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## From Pink Floyd to Pink Hill: Transforming Education from the Bricks in the Wall to the Connections of Country in Remote Aboriginal Education

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*Abstract: In this paper, we present findings from an eighteen-month research project conducted in a remote community school in Western Australia. The data from this project includes documentation pertaining to the practices of educators engaging with Aboriginal Elders and children on Country. The aim of the project was to document the transformative potential of learning on Country for young Aboriginal children (4-8 years). We discuss our findings in the context of Pink Floyd's metaphor of formal education being built and maintained as a Wall in which children are 'just another brick'. We argue that education is an institution that produces and reproduces inequalities for Aboriginal children through conforming and colonial pedagogical practices. To support our analysis and framing of this research we draw on Habermas' knowledge interests (1978) and MacNaughton's curriculum positions (2003). Using this framework, we propose that transformative pedagogies necessitate the school and the community to be 'ready, willing and able' to engage in an approach to learning and teaching that is grounded in 'Country'. We juxtapose the conforming pedagogies of the Wall with the transforming pedagogies represented by Pink Hill, a sacred feature of the landscape alongside the community where the research took place.*

### Introduction

In this paper we share our experience as participant researchers in an On Country Learning (OCL) project that took place with very young children, their teachers, Traditional Owners<sup>1</sup> and Elders<sup>2</sup> in a remote Aboriginal Community in the upper Gascoyne region of Western Australia. While other authors have examined the impact of OCL on older students and university cohorts (Godinho, Woolley, Scholes & Sutton, 2017; Mcknight, 2016), the work we present in this paper offers unique insights into the efficacy of engaging young children in OCL at the foundation of their education.

We report on one aspect of our findings from the eighteen-month project. Through our fieldwork notes, classroom observations and reflective dialogue we conceptualise our

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of 'traditional Aboriginal owners' is ... a local descent group of Aboriginals who: (a) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land; and (b) are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land (Edelman, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> An Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. In some instances, Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders. It is important to understand that, in traditional Aboriginal culture, age alone doesn't necessarily mean that one is recognised as an Elder. Aboriginal people traditionally refer to an Elder as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. However, it is recommended that non-Aboriginal people check the appropriateness of their use of these terms. (Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation (n.d.)).

findings using Habermas' knowledge interests (1978) as they have been adapted by MacNaughton (2003) for early childhood settings. We use these as a tool to describe various curriculum positions held by educators in the study. These curriculum positions are explored using two metaphors. The first is the metaphor of *Pink Floyd's Wall* which we use to examine the conforming pedagogies of educators working with Aboriginal children. The second metaphor is *Pink Hill*, the hill is a sacred feature of the landscape alongside the school and community where the research took place. We utilise the Pink Hill metaphor to represent the transforming pedagogies of teachers working in ways that are grounded in Country and connected in a genuine way with local culture and community. These metaphors support our argument that effective educators are those who are *willing* and *able* to make the journey from conforming pedagogies to transforming pedagogies by developing a relationship with Country for themselves.

Both the authors have extensive experience in the area of Aboriginal education that include working in Aboriginal early childhood education, remote community schools and On Country Learning contexts in Western Australia. Jackson-Barrett is of *Whadjuk Nyungar* heritage whilst Lee-Hammond is non-Indigenous but of Sámi heritage. We have written this paper utilising Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing rather than a western-framed methodology (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Besserab, 2015). This is intentional and acknowledges that Indigenous knowledges and methods are valid in research.

### **A Land Belonging to No One?**

Aboriginal peoples<sup>3</sup> have been living on the continent of Australia for over 60,000 years, but when the British arrived, Cook categorised the land as *Terra Nullius* which translates from Latin to *land belonging to no one* (Pascoe, 2007; Price, 2012). A lasting ramification of *terra nullius* has been the establishment of a national mindset where Aboriginal peoples have been constructed as a 'dying race', 'un-educable' while their knowledges, cultures and languages contribute little or nothing to Australia's current or future national identity (Butler, 2000). Most educators are unaware that throughout the period 1840-1967, Indigenous access to education in schools in Western Australia was restricted and, in many instances denied and not encouraged which ultimately has prevented generations of teachers from developing an understanding of Aboriginal cultures and histories that would enable them to teach with understanding (Green, 2004). We acknowledge that it is difficult to teach what you don't know (Howard, 2006). These factors have had a devastating impact on the educational experiences of Aboriginal peoples across the generations.

Australia has recently developed a national curriculum (ACARA, 2014) and national professional teaching standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011). These developments address, to some extent, knowledge about 'Aboriginal histories, cultures and peoples' (AITSL, 2011, p. 6). Until these recent curriculum and professional standards were introduced, provision for this knowledge has been ad hoc at best (Craven, 2011; Price, 2012). It is in this historical and political context, that many Australian educators are engaged in what MacNaughton (2003) describes as, an educational enterprise based on cultural transmission via a conforming curriculum in which the status quo is perpetuated and unquestioned.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably and refer to those people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. We, the authors recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenous group. The Term 'Indigenous' is used to reflect this diversity.

