor to discussion at a Bayulu Women's Group planning day held at Karrayili in March 2009

and culture. It is also regarded as the most valid solution for employment in remote community life³⁷.

The value of Ranger programs is also recognised (although not always adequately funded) by mainstream Australia, including Federal and State governments. In a media release on 24 August 2009, Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin noted the important role played by traditional owners in caring for Indigenous-owned land and land with significant cultural value. "Working on Country" she said, "draws on the significant skills and knowledge that Indigenous people bring to land management". In the same media release both Macklin and Peter Garrett, then-Minister for the Environment, made reference to the economic and employment opportunities Ranger programs have the potential to create for Indigenous people.³⁸

A Walmajarri Rangers group had previously been established as part of the KLC Rangers program. Aware that the program not only enabled ongoing maintenance of Walmajarri land and culture, but also provided young Walmajarri men with real and relevant employment and training, one of the Gooniyandi elders set about creating a similar program at Bayulu. At the time there was considerable mainstream interest in environmental projects in the Kimberley, and in particular to do with monitoring and maintaining water sources. Groups such as FitzCam (Fitzroy Catchment Management Project) and TRaCK (Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge Project, a CSIRO project) were keen to incorporate traditional Aboriginal knowledge into their own Western-based knowledge systems and research. The Gooniyandi elder, TD, approached FitzCam for help in setting up a Bayulu Rangers project, and it was agreed that they would begin work initially on monitoring the fences between Go Go station and important local waterholes. A

³⁷ The Australian Government's Indigenous Portal webpage (https://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra/wa/fact_sheets/wa02.html, accessed 22.11.09)

³⁸ Accessed on 22 November 2009 at <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/garrett/2009/mr20090824a.html>

situation had arisen where people from a number of outlying communities were accessing land at and around the waterholes by cutting station fences, an action which was leading to cattle straying into the water sources – a situation which was desirable to neither local people who used the waterholes nor to the owners of the cattle (and fences) at Go Go.

The Gooniyandi Rangers' work was carried out as part of their CDEP duties. CDEP (Community Development Employment Program) was an Australian Government-funded initiative for Indigenous job seekers, the aim of which was to “[help] Indigenous job seekers to gain the skills, training and capabilities needed to find sustainable employment and improves the economic and social well-being of communities”³⁹. In remote Australian communities in particular it has been an important, if highly contested, source of income for Indigenous Australians. On 1 July 2009, however, significant changes to the CDEP program were introduced, changes which it was anticipated would see the eventual dismantling of the program nationwide. In Fitzroy Crossing CDEP continues to be a key source of income for many people – according to the Marra Worra Worra website there are 38 CDEP worksites in the Fitzroy Valley region, with 840 participants.⁴⁰

As part of the CDEP program's aim to prepare people for regular employment, recipients were encouraged to access appropriate training which can then be funded by the program. With this in mind, the Gooniyandi Rangers – together with representatives from FitzCam, who were acting in an advocacy role for the group – approached Karrayili to ask if we could help with literacy support in completing a vehicle grant to submit to LotteryWest. After a meeting between the Rangers, a representative from FitzCam, and Karrayili staff members, it was agreed that Karrayili would provide the Rangers with various forms of educational training and support. The

³⁹ Retrieved from the FaHCSIA website on 10 February 2013 at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/community-development-employment-projects-cdep-program#cdep>

⁴⁰ Accessed on 3 October 2009 at http://www.marraworraworra.com.au/about_mww.html

Business teacher would help them to design signage to place on fences and gates in an effort to educate people about the consequences of cutting fences. The Environmental Health trainer was to investigate training around weed control and water testing, and literacy support aimed at completion of the Lottery West application would be provided on Thursday mornings by the CGEA teacher.

When I went to work at Karrayili in early June 2009 the Rangers had only very recently started their classes. I was due to take over some of the classroom duties of a CGEA teacher who was taking maternity leave, and providing literacy support to the Rangers was to be one of my roles. I had some concerns prior to our first class together – so far in Fitzroy Crossing I had only ever worked with the all-female Karrayili Class, and was unsure how easy it would be to develop rapport between myself and a group of men from Bayulu Community whom I had never met before. I was very aware of how important the personal element is to Aboriginal learners, and that if they were not comfortable with me as their teacher there was every possibility that it would not only be my first class with them but also my last. I decided that our first lesson would be a bit of a ‘getting to know you’ session, as this would help build rapport as well as providing an opportunity for them to tell me about their hopes and aspirations for the Rangers group. Seven Rangers turned up for the class, and while the class demographics changed a little over the coming five months or so the core of the group remained unchanged.

The Rangers share a common language (Gooniyandi) and family background. The elder of the group, TD, is probably in his late fifties and was evidently the driving force behind the formation of the Gooniyandi Rangers as a group. It was TD who ‘humbugged’ the coordinator of FitzCam over many months to support him to lobby for funding and administration for the group and its requirements, and it is TD the group look to for their direction and decision-making. Evidently this is typical of Ranger programs in the area; the KLC/DIA Rangers booklet notes that “In Kimberley ranger programs senior people provided cultural advice and direction to guide on-

ground operations” (p. 14). TD is a quiet, thoughtful man, for whom the wellbeing of his community, care for his country, and continuation of his culture through younger members of his family are clearly paramount. He can be sweet and caring, calling me ‘my dear’ and showing concern for my own wellbeing as their teacher, but is also a force to be reckoned with if he feels the group are not receiving a fair deal.

His son, AD, is the group’s spokesperson. This is perhaps partly because while TD speaks several traditional Languages, his English literacy skills are limited – he is able to communicate orally in English to a reasonable degree, but cannot read or write beyond simple or familiar words and can appear self-conscious when called upon to communicate in English. AD is a confident man, at that time 36 years old and recently elected chairperson of his community. He seemed to thrive on being placed in a position of responsibility and authority, and was very keen to take on a leadership role for the younger men in the Rangers group. Unfortunately AD’s role in the family and the community meant that he was often called away from Rangers business, including literacy lessons, to attend meetings or funerals, to participate in Bayulu Council business, and to represent his community at various gatherings around the region.

TD and AD were the founding members of the Rangers, and provided guidance and direction to the group as a whole. The younger members of the Rangers fluctuated to some extent, but five seemed committed to continuing with the training. All members of TD and AD’s extended family, and around 20 years old, these young men were funny, smart, confident, and an absolute delight to work with. They generally spoke Kriol together, with a smattering of Language when communicating with TD, but were able to code-switch to good oral English when talking with me.

I started that first lesson by asking the group why they wanted to be Rangers. The younger men initially waited for TD or AD to respond, but when prompted by the older men to speak up they were forthright and assured about their objectives:

We wanna take care of our country, and we gotta learn from our old people before they pass on. (RS)

We gotta learn how to look after our waterholes and our country. (DCo)

Sometimes there's problems with the station mob, you know, with the cattle and fences and that, so we can fix up the fences and make sure people know where they can go and everything. (JS)

The younger Rangers spoke of the program with great enthusiasm and seemed excited by the responsibility they had taken on to ensure the continuation of Gooniyandi traditional knowledge. They had clearly given a great deal of thought to what they wanted to do and achieve with the Ranger program, and it was interesting to note that none of them answered my question with regard to their own personal advancement or career prospects. Everything they were doing was for their country (ie Gooniyandi land), their community, their people, and they left me with little doubt that that was where their motivation was coming from. Their reasons for needing literacy support, though, were entirely practical. They needed to get a vehicle, and their own literacy skills and understanding of mainstream processes and systems were not sufficient for them to be able to complete the submission process on their own.

During our discussions that first day it had become clear that while the vehicle submission was the group's ultimate aim there were many other literacy-based skills that it would benefit the group to develop. In order for the Rangers to maintain essential links with other organisations such as Marra Worra Worra, the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) and FitzCam they needed to learn such things as basic computer skills, emailing, report-writing, and how to network with other ranger groups. They also needed to learn about the systems themselves, how mainstream Australia works and what they need to do and learn in order to be able to work alongside it. In addition, and perhaps more importantly if the group were to be sustainable, they needed to develop the skills necessary to ensure the day-to-day running and funding of the group.

Being on CDEP meant the Gooniyandi Rangers were answerable to Marra Worra Worra (MWW) for their hours and duties carried out. CDEP pays people to work on their communities for 4 hours a day (generally 7 – 11am) Monday to Thursday, and they are required to complete a fortnightly timesheet to justify how they have spent that time. Timesheets are a good example of the difficulties many Indigenous people in remote areas have in meeting the expectations of mainstream systems, and the experiences of the Gooniyandi Rangers with their CDEP timesheets were fraught with disagreement, frustration and acrimony on both sides. In Kartiya eyes timesheets are a straightforward record-keeping system, a nuisance perhaps but no big deal – you simply record the hours you worked each day and get paid accordingly. From my observations at Karrayili, however, the system is far from being clear-cut for Indigenous workers.

The Rangers' timesheets required them to not only detail the hours they worked, but also the kind of work they undertook. This added to the burden of completing the timesheets accurately and comprehensively, making it almost impossible for the Rangers to do so independently. After several questionable timesheets had been submitted by the Rangers, MWW and FitzCam asked me to cover the issue in one of our literacy lessons. As this fitted exactly with the ethos of Karrayili in terms of giving our students the literacy support they need to successfully negotiate the role played by mainstream systems in their everyday lives, I was more than happy to do so. As a group we discussed the purpose of a timesheet, how to complete it, and the importance of accuracy in doing so given the fact that it is a legal document. The group also reviewed the template they were using at the time, discussing some of its faults and coming up with an alternative version that they felt was more user-friendly. As a group we went through their current timesheet, completing it appropriately and sending it off to MWW, and at the end of the lesson the Rangers assured me they would have no further problems completing their timesheets. The following fortnight I had an email from their CDEP manager, furious that yet again the Rangers had delivered to her a group timesheet that was full of inaccuracies.

