Leaching the poison out of Remote Education

Yirrkala School Yolŋu Action Group and Yirrkala School AEUNT sub branch submission to the Senate Enquiry into Remote Education

Yirrkala Community School in North-East Arnhem Land is the premiere First Nations Bilingual, Both Ways education institution in Australia. As the first school in the Northern Territory to have an Indigenous Principal (and later Australian of the Year), this proudly Yolŋu School has been at the forefront of innovative Bilingual, Both Ways education for 45 years. We have pioneered a cutting edge community-driven and research orientated workshop pedagogy, 'Galtha Rom', that has provided the backbone of the school for more than a and is most publicly recognisable in the annual *Garma Festival*. We remain a proud Yolŋu organisation driven by an inclusive Both Ways philosophy that we see resulting in our beloved djamarrkuḻi' (children) graduating with a 'double degree' comprising both Yolŋu and Western knowledge systems. The strength of this bilingual program has endured the many changes in Territory and Commonwealth policy through the decades and continues to provide students with a high quality both ways education to this day.

Submission recommendations

Short term initiatives	Longer term initiatives

1. Adopt a mindset that fundamentally demonstrates a valuing of our First Nations knowledge systems and languages *(Page 7)*

1.1.   Continue support for well established and evidence-based initiatives such as *Learning On Country* and *Bilingual Both Ways Education* that provide schools with the resourcing to run culturally-rich learning programs

1.2.   Expand the number of people within the Department of Education whose job is to support the development of Both Ways and Bilingual programs in settings with both established and developing programs

1.3.   Work with Senior Secondary Boards to develop mechanisms for the direct accreditation of First Nations knowledge and languages towards State and Territory Certificates of Education

1.4.   Adopt as a strategic priority support for established both-ways, bilingual schools such as Yirrkala Community school and associated Literature Production Centre

1.5.   Work with remote community schools to develop relevant education programs based in a local context which draws upon locally contextualised programs to draw on First Nations knowledge systems and languages

2. Afford us the autonomy to make decisions about what and how we educate our young people *(Page 11)*

2.1 Adopt a mindset that when it comes to educating our children, the community are the ones who know how their children learn best

2.2 Provide consistent funding to support positions such as First Nations Principals (or Co-Principals) and Senior Cultural Advisors

2.3 Reestablish networks for remote schools to collaborate on teaching and learning e.g. Remote Schools Networks, Bilingual Schools Network

2.4 Support the further development of local governance initiatives for remote community schools e.g. community-led schools strategy

2.5 Establish a leadership programs that supports the development of First Nations School Principals

2.6 Empower the development and strengthening of local School Councils

3. Stop imposing on us policy and programs that are not developed with community and most often not supported by any local evidence base *(Page 13)*

3.1   Adopt a principle of 'localalised decision making' for policy decisions affecting remote communities

3.2   Work with schools to develop high quality assessment tools in both the local language and English that reflect the actual language acquisition progressions of bilingual learners

3.3   Cease NAPLAN as a compulsory requirement in remote schools with large cohorts of EAL/D learners and particularly in bilingual school settings.

3.4   Provide Departmental support for research into community-led curriculum and pedagogy programs towards developing a locally-contextualised evidence base for effective education

4. Provide real opportunities for us to train educators from our own communities
(Page 15)

4.1	Fund a pilot of a Community-Based Teacher Education Program (such the program formerly known as Remote Area Teacher Education or RATE in the NT) to provide pathways for remote people to become fully qualified school teachers, in community, without having to leave.
4.2	Optimise the support through Centrelink for local students studying to become teachers and school support officers whilst working part time in remote schools

4.3	Roll out Community Based Teacher Education Programs across the whole Northern Territory to remote school sites
4.4	Provide the funding and support to NT-based tertiary providers so that they have the capacity to deliver Community Based Teacher Education Programs.

5. Resource our schools at a standard that provides equality of educational opportunity *(Page 18)*

5.1	Exempt remote NT schools from attendance-based funding
5.2	Allow schools to use NDIS funding to directly fund service provision within the school environment
5.3	Fund a special needs teacher position outside the Global School budget for school with enrolments over 100 students
5.4	Change NT legislation to allow remote schools to provide quality education to students with special needs which will allow them to meet their legislative requirements, including, but not limited to, the establishment of special needs annexes.

5.5	Increase funding to the Territory Education system to allow for an NT-wide disbanding of attendance-based funding
5.6	Fund remote bilingual schools at the same ratio as ESL intensive English classes in major urban settings
5.7	Implement best practice models of community school-based interdisciplinary health services

6. Adopt a 'social determinants of education' approach to policy development and implementation *(Page 21)*

6.1	Develop a social determinants of education framework for informing policy development and implementation in remote communities
6.2	Transition the strategic function of remote schools from places solely for children's education to places where the whole community connects, is cared for and learns.
6.3	NT Housing to prioritise the building and allocation of housing to local recruits in teaching

6.4	To support the development of adult education centers that become part of remote schools
6.5	Continue to support initiatives that allow First Nations peoples to live and learn on there traditional homelands
6.6	Support the empowerment of economic models that harmonises the gap between the public value afforded to roles in First Nations paradigms with the economic value afforded through the Western paradigm