## **We Don't Need No Neoliberal Agenda in Australian Education**

The need to decolonise education for Indigenous students is recognised globally (Grande, 2015; Smith, 2012). Responsibility for 'failure' in Indigenous education across Australia lies with a lack of capacity among educators to work effectively with Indigenous children (Langton, 2015). A transformative opportunity for enabling Indigenous voices to be included in the Australian education system begins with preparing teachers to be willing able and able to work in ways that honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This is underscored by Santoro, Reid, Crawford and Simpson (2011) who suggest that Australian education provide 'opportunities for non-Indigenous teachers and pre-service teachers to listen to and learn from their Indigenous colleagues' (p. 2).

Successive Australian governments have implemented educational policies that impede educational progress for many Aboriginal students at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a; Yunkaporta, 2009). Nakata (2007a) describes the cultural interface as the space where Western scientific knowledge and Indigenous knowledges intersect explaining that: "Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge" (p. 8). The 'cultural interface' is 'multi-layered and multidimensional' and intersected by 'time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses with and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation' (p. 199). The ongoing imposition of colonial discourses from within educational institutions has allowed the theoretical underpinnings of colonialism to remain the foundation of education for Aboriginal students.

By contrast, transformative practices come with the intention by all stakeholders to shift models of deficit to culturally responsive pedagogies that encompass the worldviews of Country, cultures, peoples and sacred spaces such as Pink Hill, which is located at the project site. One transformative practice we explore in this paper is On Country Learning in early childhood education. While other scholars have conducted similar work on Country, our study is situated in the early years of school with the intent to provide young Aboriginal children with the cultural and linguistic foundations that are known to support their identities and wellbeing throughout their lives (Dudgeon, Walker, Scrine, Shepherd, Calma & Ring, 2014). McKnight's (2016) study with tertiary academics regarding the embedding of Aboriginal perspectives into teacher education programs explores how a social justice framework can often preserve the status quo of colonial discourse and curriculum, whilst at the same time providing the platform for non-Indigenous academics to broaden their standpoints and understanding. Suggesting that teacher education needs to move beyond a social justice lens, non-Indigenous academics were provided with an experience of Yuin<sup>4</sup> Country through Mingadhuga Mingayung (McKnight, 2015), in order to connect to the ontology and epistemology of Country. The knowledge of Country provided the space to yarn, experience and engage at level in which a new and authentic relationship to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing were formed – Country became the text to disrupt the colonial discourse through a new found sense of relatedness which then impacted the way academics worked alongside Aboriginal knowledge holders to embed Aboriginal perspectives into their curricula. In another Learning on Country study, Godinho, Woolley, Scholes, Mason and Sutton's (2017) research with middle school students evolved through ranger groups and local Indigenous communities, recognising the need for programs that promote intergenerational Indigenous knowledge of local land and sea environments.

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<sup>4</sup> Yuin Country "Extends from the Snowy River in the South to the escarpment of Wollongong, our northern boundary, and then out to the Southern Tablelands. Our Country follows the coast down and into Victoria" (Harrison and McConchie, 2009, p. 15)

Schools and education programs in remote areas have identified the potential of educational programs to link with land and sea management programs that combine Western science and Indigenous knowledge to support the acquisition of key skills and concepts. Learning on Country approaches are grounded in place-based pedagogy (Sobel, 2008), recognising the significance of focusing on what is most meaningful to the students – their places, culture, experiences and identity. Combining Western Science with Indigenous knowledge enables two-way learning, supporting educators to create pedagogies that are deeply connected to the reality of people's lives.

In his research in Maningrida<sup>5</sup>, with a junior ranger program, Fogarty (2015) found that learning through Country is an efficacious pedagogical device for working with year 11 and 12 students as part of a transition to work program. This project highlighted that learning through Country was influential in promoting care for Country and had potential to improve the employment prospects of young people. Our work takes a somewhat different emphasis to the above studies, examining the affordances of OCL for very young children to support their social and emotional wellbeing and to explore the pedagogies that support OCL (Dudgeon et.al, 2014).