The email from the CDEP manager alluded in particular to the ‘untruths’ in the Rangers’ timesheet, and to her frustrations with the Rangers being ‘untruthful’ in their recordkeeping. While there is undoubtedly an element of the Rangers knowing that at least some of what they’d recorded was not the truth, when we unpack the issue of timesheets we can see that it goes beyond a matter of deceit. As the principal of Karrayili noted, “There’s so much involved in filling out a straightforward thing like a timesheet”⁴¹. By this she was referring in part to the literacy and numeracy skills required to complete the form – to the use of fractions and decimals, basic addition and multiplication, to the spelling of unfamiliar words and knowing which piece of information to put on which part of the form. More than this, though, she was referring to the concepts behind a timesheet. The need for accuracy, for example, why a rough estimate is not acceptable and the idea of accountability. The whole concept of the working day too – at what point does your working day start? When you are getting ready for work? When you leave your community to go to your workplace? And are breaks a part of your paid working day? And what should take priority, your paid employment or family and community responsibilities?

The tensions between Kartiya understandings of aspects of work such as timesheets, and what the same procedure might mean to Aboriginal workers or participants, highlight an important facet of the type of training offered to Karrayili students. The staff at Karrayili, and the work they do, often act as a bridge between the two worlds, helping Aboriginal learners to not only improve their English literacy but to better understand and manage their dealings with Kartiya or mainstream systems. This aspect of literacy learning for Indigenous learners in the Fitzroy Valley is an important one. Much of what I saw and heard at Karrayili suggested in fact that learning there needs to be less about literacy and more about ‘working with Kartiya’, as the conceptual differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds

⁴¹ Personal communication, 23 October 2009

appear to be extremely difficult to bridge. Contradictions between what local Aboriginal people say, and what they do, are frequently as obvious as they are inexplicable, to Kartiya at least. And the tensions and frustrations caused as a result – between teachers and learners, employers and employees, service providers and service recipients – only serve in some way to reinforce patterns of misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Working with the Gooniyandi Rangers was marked by moments of extreme highs and optimism, brought about largely by the group's enthusiasm, creativity and ability to grasp new ideas very quickly and run with them, but also by periods of confusion, frustration and doubt – both of my own abilities to teach them and of the potential for the group to sustain itself. The occasions when the students turned up to class were productive and enjoyable, and I found myself energised both by their dedication to the Ranger program and by their willingness to participate and learn. Together we planned learning activities around their immediate needs, making their literacy learning an integral part of their Ranger work. For example, the students learnt basic computing skills such as creating folders, using tables and storing documents as part of a session dedicated to organising the group's work through an effective roster system. In another session we discussed an invitation the group had received to participate in cane toad control with a group called ToadBusters, planning a response and subsequently organising a week's training with them in Kununurra. We also participated in a workshop with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) on the subject of becoming incorporated, as the group had expressed an interest in pursuing that line of development. All of this training the Rangers found stimulating and useful, and in informal evaluations they claimed to be very happy with the training they were receiving from Karrayili.

And yet ... the weeks when they didn't turn up for training started to outnumber the weeks when they did. When Thursday mornings came around and I drove out to Bayulu to pick them up for class I would be lucky to find any Rangers there, or if they were there I would often be met with a lack

of eye contact and mumbled references to a 'meeting'. To be fair, there were always a lot of meetings – Gooniyandi meetings at Bayulu community; local community meetings, for example to elect a new chairperson or discuss changes to bylaws; native title meetings with the Kimberley Land Council; travel to family funerals; AGMs. But at times it seemed to me as if everything and anything took precedence over their training at Karrayili, while to my Kartiya eyes such training was crucial if the Rangers were to succeed in achieving their aspirations.

The combination of inconsistent attendance and the regularity with which our literacy sessions were 'hijacked' by other meetings or training opportunities meant that opportunities for improving the Rangers' English/mainstream literacy skills were limited. After five months we had made little progress on the Lottery West grant application, and training regarding administration of the group was minimal.

The Rangers went to Karrayili not to improve their literacy as such, but to get help in dealing with a particular English text (the Lottery West grant application) in order to achieve a very concrete, practical goal. Similarly with subsequent lessons, even though there was a literacy component this was not the Rangers' primary objective. Any literacy learning that took place occurred as a means to an end, with the main aim being to secure a sustainable and workable future for the Gooniyandi Ranger project. The Rangers' strengths lie in their connections to the land and their desire to sustain their culture and traditions, but it can be difficult to capitalise on these at the same time as training them in the world of mainstream processes and systems, regardless of the fact that they themselves have recognised the need to learn about these. What the Rangers had wanted to do was, quite simply, get a vehicle and work on country. What they got in their training was – unavoidably – a lot of paperwork, forms to be filled in, systems to be adhered to and a sudden immersion in not just Kartiya English, but highly complex bureaucratic vocabulary and terminology. It's no wonder they stopped coming to class.

This description highlights the conflicting needs and/or expectations of the Rangers and the mainstream systems with which they were attempting to interact. The difficulties they experienced in their efforts to walk in both worlds without doubt led, at least in part, to them disengaging from their studies at Karrayili. As with the KCs in Chapter One, such resistance to, or refusal to participate in, the manner in which literacy and training programs are delivered could be read as a strategy by which learners frame and implement their personal autonomy. Once they realised that the Rangers program at Karrayili was not meeting their expectations, the younger Rangers simply drew a line, deciding for themselves that they were not going to continue with the unit. For all of the students, engaging in training using SAE was a challenge. One of the students found using new technologies to be an added stress factor – few Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing have access to a computer at home, and it seemed that the combination of using a computer *and* engaging with English language texts at the same time was just too much for him. As a result he simply fled each time the lessons involved developing computer literacy. Dealing with unfamiliar concepts, cultural differences, feeling under attack from their line manager at Marra Worra Worra and feeling undervalued by those responsible for overseeing the Rangers programs – all these factors contributed to the Gooniyandi Rangers' training proving to be just too hard. In addition, they resulted in a great deal of time and effort on the part of Karrayili staff members ultimately failing to translate into units completed, meaning the Centre received funding based on the Rangers' enrolments but nothing for completed units.

The funding mechanisms, in particular, proved too complex and apparently illogical for the Gooniyandi Rangers to come to terms with. Why, for example, were other Rangers groups paid wages but they weren't? Why did other groups receive vehicles on loan from the KLC's Rangers program but they didn't? Why did they have to submit timesheets to Marra Worra Worra when everybody knew they were working as Rangers? While the answers to these questions at least made sense to me, even if at times they seemed more than a little unfair, the systems and processes they represented bore very little relevance to the knowledge systems by which the Gooniyandi

Rangers operated. With the added frustration that they received little or no guidance or mentoring from those responsible for monitoring the Rangers groups across the Kimberley, despite all their initial good intentions the Gooniyandi Rangers all but gave up and the program fizzled out. These men knew how to look after country, how to be Rangers, they just didn't know how to do it under the auspices of the mainstream processes essential to the survival and sustainability of the group.

Unfamiliarity with, lack of understanding of, or perhaps even a disregard for Western approaches to learning and the world of work can lead to missed opportunities, misunderstandings, and tensions between learners and the mainstream organisations they are inevitably required to have dealings with. This proved especially true with the Ranger group operating within the constrictions of the CDEP program and the difficulties inherent in securing funding for their group. It was frustratingly difficult to reconcile what was expected of the Rangers by the CDEP manager, in particular with regard to how much they would be paid and what they would receive payment for, with the Rangers' own understandings of these issues, and this led to disruptions in their training on a number of occasions. It also meant that a disproportionate amount of our literacy lessons were spent trying to ensure that all parties shared the same understanding of what the Rangers were required to do and when.

One of the main objectives of Karrayili is to help bridge this divide: to act as a link, connecting its students and the Karrayili world that so often complicates their lives. In particular it is a link between Aboriginal ways and mainstream or Karrayili ways; Karrayili does not just provide training and other education services, it acts as an interface between Indigenous ways of learning and Karrayili ways of teaching, albeit with varying degrees of success.

Conflicting roles

As outlined in Chapter Five, the staff at Karrayili make every effort to ensure that local cultural practices are seen to be valued and integrated into learning at the Centre. However, one of the trainers at Karrayili questioned the extent to which the Centre is able to combine meeting the expectations of the mainstream world with the expectations and ways of being that are the norm in Fitzroy Crossing:

[There's] too much control, too much rules, too much ... yeah, policies and procedures. Fitzroy Crossing doesn't ... is not organised, it's not structured, it is a bit chaotic, it is ... a bit crazy at times. I wanted, I want a class like that. If it's noisy, if it's crazy, if there's too much going on, that's what I want, and that's sort of what works ... just working in with what's there. [It's important] because Indigenous people in the town are well aware of the fact that there hasn't been any recognition of that in the past. And that's what's holding the ... if I was to come in saying what I know is what's right, I'd fail. What is right is ensuring that other people's views and ways of doing things are used. ... I have to prove that people can learn, and the best way to do that is to relinquish control. Let someone else have the responsibility for coming here. Let someone else have the responsibility for learning. (DK)

This quote highlights the conflicting roles of staff members, who are required to respond to the needs of their students while at the same time meeting the bureaucratic requirements that influence much of what goes on at Karrayili. This is particularly true in regard to balancing enrolment requirements with the realities of students' lives. The mainstream accreditation system under which Karrayili operates dictates that certain procedures be followed, and this can place staff members under considerable stress. As one of the lecturers told me,

Well it makes it a bit tricky, and it'll be interesting to see what an auditor would think of it, if they came and picked up the student's file and their enrolment forms are every year from 2005 and they're still doing the same work, but you know, one year they've withdrawn or one year I've marked them as competent, or one year I've marked them as not competent you know for whatever units they're doing, because I might only see them a couple of weeks or a couple of months or they might come for a good solid six months but not be ready to move on. (EBB)

As this lecturer notes, trying to work in the two worlds by accepting and understanding the ways in which students live their lives, while at the same time attempting to fit this into the demands of the mainstream processes that govern the way Karrayili operates, can place significant strains on the staff members there, as these two quotes illustrate:

But what else is going on in life, there's a bigger picture and we're, not we as in Karrayili, but the training part of Karrayili, is a small part of that and often like I'll see students for training and then like I see them for a workshop, they might do some follow up field work stuff and then they might not come for the next workshop but they'll be back to get assistance to dealing with life, or you know dealing with bureaucracy of life. (TV)

... it's not like staff choose whether to do the training obligations or the community obligations, you end up doing both because you have to do the training obligations because it's part of the funding mechanism but you're part of the community and you have an affinity with the people here so you do all the other stuff as well, and you end up doing everything yeah. It's not like you can choose one or the other. (EBB)

As this lecturer makes very clear, teaching at Karrayili places considerable pressure on staff members to meet everybody's needs: the needs of the bureaucratic systems under which they operate; the needs of the community at large in terms of providing programs that are meaningful and have real world outcomes; and the learning needs of individual students. Added to all of this, though, Karrayili staff members are also community members, and as such they have responsibilities to help people 'deal with life'. It is this final obligation that often takes up much of their time, and while it is not a part of the training packages which Karrayili is funded to deliver it is probably one of their most important jobs.