## Theoretical Framework

The framework we draw upon is Habermas' knowledge interests (1978). Habermas' critical theory posits that knowledge areas are characterised by particular interests and these can be described as being either *technical*, *practical* or *critical* in nature. *Technical* knowledge interests seek to control and reproduce existing understandings. *Practical* knowledge interests seek to understand and reform the meanings people make from experiences, while *critical* knowledge interests seek to question existing knowledge and to transform it in an emancipatory way. In supporting early childhood educators to reflect on their practice, MacNaughton (2003) applied Habermas' knowledge interests as a tool for reflective practice and describes each interest in terms of its curriculum position. The *technical* aligns with what MacNaughton describes as a conforming curriculum position. The *practical* aligns with a reforming curriculum position and the *critical* aligns with a transforming curriculum position. This framework enables us to view pedagogical practice through the lens of the values, culture and society in which it takes place. MacNaughton argues that there is an 'ever shifting and debated curriculum landscape in which visions of the child as a learner, approaches to building curriculum for the child and *relationships within the curriculum* are highly context-bound and value-based' (2003, p. 1 our emphasis). We use knowledge interests and curriculum positions as ways of analysing pedagogies in the remote Aboriginal community school where our research took place. The pedagogies we report on represent the technical (conforming), practical (reforming) and critical (transforming) knowledge interests of educators and the ways these were manifested in this context.

Conforming curriculum positions are characterised by cultural transmission, reproducing skills and knowledge to achieve social, political and economic goals (MacNaughton, 2003). This position is informed by neoliberalism whereby education is an instrument of government to pursue economic benefits for the nation and to minimise dependency on welfare by creating productive citizens. Mandated national curriculum and national testing are ways in which government exerts control over teachers, families and children in order to control and perpetuate certain forms of knowledge, affording significance

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<sup>5</sup> Maningrida is an Aboriginal community in the heart of the Arnhem Land region of Australia's Northern Territory. Maningrida is 500 km (311 mi) east of Darwin,<sup>[1]</sup> and 300 km (186 mi) north east of Jabiru.

to some types of knowledge over others. In relation to Aboriginal education in Australia, a conforming curriculum may be understood as one implemented by teachers who may have a broad understanding of Aboriginal cultures, histories and languages but this awareness does little to inform their day to day practice or curriculum decision making (Department of Education, 2015).

Conforming curriculum is one of the instruments enabling the colonisation of knowledge to be perpetuated. We regard this curriculum position as highly problematic in that dominant (western) cultural discourses are foregrounded, while anti-colonial discourses are considered to be too radical to implement (Grande, 2015). Culturally appropriate epistemologies and pedagogies are marginalised or ignored in a conforming curriculum since they challenge the dominant paradigm and are frequently met with resistance (MaRhea, Anderson & Atkinson, 2012). Typically, culturally relevant practices are not embraced in educational systems (Apple, 1996). In the context of Aboriginal education, westernised curriculum and values are imposed, measured and reported upon regardless of the community and context in which they are located, and they frequently exclude the Aboriginal ontological premises of 'knowing, being and doing' (Martin, 2008a, p. 72). It is evident in some remote communities in Australia that measuring up to national benchmarks is neither desirous nor considered by the community to reflect the purpose of education (Guenther, Bat & Osborne, 2014).

An alternative to conforming curriculum is a reforming curriculum position that is characterised by an emphasis on the development of the individual. The goal of education is for the individual to realise their potential through experiences that are of benefit socially, emotionally, physically and academically. This position is informed by liberalism and is child-centred, giving rise to the notion that education is a tool of democracy and should be developmentally appropriate for children as individuals (NAEYC, 2009). An emphasis on the development of the individual, supported by a reforming approach to curriculum, is at odds with Indigenous ways of 'knowing, being and doing' (Martin, 2008a, p. 72) where the *collective* wellbeing of a community is valued over individual achievement (Broome, 1982). A philosophical standpoint of individualism conflicts with Aboriginal cultures stemming from strong 'collectivist' kinship systems (Broome, 1982). In relation to Aboriginal education, reforming curriculum positions adopted by educators can be equated to what is described often as *cultural awareness and cultural understanding* but falls short of *cultural responsiveness* (Department of Education, 2015). The reforming position is often characterised by educators providing safe and supportive environments for Aboriginal students to learn. They may build positive relationships with families and communities and include aspects of Aboriginal cultures in the curriculum in limited or tokenistic ways (Department of Education, 2015). The reforming approach may even look inclusive, it is certainly well meaning, however, it falls short of decolonising education, which we have identified as a necessary condition to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students in schools. Reforming is a step towards transformation since it starts from a place of awareness, understanding and respect. It assumes that families and communities should respond to the school in ways that align with existing centralised structures. Structures, as we have earlier seen, that seek to assimilate rather than invite the community to lead the school in a reciprocal and culturally determined relationship to learning that is local, contextual and relevant to the lives of members of that community. The reforming position is critical in explaining why the achievement gap in education for many Aboriginal students persists (Langton, 2015). For educators, a reforming curriculum is a safe place. This is partly due to the fact that teachers are poorly prepared to work in transformative ways (Craven, 2011) and have a fear and resistance to teaching Aboriginal perspectives, finding it easier to avoid them altogether (Craven, 2011; MaRhea, et.al., 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009).

A transforming curriculum position is characterised by an understanding of education as a means of transforming both the individual and the society, an emancipatory opportunity (Freire, 1972). A transforming position questions the power structures that have created and maintained the status quo (the conforming position) and seeks to challenge injustices, oppression and the “thought control” (Pink Floyd, 1979) perpetuated by education. A transforming curriculum disrupts the historically and socially constructed power positions of educators and the western curriculum. In the context of Aboriginal education, it is the only position that enables decolonisation. It challenges discourses at the epistemological level and is consistent with other decolonising movements occurring globally in colonised places (Grande, 2015; Smith, 2012). Educators who offer a transforming curriculum in Aboriginal education can be described as *culturally competent and responsive* (Department of Education, 2015). This means that educators respond to diversity within Aboriginal communities and actively build curriculum around the knowledges, experiences and languages of students and their communities (Department of Education, 2015). This approach looks like communities deciding for themselves what knowledge is to be shared, how, and by whom. It might involve revitalising cultural traditions and languages as central components of the school curriculum. It is these approaches to transforming relationships that characterise our work in On Country Learning.

### **On Country Learning**

The term Country has a profound spiritual meaning that embraces the land upon which one is born or connected to through birth-rite. Country has its own ceremonies, languages, songs and holds a deep sense of relationships, belonging and identity, all of which are a central tenet of one’s Aboriginal identity. Country is as described by Berry et al. (2010) as multi-dimensional and consisting of people, animals, plants, Dreaming, underground, earth and water.

On Country Learning (OCL) is a pedagogical approach to Aboriginal early years education that aims to provide transforming pedagogies for Aboriginal students by honouring the knowledge and wisdom of their communities and their relationship to Country. In practice, OCL consists of regular class group field trips to specific places on Country, the frequency of the visits is dependent upon how the community decide to run the program. This decision making represents one of the decolonising aspects of OCL since it devolves power to the community. The sites for the visits are chosen by the Traditional Owners from the community, so that they and/or Elders can teach and nurture children with the stories, skills, knowledge and values from that Country. Children are active participants in the experiences and are encouraged to explore and experiment in collaboration with their peers, teachers, Traditional Owners and Elders. Through this participation, the children adopt an active role in constructing meaning from their experiences (Vygotsky, 1978), and thus engage in deep learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). On Country Learning (OCL) places culture and Country at the centre of the curriculum rather than in the margins enabling children and educators to make connections between Country and mandated curriculum areas. Educators work with children, Traditional Owners, Elders, researchers and the community to construct a locally situated and contextualised curriculum and plan ongoing investigations in the classroom to build new knowledge and skills germinated from time spent on Country. OCL provides children with educational experiences that are relevant to their lives. This engages students at the central tenet of their being, their connection to Country.

## Ready, Willing and Able Educators

In the context of this research we draw on the typology used in the Educator's Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2010). This typology, developed to support Australian educators to become culturally competent (reforming), provides a useful framework for our later discussion of findings. The model's four quadrants depict educators at various stages of cultural competence. Whilst we argue that cultural competence must be taken further to embrace cultural responsiveness (transforming) (DEEWR, 2010) we nonetheless utilise this model as a tool for discussing the journey of educators from conforming curriculum (Pink Floyd) to transforming curriculum (Pink Hill).



Figure 1 - Educators Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2010, p.26)

Educators who are *willing* and *able* to enact pedagogies of transformation in Aboriginal education do so when they have the appropriate support from school leadership and the community to make this a reality, a theme we take up later in this paper. On the other hand, educators who are *unwilling* and *unable* are highly problematic in any context, but even more so in contexts where children are at educational risk. We see it as a matter of professional ethics and human rights that Aboriginal children and families should not be burdened by the practice of an educator who is *unwilling* and *unable* to enact pedagogies of transformation. Consequently, it highlights the importance for Initial Teacher Education programmes to teach about Aboriginal ways of knowing in culturally responsive and transformative ways.

## Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing

Indigenous ways of knowing and practices are as varied as Aboriginal peoples themselves, their community contexts and the Country/s that ground them (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Jackson-Barrett, Price, Stomski & Walker, 2015; Wilson, 2008). At all stages

of this project, we enacted Aboriginal ways of knowing and being by collaborating closely with the local community. Indigenous frameworks and research methods are varied and each context within research is being undertaken requires contextualisation so that the methods utilised fit with the community and nature of the research. We emphasise that what works in one context may be inappropriate in another. Rather, it is essential to understand the context and use previous work as the starting point.

Indigenous approaches lend themselves to situational responsiveness (Patton, 2002) and given the depth of the cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal peoples, their communities and contexts it is necessary and culturally appropriate to draw on a number of inquiry methods, while keeping in mind that Aboriginal protocols and school regulations need to be negotiated throughout.