Much of what happens at Karrayili has little to do with formal training. People go there for help, knowing that staff at Karrayili will help them to bridge the divide between their own Indigenous world and the Karrayili world with which they need to interact on a daily basis. This can create conflict for staff members, who regularly find themselves having to fulfil their obligations to community members, while simultaneously meeting mainstream requirements. As the Environmental Health lecturer noted:

Sometimes there is an overwhelming amount of people's sort of business that you're dealing with and that makes it difficult to fulfil your mainstream requirements as well. ... I can spend at least half a day every day dealing with these things with people and then our measurable training outcomes aren't being fulfilled, if you know what I mean. It takes time away... And they aren't acknowledged at all you know in that system. Yeah and that's what we'll spend a lot of our time doing. (TV)

Part of 'dealing with life' is understanding the social obligations that so often take students away from their studies. This can frustrate lecturers, especially when they have gone to considerable lengths to design appropriate and customised programs for the learners. However the freedom to come and go, to stop and start their studies as they need to, is highly valued by the students. More than once I was told that you 'can't make people go if they don't want to', and this is understood by all who are involved with Karrayili:

Sometime people feeling that they just don' wanna go ... to Karrayili to learn more, but Karrayili is always there for people but it's them, they have to make that commitment to go on, if they want to study. It's not anyone else to force them, you know? It's gotta come from them. (AY)

The sense of autonomy that is held by the Aboriginal learners at Karrayili is evident in AY's quote above. In asserting that "it's not anyone else to force them", AY underlines the need for adult Indigenous learners to make their own decisions about their learning if that learning is going to be meaningful for them. Planning people's learning, too – while it can make perfect sense to non-Indigenous trainers such as myself – may be perceived by learners as undermining their autonomy, as taking the immediacy and ability to choose out of their hands.

Part of the Student Services and Employment Officer's role is to follow up on students who have been so 'side-tracked' that they have disappeared from Karrayili entirely and have failed to complete their course. As noted earlier, non-completion is not a rare occurrence and staff at Karrayili are keen to understand why this happens in order to be able to better help students to persevere with their training. In interview the SSEO described how

immediacy and social obligations impact on students continuing to learn at Karrayili:

Well I've followed up with a few of those things and a lot of it is social issues and stuff at home and a lot of them, they lose motivation very quickly I suppose. There was a few I'd spoken to, why, you know, they didn't complete the course and stuff and like one young boy was quite honest and he said "One of my friends was walking around, going to the pub", and you know they'd go buy ganja [marijuana] and stuff, and so he'd sort of get caught up in that moment. (DC)

Immediacy is not the only social factor that can impact on students' study pathways. A big factor in Fitzroy Crossing is that of 'fitting in', of not standing out from the crowd, and of society's expectations of individuals. As the SSEO went on to explain:

And then there's the expectations of what happens after the course as well. 'Cause then people in your family who would be saying "You're sitting this course", this and that, and then expecting you to succeed, to you know go straight into a really flash job or you know something like that. Yeah so I think confidence plays a big part in that. ... And you do get a few [students] there that once you can see that their confidence is building, they thrive. But then you get some where you can see them sort of breaking out a bit and then pretty soon then they're back with the mob. I think it's easier to blend in than to stand out, to be different, than to achieve, you know to be the one leading the way. To be a leader, I think it takes a lot for a lot of this mob. ... Even like for instance someone like me, if I, you know I've worked and stuff a lot, and you do get a few little comments here and there like "Oh, she thinks she's Kartiya". (DC)

Operating in the two worlds can lead to conflicting roles and priorities, both for students and for staff members at Karrayili. For Indigenous staff members in particular, having regular employment can present a number of social problems. As DC notes above, if an Indigenous person commits to their employment, turning up regularly and on time for work regardless of what is happening at home or in the community, they are often seen as being 'Kartiya'. Many will choose to leave their position of work rather than remain in conflict with family and friends. It is impossible to know from my interview and observation evidence just how much this factor affected the turnover of Indigenous staff during my time in Fitzroy Crossing, but it was without doubt a major influence.

For students, no matter how committed they may be to their studies their social commitments and obligations, contemporary culture, plus learning in English all make completion of units at best challenging, but more often than not impossible. For the Karrayili students choosing not to complete their training is possibly a form of empowerment, of asserting autonomy, as they are making their own decisions about their own lives. In some ways perhaps they are even undermining the bureaucracies that so dominate their lives. But for Karrayili staff members, and in particular the Principal, the conflict and contradictions inherent in working in the two worlds could be seen as being far more serious. There is no doubt that whatever aspects of community life impact on their students' learning will be acknowledged and valued, but at the same time the Centre needs to find some way to pay the bills. Having large proportions of funding tied up in enrolment and completion rates clearly presents problems with achieving this.

Immediacy, as stated in Chapter Six, is a strong part of contemporary Aboriginal culture in Fitzroy Crossing. It shapes people's lives, enables them to assert autonomy, is a powerful factor of local Aboriginal identity, and as JLC noted, it's "how we like it". How, though, immediacy can exist alongside the demands and expectations of mainstream Australia, including its current systems of adult education and literacy teaching, is another matter, and it is one that Karrayili staff are forced to negotiate on a daily basis.

Conflicting representations of student needs

Like other Aboriginal people across Australia, people in Fitzroy Crossing say that they need and want to learn English. They express particular concern for the younger generations, wanting them to be SAE literate in order to get jobs or take control of their lives, while at the same time expressing concerns that they are foregoing their traditional languages in favour of 'them *Kartiya* ways'. When people talk about the need for English they almost always give

one of two reasons: either to 'talk with them government mob', or to get a job.

Well, I think when people realise that literacy's the main thing, now people looking at "Ah yeah, well I wanna do my literacy again", but I don't know what that word literacy means. You know, I asked you what literacy means. An I thought literacy was just talkin about learning English, you know? So an it's good because round Fitzroy, if people wants to, like, get a proper job, or, you know, wanna be somebody then I reckon this is where they need this literacy stuff. ... If you don't know your English then how can you get a job? (PD)

Yeah, it's about getting licence, and ... mainly jobs cos a lotta blokes I seen, like in their 20 upwards, came in here to get white cards to do the building that going on round Fitzroy. They come in an do their resume, an now I see them all with jobs, you know? That's real good, cos Karrayili can provide that for them. (ETM)

And yet, as I discovered very early on in my experiences teaching at Karrayili, students frequently enrol in a unit then either stop coming to class after a few lessons or sometimes not even start their studies. For this reason lecturers are encouraged to spend time with students before they enrol, carefully outlining the requirements of the unit and expectations of the student and identifying the learner's reasons for wanting to enrol. Despite all of this careful preparation Karrayili students will often say they want training, sometimes explicitly identifying a need to improve their English skills, then not come to classes. Immediacy, family obligations, and other aspects of contemporary culture all play their part in interrupting students' plans to study.

Providing education services in the context of Fitzroy Crossing is full of such contradictions. There are contradictions between what people say they want and what they actually appear to want, between what people say and what they do, and contradictions too in what Karrayili appears to do and what it actually does.

Teaching literacy and other training in the sociocultural context of people's lives in Fitzroy Crossing goes beyond pedagogy and learning styles. It goes beyond even knowing and integrating local culture. As colonised people, the

Indigenous population of Fitzroy Crossing have experienced a recent and complex history of settlement, a history which has included the oppression of people and their traditional language use, and which therefore plays a significant role in defining people's attitudes to SAE and to dealing with Kartiya. To some extent this is countered at Karrayili by the Centre's emphasis on prioritising local ways of doing and being, and in particular on the value placed on establishing genuine and respectful relationships between staff and students.

This is particularly significant when it comes to language use, and in particular student use of SAE. While students often state that they want and need to improve their English skills, low levels of literacy can contribute to a lack of self-confidence when dealing with tasks and texts in SAE, which may in turn discourage students from attending classes. Even with lessons and tasks that are carefully designed around the specific needs of ESL learners, engaging with English-language texts can be an overwhelming prospect for people with poor English literacy skills and doubtless this is even more daunting for young men (for example the Gooniyandi Rangers) who may feel that they are in danger of 'losing face' in front of their peers.