The project's methodology is characterised by the Aboriginal protocol of 'to sit and listen' (Jackson-Barrett, et.al., 2015) that is, to listen to the voices of the Traditional Owners, Elders, children, parents, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) and teachers. Utilising Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing alongside design-based research (Reeves, 2006) allowed for flexibility in the implementation of OCL. Further, our research is underpinned with a decolonising approach that highlights existing frameworks within the school which are challenged by placing Indigenous methods front and centre allowing Country and the community to act as agents of change (Smith, 2012; Rigney, 1999).

### **Design-Based Research**

A methodological approach of design-based research (DBR) (Reeves, 2006; Reeves, Herrington & Oliver, 2005) is used as a framework for this project. The approach involves a series of phases, with each phase informing the next in a cycle of planning and evaluating actions. DBR situated alongside Aboriginal approaches of being, knowing and doing may seem unconventional, however our experience has been that these two approaches work effectively with one another.

DBR is a methodological approach that is particularly appropriate for research in Indigenous settings because of its strong consultative focus, and because it addresses complex problems in real contexts in collaboration with communities, schools and teachers. Unlike action research which is normally actioned by a participant and then supported by the researcher, design-based research begins with the premise that participants, in this case community Elders, teachers and students, are co-researchers and designers from the onset. Design based research takes place in situ and offers the opportunity to adjust the research design when and where needed so that researchers can test and generate the authenticity of the project. In this case, DBR supported the development of On Country Learning practice and pedagogies. It is also appropriate for research where an innovative approach is implemented, and there is an emphasis on *making* a project work, rather than simply researching *whether* it works or not. Involving the community and the school in planning, enacting and evaluating the OCL project in a series of phases over eighteen months we had the opportunity to review and refine the design at each phase by responding to feedback and evolving ideas. Design based research depends upon active input and participation, requiring close interaction by all involved in the research. This underpins the concept of relationships that are central to working alongside Aboriginal peoples and communities.

The research team's extensive experience in Aboriginal contexts has taught us that communities are complex systems, and research methods need to remain open and flexible. Combining Indigenous methodologies and design-based research afforded us opportunities to accommodate changes in the project in response to the community and the impacts of the

project itself. This approach draws upon the breadth and depth of all participants' experiences and enables the research to be enacted through a pedagogy of emancipation and empowerment (Rigney, 1999). Traditional Owners and Elders participating in the delivery of OCL were invited through yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) to contribute to the iterative design of OCL at all stages of the project. Researchers worked with Traditional Owners and Elders to support their leadership and to assist with program design for each phase of the OCL experiences. Traditional Owners and Elders made decisions about where the children would go and places they were not to go for cultural reasons and as researchers we respected their decision making and their roles as Custodians of Country. By engaging Traditional Owners and Elders, the school and community were able to shift learning from being situated only in the walls of the classroom (Pink Floyd) to the land on which the Traditional Owners shared their knowledge (Pink Hill).

## **Methods**

The participatory nature of this research emphasised the community's agency in the research process and contributed to the transforming pedagogies and relationships we report in our findings.

We selected a range of qualitative tools to gather data that enabled us to evaluate the capacity of OCL to transform relationships and curriculum. In this paper, we report on some of the qualitative data drawn from field notes, children's mapmaking (Clark, 2011) and classroom observations.

## **Participants**

A total of forty children were engaged in field trips on Country at different times during the project. A handful of children who attended this school regularly, participated in every OCL experience that was offered, while others, who were not in the community at various times, participated only once. Initially, the intention was that OCL experiences would occur fortnightly, however, due to a range of factors such as cultural obligations, weather conditions and vehicle availability, there was considerable flexibility in the timing of these trips. Any children who attended school on a day when OCL was on offer was invited to participate. A total of sixteen field trips were conducted over the life of the project. Thirteen Elders were involved in planning and delivering the OCL and providing feedback throughout the life of the project. Seven teachers and four Aboriginal Education Officers were also participants in the study.

## **Field Notes and Classroom Observations**

Throughout the 18 months in which the study was conducted, the researchers resided in the community for approximately a week at a time, to conduct field work on eight separate occasions. During these visits we wrote detailed field notes and at the end of each day, spent hours in reflective dialogue about our observations on Country and in classrooms. We spent time in classrooms each day observing practice and recording interactions. This data provided us with rich descriptions of practice and exemplars of conforming, reforming and transforming pedagogies. Due to some students and teachers changing from one visit to another we obtained ongoing consent to conduct the field work.

## **Mapmaking**

Supporting children to represent their experiences using maps (Yunkaporta, 2009) was an important tool in our research. Clark (2011) notes that “informant-led representations can promote ‘cultural brokerage’ by facilitating the exchange of meanings within learning communities and beyond.” (p. 311). This has been a particularly useful tool for our study as it has enabled children’s multimodal ways of knowing to be acknowledged and supported. Many of the children in this research experienced some challenges in reading and writing Standard Australian English (SAE). Our work with the youngest children in the school meant that this lack of facility with SAE was partly maturational and partly due to SAE being a second language or dialect. Rather than relying on the traditional pencil and paper ‘recount’ of OCL experiences, the mapmaking supported children to communicate their experiences and ideas in visual and creative modes (Yunkaporta, 2009) thus enabling them to participate in a transforming curriculum that supports and values their ways of ‘knowing being and doing’ (Martin, 2008a, p.72). The standard written recount, so heavily emphasised in the traditional school curriculum (conforming) was replaced by this method of reflection on learning and initiated a process of transformative pedagogy (transforming). Enabling children to experience success in communicating complex ideas and making meanings from them that may be shared and appreciated by members of their community is a significant outcome of the project. We use one of the children’s maps from Country in our data analysis later in this paper.

## **Ethics**

The research has ethical approval from Murdoch University and the Department of Education, Western Australia. This research was carried out in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for conducting research in Indigenous contexts. All participants provided informed consent for the study to be undertaken and for data to be collected. Where content shared by Elders is not for publication, we have omitted this information from the data as requested.

## **The Journey to Transforming Curriculum**

Using the three curriculum positions discussed earlier, we now present the data derived from our research in Country learning (OCL). We start the analysis of our data use the following map created on Country by a child in Year 1 as a means to illustrate the three perspectives on curriculum (conforming, reforming and transforming) in a remote community school.