In the Kimberley, Aboriginal people refer to this loss of face as being 'shame'. People are often 'shame' to speak with Kartiya, as these quotes from Karrayili staff and students describe:

You know like some kids they find it hard to even go to the shops. They don't want to communicate with those Kartiya's. You know, some of them a bit shame. (WS)

... you might meet someone who is quite young, not very confident with their spoken English and not very strong with their written English and it seems to be because Kriol is their first language ... and you know for some people they missed out on school life because they were out at communities or stations. I had one bloke who grew up on the station and was 17 and could not write the simplest of letters, of words, but he didn't... it didn't bother him, he didn't have any shame factor about it, it didn't bother him at all to come to Karrayili ... and come to class and it didn't seem to frustrate him or worry him. Whereas we've had other people who seem to be aware of their own literacy barriers and it does concern them and they do feel that shame factor. (EBB)

I think also stems back to, back in the older days and how we were more or less pushed to the side and wasn't given our rights and all this. I think a lot of that has been passed down through the generations. Well pretty much, back in my grandmother's days you wouldn't see an Aboriginal woman doing the job that I do. So therefore they had their place in society and then therefore a lot of that stuff was passed on to the next generation and the next. Like an example would be the shame business that we have today, because we weren't able to speak our minds and express our feelings and all of this type of stuff, a lot of that was you know, shame. And I think a lot of the Kimberleys, definitely Fitzroy, it's still quite ingrained through the generations and I think that's something that's not going to change overnight. But yeah I suppose it's breaking that cycle in some ways. Especially that shame business with our younger generation, it holds them back, stops them growing and achieving so much. (DC)

In the last quote DC, a local Aboriginal woman who worked at Karrayili for some time as the Student Services and Employment Officer, raises two important issues regarding 'shame'. The first is that there are clear and undeniable historical reasons for Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing feeling 'shame' about speaking up, and in particular about speaking up in SAE or Kriol. Added to this is the continued perception held by many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing of Kriol as 'rubbish English'; people often believe they either can't communicate with Kariya or feel 'shame' about speaking in Kriol. The second issue is that in contemporary Fitzroy Crossing people are increasingly aware of the need to overcome feelings of 'shame', and for younger generations in particular to have opportunities to achieve their ambitions without being held back by the 'shame' factor.

Another Karrayili student told me how 'shame' is seen as being cultural. Kariya are perceived as having less 'shame', as being more confident about speaking with strangers and speaking in unfamiliar situations. This is seen as an advantage, particularly in relation to securing and sustaining employment:

Because most of the people roun here, they too shy, you know ... they not used to talkin to, other family member group you know? Like you'll get most of them will be ... be with one family group, but if you talkin about, if these people applyin for a job, then they have to get out of their shyness, you know, to be ... Like if I go to another family, you know ... I won't talk straight away, it'll take time for me to know that family group, or something like that. Maybe with Kariya like you ... oh, maybe we just

learn to, even if you feel shy you don't show it, I mean even if you're in that situation you just talk up. It's all about that confidence, you know. You look at other, you look most of that Kartiyas they'll talk to anybody, but blackfella, Aboriginal I mean, sorry, you won't see them much talk up if they don't know that Kartiya. They won't go over an talk with them. Kartiya, if they want anything they talk to anybody. (PD)

As I noted earlier, Aboriginal people feel comfortable about going to Karrayili. But from the quotes above it can be seen that even at Karrayili people can feel 'shame' to work with Kartiya and speak SAE, and this can be powerful enough to cause students to stop studying, or even to fail to enrol at all. Many Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing want to improve their English literacy skills, whether for personal or professional purposes, but there are just so many social and cultural reasons preventing them from doing so. It is difficult to know what could be done to ameliorate this situation; it is possible though that further research carried out from an Indigenous perspective could shed light on this important issue.

The student above, PD, went on to talk about one of the ways in which she feels the 'shame' issue could be dealt with:

I think that's what people needs to know about, you know? Like get out of that shameness and be – what that word? Self-esteem eh? ... an that what community people, that's what they gotta say to themselves that they are special, you know, somebody special. You're not, you know, they might think that they nobody, but they not, they are somebody. When people look at them and you, you know, you can tell them oh, I know you can do the job.

In Chapters Five and Six I explained how Karrayili not only provides training and education services to the Fitzroy Valley people, it also plays a part in making and keeping communities and individuals strong. As PD notes in the quote above, increasing self-esteem, giving people confidence and letting them know that they are 'somebody special' is key to improving the education and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Australia. Empowering communities and individuals is about so much more than simply 'giving them literacy' so that they can join the workforce.

Conclusions

The conflicting roles and tensions outlined in this chapter show that teaching and learning at Karrayili is rarely straightforward or easy. In operating as a community-driven education centre that is funded and accredited by mainstream systems, Karrayili is forced to meet two very different, and often conflicting, sets of needs at the same time. This creates tensions for management, teaching staff, and the learners themselves. In going about its business in ways that reflect the values, beliefs and needs of the local community, however, Karrayili has the potential to play an important role in building stronger communities in the Fitzroy Valley.

Part C: Conclusions and findings

Chapter 8: Diversity, equity and empowering Aboriginal learners

This thesis has used a case study of Karrayili Adult Education Centre to explore and analyse the reasons why Indigenous adults in remote Australia might choose to engage in further education and training. Limited research has previously been undertaken in this area, and even less from a 'bottom up' perspective. Through the use of ethnographic research methods, including participant observation and in-depth, unstructured interviews, I have been able to gain valuable insights into why Aboriginal people in this particular context choose to engage with the adult education centre in question, why at times they choose to disengage, and what it is that they hope to gain from any engagement that takes place. Current policy emphasis is firmly centred on literacy as a pathway to employment, yet the findings of this research show that engagement in literacy and learning, in this context at least, is far more about culture and connections, and about finding strength as individuals and as a community.

The main findings of this research can be defined as being about three key aspects of Indigenous adult education and literacy: diversity, equity and empowerment. In this concluding chapter I will outline the key findings as

they relate to these three topics. The first two are interrelated, and I will therefore deal with these two aspects together in the following section.

Diversity and equity

Chapters Five and Six of this thesis reveal that the ways in which Karrayili operates, and the learners' reasons for engaging with the Centre, are highly context-specific and as a result are very different from the experiences of the majority of mainstream education providers. Karrayili, as with all adult education providers, deals with a wide range of learners who have a variety of reasons for enrolling in training. For some it is an opportunity to enhance their career prospects, to gain the literacy, numeracy, or work-ready skills that will enable them to get a job. But for many students their reasons for learning are far more personal, and may include the opportunity to consolidate their social relationships or strengthen cultural connections. Many have multiple reasons for attending, and multiple literacies are employed during their learning experiences.

Unlike the norm in mainstream further education, while some people's reasons for studying at Karrayili are about getting a job, this is rarely (if ever) the prime motivating factor. For many students it isn't a motivator at all. As detailed in Chapter Six, people are far more likely to be studying there because of connections to other people, or as a means of maintaining or strengthening culture (both traditional and contemporary). Living in a remote town where there is little to do, they may also attend simply to pass the time, or because of links to the Centre itself – for many it is just what they do most days, they go to Karrayili. This diverges significantly from the current VET or human capital perspectives of government programs and policies, which assume the learner will attend classes regularly, gain qualifications, and then get a job as a direct consequence of their training.

At Karrayili the learners' very specific cultural, historical, and social reasons for attending the Centre are acknowledged, and the training and learning that is provided is built around community and individual learners' needs. To do this, it is necessary for things to be done differently from most mainstream organisations. The way they do things at Karrayili makes sense to those closely involved with the Centre itself, but do not necessarily conform to the assumptions about adult education that are held by those responsible for making decisions about funding and accreditation.

These findings do not simply tell us that things are different at Karrayili. If these findings are applied to adult education more broadly, we can see that in order for education provision for marginalised adults to be successful, it is necessary to meet the needs of the learners *as perceived by the learners themselves*. And to do that, it is necessary to first find out what those needs are, to listen to students and to those involved at the level of practice. Only in this way will there be room in adult education for recognition of the diversity of learners and their needs, expectations and aspirations. I doubt that the Karrayili learners are alone in their need for their adult education provider to provide a safe, comfortable environment where people feel that their culture and beliefs are valued and understood.

Community-controlled education providers need to be able to meet the real needs of their learners. One size most definitely does not fit all, and it is only people closely involved at the local level who can truly understand the learners' motivations for learning and their learning needs. As Michael Christie states:

We need to produce and maintain spaces where both the local and the global are contextualised, available and relevant, and understand our success in terms of our students' abilities to truly be themselves, appropriately and constructively, precisely where they are. This implies a commitment to a complex understanding of knowledge as always primarily local, primarily social, and often embedded and enabled both by place, and by the wider knowledge traditions of our society – literacy, numeracy, technical knowledge, wisdom. The prioritisation of national standards of literacy and numeracy over local skills and knowledge systems needs to be balanced against our efforts to integrate learning with community histories and futures. (2005, p. 10)

Decision-making regarding the provision of services by community-controlled education providers must be at least informed by, if not made at, a local level. Key to this though is the need for a re-evaluation of how adult education is perceived and approached in Australia. With regard to Indigenous literacy, in particular, it is time the literacy 'gap' was viewed in a way that takes into account difference and learner/community autonomy. Chapter Three discusses contemporary approaches to understanding literacy, or literacies, within the social context in which they are practised. With this in mind, I suggest that the literacy 'gap' is one of difference, rather than deficit – if you like a horizontal, rather than vertical gap – and it is only through open and honest recognition of this difference that Aboriginal people will truly have the option to learn what *they* determine they need to learn, in ways that have meaning for them. Literacy learning needs to sit alongside other equally valid and viable factors such as humanisation, solidarity, and above all equity and freedom. As noted by Altman and Fogarty (2010), linking literacy learning exclusively to human capital and productivity fails to take into account the social practice of literacy and the need to view learners as individuals, as citizens with rights, not as clients to be managed.

As noted in Chapter Three, participation in adult education is often evaluated in terms of subsequent economic productivity by the learner. A British study which aimed to quantify the value of adult learning more holistically used a model to express the impact participation in adult learning has on social relationships, volunteering, health and employment in monetary terms (Fujiwara, 2012). The study concluded that adult learning had a positive impact on all four domains. It would be very interesting for the dollar value of participation in adult education in Australia, regardless of whether or not the learner joins the workforce as a direct result of their studies, to be evaluated. How, for example, does participation in adult education impact on the individual's wellbeing, potentially resulting in a reduced load on health services? How might it impact on family welfare, on inter-generational education? There may well be an economic argument for encouraging participation in adult education, in whatever form that may take, and further research in this area is needed.

The theme of 'difference' has emerged strongly from this research, and this is closely linked to equity issues for Indigenous learners. If difference is allowed to go unrecognised, if all adult education providers are required to comply with standardised regulations and requirements regardless of the particular socio-cultural, as well as educational, needs of their learners, then the situation for many marginalised learners will not be equitable. The context of learning at Karrayili is intimately tied to issues of culture, social practice, demographics, history and even geographical location, and this fact needs to be recognised by those responsible for funding and accreditation.

Equality in education provision does not necessarily result in equity. Given the highly context-specific nature of teaching and learning in a remote location such as Fitzroy Crossing, it makes no sense for Karrayili to be required to comply with the same procedures and regulations as would a centre catering to the needs of non-Indigenous Australians, or even of Indigenous Australians in an urban environment. It is only through first the recognition of diversity, and secondly the acknowledgement of this in terms of how adult education centres are allowed and enabled to be run, that education practices for marginalised adults will reach any real degree of equity.

Literacy learning and empowering learners

Much is made in the 'closing the gap' discourse of the potential for literacy learning to empower learners and communities. The findings of this research have clearly demonstrated that while Karrayili certainly empowers its learners, this has little to do with any actual improvement in the learners' literacy skills. Instead it has shown that the students at Karrayili, and indeed the Aboriginal community of Fitzroy Crossing in general, find individual and community strength through the sense of ownership they feel for Karrayili, and through the connections and sense of belonging that it both symbolises and sustains. By keeping their community and their culture strong, they

empower themselves. The learners at Karrayili are made stronger by their engagement with learning at the Centre, but not necessarily, or not only, through the opportunities to improve their English literacy and ultimately gain employment. As noted by several of the participants in this study, it is Karrayili itself that makes them strong.

In regard to the training that takes place at Karrayili, learners are empowered less by what is imposed on them in terms of literacy programs, and more by what they decide to do and what they achieve autonomously. The KCs, in their steadfast determination at times to resist my lesson plans and instead do things *their* way; the Gooniyandi Rangers, in their refusal to participate in systems of learning and doing that did not reflect their own understandings or needs; the Environmental Health students who together determine when and where community workshops will be held; and all the Karrayili students for whom immediacy, and the demonstrated need to prioritise family and community over their commitment to learning and training, is yet another way of making their own choices and asserting control over their lives.

Key to the empowering of students at Karrayili is the recognition and valuing of local culture, and especially language use. For many Aboriginal students, engaging in further education means learning in a language in which they are not proficient, and about which they may have learnt to feel 'shame'. Language use cannot be separated from issues of identity for colonised peoples, especially those who have been forbidden from using their first language(s). As an Aboriginal-directed education provider, Karrayili cuts through some of that 'shame' factor. Local people feel comfortable about going there, knowing that not only will they not be judged for their English language skills, but that use of traditional Language and Kriol is actively encouraged and valued.

Karrayili empowers not only the students who go there, but also the wider Aboriginal community. The history of how Karrayili came about, together with having an all-Aboriginal Board of Directors who are responsible for all decision-making on behalf of the community, gives the local Aboriginal community a sense of ownership, of having control over their lives. Through

Karrayili they are able to do things their own way, knowing that their cultural practices will not adversely affect their learning opportunities – something that is usually denied to them at other organisations. Through doing things their own way they also have opportunities to subvert the system that exerts so much control over their lives in so many other ways. Local culture, social practices and languages are valued and incorporated into teaching and learning at Karrayili, and as a result students' autonomy is confirmed in their learning experiences there.

The students at Karrayili tend not to 'play by the rules'. They come to classes as and when it suits them. In class they are not passive learners, and will find ways to ensure that the lesson fits their needs, at times regardless of what the teacher had intended. By insisting on not conforming, by subverting the system so that their own values and priorities are not distorted or lost, the Karrayili learners empower themselves. This empowerment is supported by the staff at Karrayili, who acknowledge the need for learner autonomy and recognise the importance of implementing a broader perspective of literacy and learning in class. Key to this is the way in which staff position themselves as facilitators, making it possible for learners to come to Karrayili and to do what *they* think they need to do once they are there. This is no small thing for a group of people with a history of colonisation which resulted in loss of culture, land and language, and for whom the colonising force came to symbolise the imposition of a foreign culture and the oppression of their people.

At Karrayili Aboriginal students are free to make choices about their learning. This element of autonomy is essential if self-determination in education is to be achieved. As noted by Jack Beetson, President of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers (FIAEP) in 1997:

Self-determination to me is about choice. Unfortunately, in the Aboriginal community, regardless of what the issue is but, in particular, education, Aboriginal people seem to have very limited choice. In fact, the choices that we make, if we do get to make a choice at all, are very directly steered by government ... [They] are sitting there saying that Aboriginal self-determination is what underpins their policy [but] ... what they do is determine policy that restricts our right to choice, our right to

access an education that is determined by us ... The only way that Aboriginal people will ever become empowered through education is by doing it their own way, in their own time, and with their own people. (in B Boughton & Durnan, 1997b, p. 5)

Beetson's comments resonate with the learning that takes place at Karrayili. In terms of measurable outcomes and completions the success of what happens at Karrayili is questionable. But if we view Karrayili instead from a social justice angle we can see that in allowing its students greater choice in what and how they study, and in challenging Kartiya ways of imposing education pedagogy, Karrayili is surely contributing to the important issue of facilitating autonomy and self-determination for Aboriginal Australians.

These findings suggest that there is scope for Indigenous education policy and programs to be more effective, particularly in terms of engaging learners, if greater emphasis is placed on enabling people and communities to become stronger as opposed to the current narrow focus on measurable outcomes. Community-controlled education providers, particularly when that community has been marginalised from the dominant culture and systems, have the ability to empower their communities. But decisions about, and understandings of, what makes people stronger must come from the learners and communities themselves, not be imposed from above.

Disempowerment through bureaucratic constraints

I have so far reviewed and discussed the findings of this thesis in regard to what happens at Karrayili from the learner-centred perspective as revealed in Chapters Five and Six. In Chapter Seven I moved on to an analysis of some of the tensions and contradictions that are created when an Aboriginal-directed education provider such as Karrayili is required to operate under the auspices of mainstream bureaucratic systems. Differences in expectations of learners' aspirations and motivations for learning, and in understandings of how best to cater to the learners' very context-specific needs, leads to a

mismatch which can result in the education provider being limited in the services they provide.

In attempting to deliver services that are locally appropriate, while simultaneously maintaining responsibilities to mainstream funding and accreditation bodies, Karrayili is severely constrained in terms of what it can achieve for the benefit of individuals and the Fitzroy Valley community. In this way the bureaucratic systems that govern the operation of Karrayili serve to disempower the learners and the community by constraining, and to some degree determining, the services Karrayili is able to offer its students. While staff and students find ways to manage the limitations of the bureaucratic systems with which they must comply, these limitations nevertheless create tensions and frustrations for all those involved at ground level in the delivery of education services to adults at Karrayili. Karrayili is all about meeting students' needs, but the accreditation and funding systems within which it is forced to operate often limit the Karrayili staff's ability to do this as effectively as they would like to.

In failing to sufficiently acknowledge and allow for the cultural, linguistic and social differences that may exist for marginalised adult learners, mainstream systems limit and constrain those attempting to provide them with appropriate education services. This reinforces power imbalances and encourages a paternalistic approach to teaching and learning. It disempowers individuals, who know what they want or need to learn and what their preferred learning methods are. Rather than empowering students, as supposed, the current deficit approach toward literacy learning for adults can in fact lead to disempowerment of the learners.

One of the most powerful ways in which current adult education regulations disempowers Karrayili is through the funding systems. Funding needs to be consistent and reliable, but in recent years has become increasingly fragmented and difficult for Karrayili to secure. As noted by the Karrayili Principal, current systems are focused on a push for "quick results, quick qualifications, get a job", with funding dependent on proof of enrolments and completions. But at Karrayili things don't work like this. Nothing is quick,

people aren't job-focused, and the realities of employment don't fit commonly-held assumptions. What Karrayili wants, and needs, is to have the social aspect of adult education recognised and appropriately and sufficiently funded.

At this stage I would like to make one final but pivotal comment regarding the findings of this research. In no way am I suggesting that the findings of this thesis, with regard to the needs and aspirations of the learners at Karrayili, are representative of all Indigenous Australians. It is important to recognise the extraordinary diversity among Indigenous groups, and diversity among adult learners. What works at Karrayili might not necessarily work elsewhere, but the findings of this research do indicate that there is a need for localised decision-making and acknowledgement of difference in adult education. Not just difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, or between Indigenous Australians in remote or non-remote regions, but diversity in general.

However, current policy directions, and in particular the 'Closing the gap' campaign, fail to reflect this. As noted by Altman and Fogarty, policy regarding Indigenous education in recent years has been marked by its emphasis on an "increasingly complex, managerial and technical approach to addressing undeniable Indigenous disadvantage. ... As policy has become more monolithic and monopolistic, the state has become less sympathetic to the diversity and difference that is a feature of Indigenous societies, especially in remote Australia" (2010, p. 109).