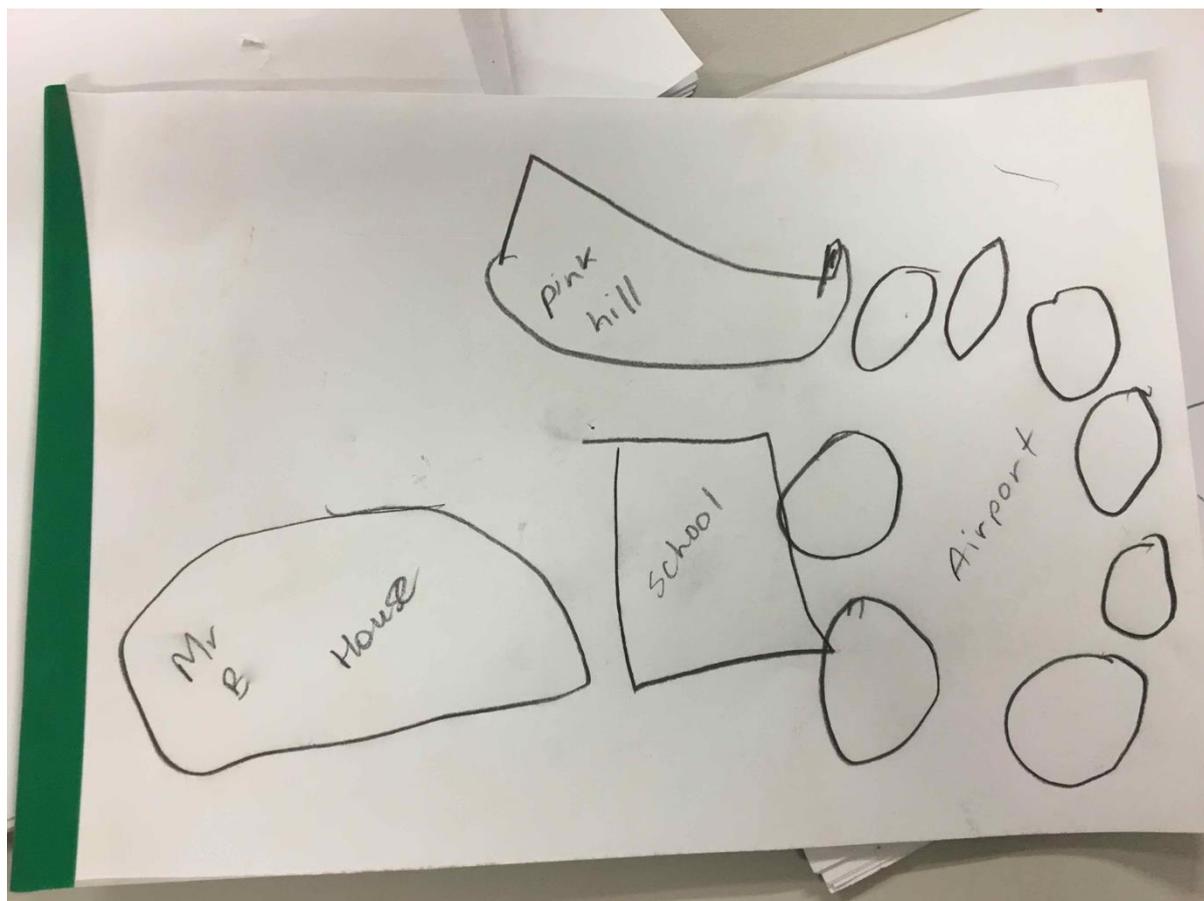


Figure 2. Caroline's Map from Country

In the above figure, Caroline (pseudonym) drew a map of the journey from school to the site where the class participated in OCL on a particular day, the site was a short drive from the school and adjacent to Pink Hill. At the beginning of the day, Caroline had completed the daily task in her classroom, of writing and re-writing her name which was traced in dots on a laminated sheet. She sat quietly tracing the letters of her name, she followed left to right and stayed within the dotted lines. Later, on Country, she drew the map after she and a small group of children had spent a full morning exploring and listening to stories told by a Traditional Owner nearby to Pink Hill. Caroline drew this aerial perspective map including the Principal's house, the school, the *jina*<sup>6</sup> (the track marked by a series of circles from the school), the airport and Pink Hill. In the context of our research, there are three key features of the map we draw the reader's attention to, *the school, the jina and Pink Hill*.

### What Caroline's Map tells us about her as a Learner and about Transforming Curriculum

Caroline's map of Country provides insights into her ways of 'knowing, being and doing' (Martin, 2008a, p.72) when engaging in OCL. Country, and mapmaking, provided her with agency to express her knowledge both visually and verbally, enabling Caroline to story

<sup>6</sup> Yngarrda Language is one distinct languages in the Mid-West, Murchison and Gascoyne regions

and label her map with us. Spontaneous discussion between the children took place as they drew their maps, first in the sand, scratching out features in the landscape and starting again, Caroline and her peers were animatedly negotiating and clarifying their ideas about how the map would accurately represent the journey from school to the place they were sitting under a tree. The multimodal opportunity afforded by discussing and drawing a map gave Caroline and her classmates an opportunity to show their strengths and engage in a task that they had control over. The OCL approach supported the deep understanding and connection with place that the children hold. This map reflects the way Caroline sees Country, engaging in sharing ‘two-way’<sup>7</sup> by using her “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) and language to explain her understanding of Country and how to get to Pink Hill, in much the same way that a teacher (within the walls of the classroom) would explain any concept they were teaching using the language and knowledge of school. Depicted in the map the school is represented by hard lines in a box shape that we use to represent the ‘bricks in the wall’ where children write their names on dotted lines in a *conforming* curriculum. Pink Hill is the space where Caroline’s strengths and knowing are foregrounded and valued, it represents the *transforming* curriculum – the place where culture is central. The *jina* is the path connecting the two – the *reforming* curriculum.

Using this map and content analysis of our field notes (Hseih & Shannon, 2005) we seek to apply and extend the work of MacNaughton’s (2003) curriculum positions and Habermas’ (1978) knowledge interests by applying the theoretical framework to our data.

All of the elements presented below are drawn from our fieldwork during the project. Each curriculum position is presented with exemplars from practice we observed and documented.

### Conforming Curriculum Practices

Drawing on our classroom observations, field notes and reflective dialogue as researchers, the metaphor of Pink Floyd's The Wall is utilised to represent the conforming rigid practices of curriculum positioned in the conforming classroom. Exemplifying conforming curriculum, we observed curriculum practices that conveyed low expectations through rote tasks or low-level tasks (e.g. colouring in) rather than challenging problems or open-ended explorations. The conforming curriculum was also extended to a strict behaviour management regime with an expectation for complete silence in class. This was enforced via the use of rewards and punishments. In this conforming classroom curriculum was delivered via worksheets. The teacher sat behind the desk creating a distance from children. We observed students in this classroom operate at in a disengaged way by being non-compliant and causing disruptions and asking to go to another class. Children in this class were often absent from school although they were still in the community. During our field trips on Country this educator openly rejected the notion of Country being a pedagogical tool for children to strengthen their identities and learn about culture stating “this isn’t really anything Aboriginal, it’s just environmental education”. In the context of the typology described in Figure 1, this teacher is what we would regard as the unwilling and unable who created and maintained a power position as an authority figure in a tightly controlled conforming curriculum. When we observe an educator operating in this way we are reminded of the lyrics of Pink Floyd “*Hey, teacher leave those kids alone*” (Pink Floyd, 1979).

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<sup>7</sup> Two-way teaching is characterised by the incorporation of more “Aboriginal way” pedagogy (including more negotiation, collaborative group work, problem solving, integration and hands-on activities) and reduced use of controlled “look, listen, do” ways of teaching. (Department of Education and Training. (2004). Deadly Ideas, Deadly Ways to Learn Project, p.10)

## Reforming Curriculum Practices

By contrast, teachers and students we observed operating in the reforming space (the *jina* in Caroline's drawing) negotiate curriculum at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) with the teachers making sincere attempts to incorporate Aboriginal culture into the curriculum. Teachers we observed utilising a reforming curriculum hosted warm classroom environments by being friendly and demonstrative with children (giving high fives, asking about their families, pets etc.). These teachers also offered encouragement to children for effort in their school work and held high expectations; they were fair and flexible in their management of learning and student behaviour, conceding, for example when something they were doing wasn't working. These teachers were building relationships with families and the community when they came to the school or classroom, greeting them by name and engaging in informal conversations. These teachers were open to what they might learn on Country and how they could bring this learning to the classroom. One teacher used stones collected on Country (with permission from the Elder) to create artworks with children and enthusiastically participated in a whole class project to make a set of clapping sticks for each child. The sticks were incorporated into music lessons for the remainder of the year. Children situated in the reforming classes appeared to enjoy school most of the time and attended school on a regular basis. In the reforming curriculum space, we observed **"No Dark Sarcasm in the classroom"** (Pink Floyd, 1979). These teachers were *willing* and becoming *able*, they were moving towards a transforming curriculum through their willingness to learn and reflect on their pedagogies and their ability to respond confidently in the local context.

For the purpose of our analysis, Pink Hill in Caroline's drawing above represents a transforming curriculum in juxtaposition to the approaches described above. Pink Hill is an important part of Country in this particular setting and is directly related to the students lived experiences. All the children know Pink Hill, they know it is sacred and they approach it with respect. The teachers we observed engaging in transforming pedagogies grounded and connected their curriculum to experiences On Country and similarly approached this with a sense of deep respect. They used culture as the starting point for planning because they understood that curriculum connected to Country, language and cultural and practices was relevant and engaging for students. The practices of teachers engaged in transforming pedagogies included: planning curriculum alongside Elders and other community members; asking permission before visiting places or removing anything from the land, building meaningful relationships outside of the school by, for example, calling by the front yard of a family's home after school to check if a child or family member is well; informally yarning with people within the community at the local shop; and attending community events as a wholehearted participant. We observed students in these classrooms were engaged, respected and respectful and motivated, they stayed back to finish their work after the final bell and had strong and friendly relationships with their teachers evident by sharing jokes or spontaneously embracing their teacher a hug. The teachers who build relationships of trust and mutual respect with children, their family and the wider community is engaging in transforming pedagogies. Teachers sought to engage Elders in discussions and planning about ways they could support children's learning through and with culture, they were honest about their own lack of knowledge and openly expressed their desire to learn about local culture in order to better cater for the children in their setting. The practices described are emancipatory for both students and teachers because they operate in the space of relatedness (Martin, 2008b) and devolve power to the children and the community with respect. The above typology describes these teachers as willing and able to provide culturally responsive and transformative curriculum. These teachers locate their practice on Country and in community and have made the journey from Pink Floyd to Pink Hill.

Our findings point to the primacy of relationships of mutual trust and respect as the means by which educators and researchers might transform Indigenous education. The above examples from practice illustrate the ways in which teachers, schools, children and communities may re-establish relationships in Aboriginal education to transform learning. We have highlighted the manner in which relationships between school and community are fundamentally shaped by the epistemologies of educators.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest that in order to make the journey from Pink Floyd (conforming curriculum) to Pink Hill (transforming curriculum), educators and communities must be ready, willing and able to work together in a two-way manner. To achieve this, each party must respect the knowledge and experiences of the others as being significant in the lives of children. It is possible to achieve this first, by acknowledging the relatedness of *Country* for Aboriginal peoples and second, by recognising that teachers' cultural competence and responsiveness takes time, as it is difficult to respond appropriately and teach what you don't know. From our experience, it is likely that teachers adopting a conforming position have had very little to do with Aboriginal students, peoples or communities. If they are willing, it is possible for them to commence the journey to transformative pedagogies. Those adopting a reforming position usually possess some general knowledge about Aboriginal cultures and more work is required to build on such teachers' willingness and existing praxis to strengthen their cultural understandings and capacity to provide responsive pedagogies. The reality is that many teachers working on *Country* do not have a foundational knowledge of that *Country*. They require support to make the connections of *Country* and it is important to identify the three curriculum positions so that appropriately targeted programs such as On Country Learning might support schools and communities to create pathways to enhance the transition for teachers to transformative practice. Undertaking work in Aboriginal communities on any level requires comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories in Australia since colonisation/invasion. The necessity of taking time to build authentic relationships is underscored in our research. Additionally, it is essential that newcomers suspend judgement and be willing to understand the context of the community and their ways of knowing, being and doing as not all communities are the same.

Findings from this study will be beneficial for others who wish to engage with Aboriginal education in ways that are transformative for both the school and the community. We have demonstrated how this can be made possible by schools and communities seeking to work together in culturally responsive ways to embrace the opportunities for emancipatory education, only then can we begin to 'close the gap' for Aboriginal students in education and stop saying "*Wrong! Do it again!*" (Pink Floyd, 1979).

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