Limitations of the research

In Chapter One I stated that my objectives were to investigate the Karrayili learners' perceptions of the value of adult education and literacy learning in their lives. I wanted to find out why they go to Karrayili, what they do there, and whether learning in this context is different from mainstream. I wanted to learn what it means for Aboriginal adults to study at an Aboriginal-directed

education centre, and how what happens there 'fits' with mainstream bureaucratic and administrative policies and regulations.

My research has achieved these aims, as evidenced by the material in the case study chapters and the summary given above. However, as with any research there are some reservations regarding the extent to which my objectives have been met, the research methods used, and the conclusions reached, and it is important that these reservations are addressed here.

Doing ethnography, as I have discovered, is not as easy as it looks. It raises a number of issues around ethical interactions and representations, and in particular the use of participant observation places the researcher in the peculiar position of being at the same time an insider and an outsider. In observing Indigenous ways of doing research by ensuring that I spent time first developing relationships and building rapport with participants, my own level of engagement with the research context became extremely intricate. I became a part of Karrayili, I became a part of the Karrayili family and a part of the wider community. In doing so I gained family and friends, but I also took on obligations and responsibilities to individuals and the community. I developed genuine connections with the people and the environment, and I am still not sure whether I was, as a result, able to 'step back' sufficiently when it came time to analyse the evidence and write up the thesis. I have been very mindful of the dangers of romanticising Indigenous ways of doing and being, but at the same time was aware that given my connections with Karrayili it was difficult for me to change roles from staff member/friend/family to objective researcher.

My own discomfort in the role of researcher, detailed in Chapter Four, also impacted on my research. Perhaps had I been more confident or comfortable in this role earlier on, I would have conducted more interviews with a wider range of participants. It is difficult to know whether my discomfort held back my research and limited the results, or whether by fitting in with Aboriginal ways of doing - in that I approached my research in a measured, quiet way, allowing the participants themselves to determine, to a

large extent, when they would be interviewed and where – it helped me develop the rapport essential to doing the research.

The rapport that I developed certainly helped me to fulfil the ethical requirements of doing research with Indigenous people, as outlined in Chapter Four. Ultimately, however, I went to the research site as an outsider. Although I built good relationships and was accepted into the community, making lasting friendships and being given a skin name, I remained, to some large extent, an outsider. In this thesis I have endeavoured to represent local Indigenous values and beliefs about education and training, but inevitably I can only represent it from my own non-Indigenous perspective. If future research in this area were to be carried out by an Indigenous person familiar with the remote context, this could provide an interesting complement to my thesis by applying an Indigenous perspective to the same subject.

Issues of literacy and the use of Standard Australian English by Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing are raised in my research, but I have not placed a great deal of emphasis on them. As I noted earlier, while literacy use was my original focus, the shape of my thesis changed as I engaged with everyday life at the research site in greater depth, becoming more focused on issues of diversity, power and equity. Yet the use of SAE in Fitzroy Crossing, or perhaps more accurately the lack of such use, is certainly worthy of further investigation. Of particular interest are the contradictions regarding English use in Fitzroy Crossing. People say they need to learn SAE, but then don't go to classes or appear to make much effort to use it. In addition Aboriginal people in Fitzroy Crossing rarely need to use SAE outside interactions with Kartiya, yet it is those very interactions which generally have the most serious consequences for people's lives – for example dealing with Centrelink, the police, hospital staff, or at native title meetings. There is certainly scope here for further research.

Summary

This thesis has added to knowledge by describing and analysing what happens in adult Aboriginal education *at the level of practice*. It demonstrates how adult education for Indigenous learners, using a culture-centred, social practice approach, can be effective in terms of engaging learners and meeting their needs as defined by them. At the same time it raises questions as to the match of current policy directions for adult education in an Indigenous context, identifying that the current emphasis on a human capital approach is not only inappropriate, but is actively hampering centres such as Karrayili in their efforts to provide culturally appropriate education services to their students.

Key to the findings of this research is the need for recognition and appreciation of diversity. What matters, and what this thesis has made a significant contribution to, is, in the words of the current Principal, “having people get what and who we [at Karrayili] *really are*”. A homogenous approach to adult education will only ever represent the needs of a particular section of society, and that section is generally those who are already privileged in terms of access to opportunities for further education. Those of us who ‘fit in’ with mainstream approaches to education have greater access to lifelong learning, and to choosing the types of learning that we want. Adult learning in Australia continues to be dominated by particular pedagogies and philosophies of education and by policies that perpetuate the marginalisation of those who don’t ‘fit in’. For adult education to be equitable Indigenous learners, and perhaps other marginalised groups too, need to be provided with real choices about what and how they learn.

There are no easy answers to issues of Aboriginal literacy in Australia. In particular there is the ongoing paradox of Aboriginal learners, in remote areas at least, identifying for themselves the need for improved SAE skills, while in real terms they have little need to use SAE on a daily basis. What this research has shown is that teaching and learning needs to be meaningful to the learners if it is to be effective, and in this context such meaning often

comes not from the prospect of improving English skills or getting a job at the end of their training, but from the social, cultural, and linguistic landscapes of their everyday lives.

For my final comments I would like to return to the case study site at the heart of this research, Karrayili Adult Education Centre. In 2012, more than two years since I completed my primary research for this thesis, Karrayili is changing. With new buildings, the campus has expanded and now has some wonderful new facilities for the provision of quality training and education for the Fitzroy Valley communities. Yet the original cohort of students, the 'old people' and the KCs, the driving forces behind Karrayili, are getting old. Naturally they are tired, and while they still attend it is less regularly and with less enthusiasm than before. They speak now of being ready to hand over to the 'young ones', but at this stage it is unclear whether a new generation of learners are prepared to step up and take their places.

Karrayili is going through transition in other ways too. With new technologies and younger people's strong interest in computers, there is scope for a greater focus on using IT in students' learning. This is already happening to some extent, with the Business Lecturer having introduced online learning for outlying communities. In addition the Centre's latest Strategic Plan is strongly geared towards shifting Karrayili more firmly towards the provision of both-ways learning and literacy, building on its strengths as a cultural knowledge base, supporting the community in maintaining and transmitting cultural practices and educating the Kartiya community regarding cultural awareness. As always, though, Karrayili is dependent on receiving sufficient and appropriate funding in order to achieve its aims. With recent changes to funding for accredited training only exacerbating its financial situation, those closely involved with Karrayili now have grave concerns as to whether or not the Centre will be able to survive for much longer.

In determining directions in adult education in Australia, there needs to be greater focus in the policy discourse on what is considered 'success'. Whose definitions of successful learning practices, or accountability, are driving the

design and direction of adult education policy? Is it really just about completing qualifications and providing measurable outcomes? Or is there room for 'success' to also encompass capacity-building for Indigenous communities to make themselves stronger, with strong communities and strong people, people who have pride in what they do? In terms of completions and getting people job-ready, Karrayili struggles to meet mainstream ideals of what an adult education centre should do. Yet what it does do is far more important: it supports people in building their self-esteem, their pride in their culture and languages, and helps them to live meaningful lives. I'll leave the final word to TV, one of the Karrayili lecturers, who told me when asked which outcomes are important at Karrayili:

Well, I mean it's all about qualitative outcomes which are very difficult to measure. How do you measure somebody's confidence and willingness to engage in other bureaucracy? I mean in my room I've got a speaker phone and people will come in and ask for help with um, oh say with for example renewing a gun licence (laughing), and we help people with that, although it's not at all related to Certificate II in Indigenous Environmental Health work but that, that's everyday life stuff for people and so people want me to ring and deal with this bureaucracy. And I'll say "Nah, come on, I know you're a strong talker, we'll do it together". So together we sit on the speaker phone, and together we answer the questions, and I'll answer some things, if people want me to, or I'll encourage people to speak up and, whereas before they would have handed all of that over to be done by somebody else, so ... then the next time that person might do it themselves and I'll be there to help out, like if they need some assistance. But you know, they'll feel more confident to do that. That's immeasurable isn't it?

References

- Abdullah, J., & Stringer, E. (1997). *Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Learning, Indigenous Research* (Vol. 7). Perth, WA: Curtin Indigenous Research Centre.
- Aboriginal Literacy Foundation. (2011). *Aboriginal Disadvantage Worsening*, from <http://www.aboriginalliteracyfoundation.org/Media/8-6-11.html>
- Aboriginal Literacy Foundation. (n.d.). from <http://www.aboriginalliteracyfoundation.org/our-programs.html>
- Altman, J., & Fogarty, B. (2010). Indigenous Australians as 'No Gaps' Subjects: Education and Development in Remote Australia. In I. Snyder & J. Nieuwenhuysen (Eds.), *Closing the Gap Closing the Gap in Education? Improving Outcomes in Southern World Societies*. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing.
- Anderson, G. L. (1989). Critical Ethnography in Education: Origins, Current Status, and New Directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 249-271`.
- Antone, E., & Cordoba, T. (2005). Re-Storying Aboriginal Literacy. Retrieved from <http://www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/6-2005/pdf/antone+cordoba.pdf>
- Antone, E. M. (2000). Empowering Aboriginal voice in Aboriginal education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24, 92-101.
- Arbon, V. (1998). Presence and dialogue: The need for balance in remote tertiary education *Ngoonjook*, 14, 16-30.
- Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (2001). *Handbook of Ethnography*. London Sage Publications Ltd.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008a). *4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2006 (Reissue)* Retrieved from [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228.0Main%20Features22006%20\(Reissue\)?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4228.0&issue=2006%20\(Reissue\)&num=&view=.](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228.0Main%20Features22006%20(Reissue)?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4228.0&issue=2006%20(Reissue)&num=&view=)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008b). *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey: Users' Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/4720.0~2008~Main+Features~Education?OpenDocument#PARALINK13>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). 2075.0 - Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.nsf/web/Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+Peoples+-+Population>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). 4517.0 - Prisoners in Australia, 2012, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/BD0021D329F0464FCA257B3C000DCCE0?opendocument>

- Australian Council for Adult Literacy. (2001). *A Literate Australia: National Position Paper on the Future Adult Literacy and Numeracy Needs of Australia*.
- Australian Indigenous Health Info Net.). *Closing the Gap*, 2012, from <http://www.healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap/key-facts/what-is-the-history-of-closing-the-gap>
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2012). *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Retrieved from <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/files/research/GERAIS.pdf>.
- Balatti, J., Black, S., & Falk, I. (2006). *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)*.
- Barton, D. (1994). *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. New York: Routledge.
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy Practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge.
- Battiste, M. (2008). Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: Institutional and Researcher Responsibilities. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 497-510). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. Y. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Beresford, Q., Partington, G., & Gower, G. (2012). *Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education*. Crawley: UWA Publishing.
- Berndt, R. M., & Berndt, C. H. (1952). *The First Australians*. Sydney: Ure Smith
- Berndt, R. M., & Berndt, C. H. (1980). *Aborigines of the West: Their past and their present*. Nedlands WA: University of Western Australia Press.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (2003). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. London: Zed Books.
- Biskup, P. (1973). *Not slaves, not citizens: The aboriginal problem in Western Australia, 1898-1954*. New York: University of Queensland Press
- Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., & Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boughton, B. (1998). *Alternative VET pathways to indigenous development*. Leabrook, SA: NCVER.

- Boughton, B., & Durnan, D. (1997a) Best practice and benchmarking in Aboriginal community-controlled education. Sydney, NSW: Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers.
- Boughton, B., & Durnan, D. (1997b). Education for self-determination: a review of the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in relation to Aboriginal community-controlled adult education: a project report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Alice Springs, NT: FIAEP.
- Boughton, B., & Durnan, D. (2004). Beyond equity? Indigenous people's rights and the national VET system. In K. Bowman (Ed.), *Equity in vocational education and training : research readings*. . Adelaide, South Australia: NCVET.
- Brandt, D., & Clinton, K. (2002). Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(3), pp. 337-356.
- Brisset-Blackley, C. (2000). Karrayili at Wangkatjungka. In S. McGinty, T. I. Jimbidie & P. G. Smiler (Eds.), *Karrayili: Adult education in a remote Australian community*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Bulfin, S., & North, S. (2007). Negotiating Digital Literacy Practices Across School and Home: Case Studies of Young People in Australia. *Language and Education*, 21(3), pp. 247-263.
- Bulugardie, H., Richards, E., Hudson, J., & Lowe, P. (2002). *Out of the Desert: Stories from the Walmajarri Exodus*. Broome: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation.
- Burawoy, M. (1998). The Extended Case Method. *Sociological Theory*, 16(1).
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1993). Critical Ethnography of a Sri Lankan Classroom: Ambiguities in Student Opposition to Reproduction Through ESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 601-626.
- Canieso-Doronila, M. L. (1996). *Landscapes of literacy: An ethnographic study of functional literacy in marginal Philippine communities*. Paris: UNESCO Institute for Education.
- Castanheira, M. L., Crawford, T., Dixon, C. N., & Green, J. L. (2000). Interactional Ethnography: An Approach to Studying the Social Construction of Literate Practices. *Linguistics and Education*, 11(4), pp. 353-400.
- Castleton, G. (2002b). Adult literacy identified as priority for improving Aboriginal health. *Literacy Link*, 22(5).
- Castleton, G., & McDonald, M. (2002). A decade of literacy: policy, programs and perspectives. Qld: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC), Griffith University.
- Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., & Gee, J. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-92.

- Choo, C. (2001). *Mission girls : Aboriginal women on Catholic missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950*. Crawley, W. A.: University of Western Australia Press.
- Christie, F., Clark, D., Gerot, L., & Palmer, M. (1993). *Adult Literacy in Urban Situations in the Northern Territory*. Darwin: Centre for Studies of Language in Education, Northern Territory University.
- Christie, M. (2005). Local versus Global Knowledges: A Fundamental Dilemma In 'Remote Education'. Retrieved from www.cdu.edu.au/centres/inc/pdf/Local_v_Global_Knowledges.pdf
- COAG Reform Council. (2012). *Indigenous reform 2010–11: Comparing performance across Australia*. Sydney NSW: COAG Reform Council. Retrieved from [http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/docs/ir_10-11_comparing/Indigenous Reform 2010-11 full%20report.pdf](http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/docs/ir_10-11_comparing/Indigenous_Reform_2010-11_full%20report.pdf).
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (1998). Multiliteracies: Meeting the communications challenge in TAFE *The Australian TAFE Teacher*, 32(2), 28-29.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. New York: Routledge.
- Corson, D. (1999). *Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for Teachers and Administrators*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cotterall, S., & Crabbe, D. (1999). *Learner autonomy in language learning: Defining the field and effecting change*. : Peter Lang.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage*. Council of Australian Governments: Retrieved from <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/65>.
- Council of Australian Governments. (n.d.). Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, from https://www.coag.gov.au/closing_the_gap_in_indigenous_disadvantage
- Crazy Bull, C. (1997). A native conversation about research and scholarship. *Tribal College*, 9(1), 17-23.
- Curtin University Centre for Aboriginal Studies.). Research in Indigenous Communities, from <https://karda.curtin.edu.au/research/research-indigenous-communities.cfm>
- Dei, G. J. S. (1997). *Reconstructing'dropout': A critical ethnography of the dynamics of black students' disengagement from school*: University of Toronto Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. (2009). *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage: The Challenge for Australia*. Retrieved from http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/closing_the_gap.pdf.

- Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. (2012). Find and Connect Western Australia, from <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/wa/biogs/WE00504b.htm>
- Eady, M., Herrington, A., & Jones, C. (2010). Literacy practitioners' perspectives on adult learning needs and technology approaches in Indigenous communities. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 50*(2).
- Elkin, A. P. (1932). Social Organization in the Kimberley Division, North-Western Australia. *Oceania, 2*(3), 296-333.
- Elkin, A. P. (1979). Aboriginal-European relations in Western Australia: an historical and personal record. In R. a. C. Berndt (Ed.), *Aborigines of the West: Their past and their present* (pp. 285-323). Perth: University of Western Australia Press.
- Fetterman, D. (1988). *Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fetterman, D. (2010). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (Vol. 17). California: Sage.
- Fogarty, W., & Schwab, R. G. (2012). Indigenous Education: Experiential Learning and Learning Through Country. Retrieved from caepr.anu.edu.au
- Foster, S., & Beddie, F. (2005). Adult literacy and numeracy: At a glance. : National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)
- Freebody, P. (2007). *Literacy Education in School: Research perspectives from the past, for the future*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fujiwara, D. (2012). Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning: An analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
- Gee, J. (1996). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses (2nd ed)*. London: Farmer.
- Gee, J. (nd). The New Literacy Studies and the "Social Turn" Retrieved 1 May, 2007, from <http://www.schools.ash.org.au/litweb/page300.html>
- Gee, J. P. (2003). *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- George, P. (2001). Research on Aboriginal Literacy in Australia Retrieved 20.10.2006, from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/abo-aus/abo-aus.PDF>

- Gray, J., & Beresford, Q. (2008). A 'formidable challenge': Australia's quest for equity in Indigenous education. *Australian Journal of Education*, 52(2), 197-223.
- Gray, W. S. (1956). *The Teaching of Reading and Writing*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Grenier, L. (1998). *Working with Indigenous Knowledge: A Guide for Researchers*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- Groome, H., & Hamilton, A. (1995). Meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Harris, J. W. (1991). Kriol—the creation of a new language. In S. Romaine (Ed.), *Language in Australia* (pp. 195-203). Cambridge: CUP.
- Harrison, N. (2003). Grounded Theory or Grounded Data?: the Production of Power and Knowledge in Ethnographic Research. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 32, 101-106.
- Hawke, S., & Gallagher, M. (1989). *Noonkanbah : whose land, whose law*. Fremantle, W.A: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1980). The Functions and Uses of Literacy. *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 123-133.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. B., & Street, B. V. (2008). *On Ethnography: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hope, A. (2008). *Record of Investigation into Death*. Retrieved from http://www.safetyandquality.health.wa.gov.au/docs/mortality_review/inquest_finding/Kimberley_Coronial_Report_Findings.pdf.
- Hudson, J. (1985). *Grammatical and Semantic Aspects of Fitzroy Valley Kriol* (Vol. 8). Darwin: Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch.
- Hughes, I. (1995). Dependent autonomy: A new phase of internal colonialism. *Australian Journal of Social Issues (Australian Council of Social Service)*, 30(4).
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. (1997). *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Retrieved from http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf.
- Irwin, K. (1994). Maori Research Methods and Processes: An Exploration. *Sites: A Journal for South Pacific Cultural Studies*, 28, 25-43.
- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Kaberry, P. (1939). *Aboriginal Woman, Sacred and Profane*. New York: Gordon Press.

- Kalman, J. (1999). *Writing on the plaza. The mediated literacy practices of scribes and their clients in Mexico City*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Karrayili Adult Education Centre. (n.d.). Tell me more about the people I work with. Fitzroy Crossing: Karrayili Adult Education Centre.
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre. (1996). *Yirra: Land, Law and Culture, Strong and Alive*. Fitzroy Crossing: Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC).
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre. (2006). *New Legend: A Story of Law and Culture and the Fight for Self-Determination in the Kimberley*. Fitzroy Crossing: Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre.
- Kimberley Language Resource Centre. (1996). *Moola Bulla: In the Shadow of the Mountain*. Broome: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation.
- Kinnane, S., Farrington, F., Henderson-Yates, L., & Parker, H. (2010). Fitzroy Valley Alcohol Restriction Report: An evaluation of the effects of a restriction on take-away alcohol relating to measurable health and social outcomes, community perceptions and behaviours after a two year period. Mt Lawley, WA: The Drug and Alcohol Office.
- Kolig, E. (1987). *The Noonkanbah Story*. Dunedin, N.Z.: University of Otago Press.
- Kozol, J. (1985). *Illiterate America*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Kral, I. (2009). The literacy question in remote Indigenous Australia. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.
- Kral, I. (2012). *Talk, Text and Technology: Literacy and Social Practice in a Remote Indigenous Community*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Kral, I., & Falk, I. (2004). What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult literacy practices, training, community capacity and health. Adelaide, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), .
- Kral, I., & Schwab, R. G. (2003). The realities of Indigenous adult literacy acquisition and practice: Implications for capacity development in remote communities: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
- LaBelle, S. (2011). Language and Identity. *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*. (pp. 173-188). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Lankshear, C. (1986). Humanizing Functional Literacy: Beyond Utilitarian Necessity. *Educational Theory*, 36(4).
- Lankshear, C. (1997). *Changing Literacies*. : . Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place. *Interchange*, 17(4), 63-84.

- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawford, E., Shandley, J., Bird, J., Watson, I., Clancy, P., Watson, J., . . . Barnes, B. (1989). *Raparapa: all right, now we go 'longside the river*. Broome, WA: Magabala Books.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *The Ethnographer's Toolkit*. New Jersey: Altamira Press, A Division of Roman and Littlefield.
- Levine, K. (1986). *The Social Context of Literacy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Lo Bianco, J., & Freebody, P. (1997). *Australian Literacies: Informing national policy on literacy education*. Belconnen ACT: Language Australia Publications.
- Lonsdale, M., & McCurry, D. (2004). *Literacy in the new millenium*. Adelaide: NCVER.
- Lowe, P., & Pike, J. (2009). *You Call It Desert - We Used To Live There*. Broome: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation.
- Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia. *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy*, 43(5), 448-461.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1997). The social practices of reading. In S. Muspratt, A. Luke & P. Freebody (Eds.), *Constructing critical literacies: Teaching and learning textual practice*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Madison, D. S. (2011). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Martin, K. (2003). Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing: a theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous research and Indigenist research. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 76, 203-214.
- May, S. (1999). *Indigenous Community-based Education*. Artamon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- McConaghy, C. (2000). *Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing*. Flaxton, Queensland: Post Pressed.
- McGinty, S., Jimbidie, T. I., & Smiler, P. G. (2000). *Karrayili: Adult education in a remote Australian community*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- McGlusky, N., & Thaker, L. (2006). Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
- McGregor, W. R. (2004). *The Languages of the Kimberley, Western Australia*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- McMullen, J. (2006). Australia's Greatest Challenge - the Link between Indigenous Health and Education. *Literacy Link*, 26(4), 1-4. Retrieved from http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/newsletters/LL2006/LL_Dec06.pdf

- Mihesuah, D. A. (1998). *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Miller, C. (2005). Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: A systematic review of research. *NCVER*.
- Mills, K. (2007). Access to multiliteracies: a critical ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(3), pp. 305-325.
- Morphy, F. (2010). Population, People and Place: The Fitzroy Valley Population Project. Canberra, ACT: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.
- Munro, J. M. (2000). Kriol on the move: A case of language spread and shift in Northern Australia. In J. Siegel (Ed.), *Processes of Language Contact. Studies from Australia and the South Pacific* (pp. 245-270). Saint Laurent QC: Fides.
- Musharbash, Y. (2008). *Yuendumu Everyday: Contemporary life in remote Aboriginal Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Naidoo, L. (2008). Supporting African refugees in Greater Western Sydney: a critical ethnography of after-school homework tutoring centres. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 7(3), 139-150.
- Nakata, M. (1998). Anthropological texts and Indigenous standpoints. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 3-12.
- Nakata, M. (1999). History, Cultural Diversity & English Language Teaching. In P. Wignell (Ed.), *Double Power: English literacy and Indigenous education* (pp. 5-23). Melbourne: Language Australia, the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia Ltd.
- Nakata, M. (2003). Some Thoughts on Literacy Issues in Indigenous Contexts. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 31, 7-15.
- Nakata, M., & Nakata, V. (2002). Changing Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum. In M. Kalantzis, G. Varnava-Skoura & B. Cope (Eds.), *Learning for the future: New worlds, new Literacies, new learning, new people* (pp. 145-154). Altona: Common Ground Publishing.
- Papen, U. (2005). *Adult Literacy as Social Practice: More than skills*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.
- Pearson, N. (2000). *Our Right to Take Responsibility*. Cairns: Noel Pearson and Associates.
- Philpott, D., & Nesbit, W. C. (2010). Approaching Educational Empowerment: Guidelines from a Collaborative Study with the Innu of Labrador. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 1(1).
- Prinsloo, M., & Breier, M. (1996). *The Social Uses of Literacy: Theory and Practice in Contemporary South Africa*. Cape Town: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Prout, S. (2008). On the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia (Vol. 48). Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.
- Putt, J. (2013). Conducting research with Indigenous people and communities. Retrieved from www.indigenousjustice.gov.au
- Richards, E. (2000). A Journey of Language and Literacy. In S. McGinty, T. I. Jimbidie & P. G. Smiler (Eds.), *Karrayili*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Rigney, L. I. (1999). *The first perspective: Culturally safe research practices on or with Indigenous peoples*. Paper presented at the Chacmool Conference, University of Calgary, Canada.
- Robinson-Pant, A. (2000). Women and literacy: a Nepal perspective. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(4), pp.349-364.
- Rumley, H., & Toussaint, S. (1990). 'For Their Own Benefit'? A Critical Overview of Aboriginal Policy and Practice at Moola Bulla, East Kimberley, 1910-1955. *Aboriginal History* 14(1), 80-103.
- Sandefur, J. R. (1984). *A language coming of age: Kriol of North Australia*. Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia.
- Sarantakos, S. (1993). *Social research*. South Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Sarra, C. (2009). 2009 NAPLAN Data, from <http://chrissarra.wordpress.com/2009/09/11/2009-naplan-data/>
- Sarra, C. (2011). *Strong and Smart - Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation*. New York: Routledge.
- Schultz, E. A., & Lavenda, R. H. (2005). *Cultural Anthropology: A perspective on the human condition* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schwab, R. G., & Sutherland, D. (2001). Building Indigenous learning communities: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
- Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1988). Unpacking Literacy. In E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), *Perspectives on Literacy* (pp. 57-70). Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (2nd edition ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Smith, M., Trinidad, S., & Biemmi Beurteaux, E. (2008). *Blogging in the Bush: Using Social Computing to enhance adult literacy in remote Western Australia*. Paper presented at the Australian Computers in Education.
- Smylie, J., Williams, L., & Cooper, N. (2006). Culture-based Literacy and Aboriginal Health. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 97(2), 21-25.

- Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011*. Retrieved from http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/111609/key-indicators-2011-report.pdf.
- Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. V. (1995). *Social literacies: critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. London: Longman.
- Street, B. V. (1996). Literacy and Power? *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 6(2), 7-16.
- Street, B. V. (2000). Literacy events and literacy practices: Theory and practice in the New Literacy Studies. In K. Jones & M. Martin-Jones (Eds.), *Multilingual Literacies: Reading and writing different worlds* (pp. 17–29). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Street, B. V. (2001). *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Street, B. V. (2003). What's 'new' in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), 77 - 91.
- Street, B. V. (2005). Recent Applications of New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(4), 417-424.
- Sullivan, P. (1996). *All Free Man Now: Culture, Community and Politics in the Kimberley Region, North-Western Australia*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- Tett, L., Hamilton, M., & Crowther, J. (2012). *More Powerful Literacies*. Leicester: NIACE.
- The Australian Government. (2009). The Australian Government's Indigenous Portal Retrieved 22 November 2009, from https://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra/wa/fact_sheets/wa02.html
- The New London Group. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1).
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing Critical Ethnography* (Vol. 26). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Toussaint, S. (1989). Aboriginal and non Aboriginal healing, health and knowledge: Sociocultural and environmental issues in the West Kimberley. *Aboriginal Health Information Bulletin* (Vol. 12, pp. 30-35).
- Toussaint, S., Sullivan, P., Yu, S., & Mularty Jnr., M. (2001). Fitzroy Valley Indigenous Cultural Values Study. Retrieved from http://portal.environment.wa.gov.au/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/DOE_ADMIN/PROJECTS/TAB2405944/FITZROY%20ABORIGINAL%20CULTURAL%20VALUES.DOC.PDF

- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies : research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Van Maanen, J. (2001). Natives 'R' Us: Some Notes on the Ethnography of Organizations. In D. N. Gellner & E. Hirsch (Eds.), *Inside Organizations*. Oxford: Berg.
- Walton, C. (1993). Literacy in Aboriginal contexts : re-examining pedagogy. In A. Luke (Ed.), *Literacy in contexts : Australian perspectives and issues* (pp. pp 39-45): Allen & Unwin.
- Walton, C. (1996). *Critical Social Literacies*. Darwin: NTUniprint.
- Welch, A. R. (1988). Aboriginal Education as Internal Colonialism: the schooling of an Indigenous minority in Australia. *Comparative Education*, 24(2), pp. 203-215.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Western Australian Planning Commission. (2009). Fitzroy Futures Town Plan: Shire of Derby West Kimberley, Bunuba Inc.
- Wickert, R. (1989). No Single Measure: A survey of Australian adult literacy. Broadway, NSW: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Wignell, P. (1999). Rough Diamonds: a case study of workplace literacy and training for Indigenous workers in the mining industry. In P. Wignell (Ed.), *Double Power: English literacy and Indigenous education* (pp. 95-120). Melbourne: Language Australia.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.
- Yunupingu, M. (1999). Double Power. In P. Wignell (Ed.), *Double Power: English literacy and Indigenous Education* (pp. 1-4). Melbourne, Australia: Language Australia, the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia Ltd.

Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.