Introduction

> *"At the right time of the year, Yolŋu women gather to collect Ŋathu, cycad nut ,from the bush. The nut contains dingu, poison, in the form of cyanide. Therefore, there are strict protocols and process that must be observed in order to ensure no poison remain when the nut is ground intro flour to make sacred bread. If the process is done too early, you die. It must be picked in the right season, it must be leached and processed properly to remove the poison.*
>
> *The Ŋathu metaphor is very important for us, especially with respect to process. It was developed by Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) students… at the Yirrkala School for our curriculum journey. When people come to our community to work with us they often come with ready made ideas. These ideas may have valuable nourishing components in them, but we need time, as a community, to mold these ideas into our own context. We need to make sure that there is time to leach the poison out their ideas to make nourishing foods."* (1)
>
> This Ŋathu metaphor relates to a continual process operating at the interface of Yolŋu and Balanda education systems.

N.B. This submission has mixture of voice that is signposted throughout the document. Yolŋu voice will be prefaced with 'we' or 'we Yolŋu' and the joint Yolŋu and Balanda (non-Yolŋu) voice prefaced with 'we the Yolŋu and Balanda'.

We Yolŋu have been practicing a highly sophisticated model of education for millennia. The process of making the sacred Ŋathu bread is as rich in knowledge as it is sophisticated as a pedagogical practice. Although we continue to be subjected to colonisation, after decades of resistance we Yolŋu people are steadfast in our resolve to exercise our right to control our children's education (2).

We have consistently **adapted and negotiated with you towards a way of educating that values both world views**, Yolŋu and Balanda (non-Yolŋu). Our Elders taught us that respecting and including our Yolŋu knowledge and languages in our children's education is the right way to teach them. As teachers, we know that this is the correct and successful approach to Yolŋu education. We worked to adapt an oral language to the world of the written word and implemented bilingual education. When given the opportunity we trained our people to be like your educators. Our school was the first in the NT to have a First Nations principal, a position shared by a Yolŋu still in 2020. Our Yambirrpa School Council and Yambirrpa Action group are integral to our bilingual both ways education and were recognized through the International Linguapax Award in 2016.

We Yolŋu have had to fight to withstand the existential threat posed by Government policies to the important things we have built, Threats such as the Intervention and Stronger Futures are both policies which disempower and disrespect our people and communities. The NT Four Hours English policy and attendance-based funding are further examples of the unfair burden placed on remote schools. We have done our best to leach what has been, at times, the poisonous approaches to education imposed on us. In spite of this, we Yolŋu have continued to make rich Ŋathu bread.

Daily we the Yolŋu and Balanda teachers work together to give everything we can towards our children's education in the belief of our former School Manager and cultural advisor Mr. W. W. Wunuŋmurra, **that our kids can truly achieve anything**.' As coalface educators we everyday bear witness to the incredible intelligence, ingenuity, joy and kindness our young people bring to navigating what is in essence a 'double degree' encompassing both Yolŋu and Balanda knowledge systems and languages. This is a mighty feat most often undertaken in spite of incredible social and health barriers. Indeed daily our hearts weigh heavy, for we see such great potential in our students, our children, so often locked up by the **systematic inequality of educational opportunity**.

Youth suicide is a nationally recognised crisis for remote communities including ours, and we know that without this nourishing Ŋathu bread (our Yolŋu Bilingual Both Ways curriculum) our young people will struggle to attain the necessary agency to choose a life in which they see reason to value. The process to leach the poison is getting harder, as more resources are taken away. In particular we worry about the training of future Yolŋu teaching staff as our few remaining great Yolŋu educators grow tired after a lifetime of service.

We have a deep and real fear for the Bilingual Both Ways educational model we have built here at Yirrkala over the past 45 years and the vital cultural, linguistic and life outcomes that hinge on it. This fear for the continuing health and support for our Yolŋu education is not new, and it is a fear that will only be alleviated through **a profound reorientation in governmental mindset and policy**.

In spite of this, **hope strings eternal**. In 2020 will see the return of the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATE) through a pilot partnership with the Cotton On Foundation. We have a number of our senior secondary students on track to become the first to graduate from our school with an ATAR and our preschool continues to build on its Excellent rating award in 2019 which made it one of only 39 facilitates nation-wide to be at this level.

Thus, it is with this hope that we again will contribute to another government inquiry. Time and again we have generously shared our knowledge and experiences with the Government and their consultants. However, we must say we sometimes find ourselves thinking like one Yolŋu quoted in the Collins Report (3) who stated:

"Every year you ask us and every year we tell you but don't listen to what we say. Some community members say that you will keep asking until we are Balanda, then you'll stop asking".

 So here, we the Yolŋu and Balanda educators of Yirrkala School will make it explicitly clear to you what we think it will take to leach the poison out of the current way education is approached by Commonwealth and Territory Governments in remote Australia. We do so in the footsteps of our Elders and in the **aspiration that together we can develop a Ŋathu bread so rich that it will enrich and sustain the future of our community and our school.**

Our core recommendations are thus:

1	**Adopt a mindset that fundamentally demonstrates a valuing of our knowledge systems and languages**
2	**Afford us the autonomy to make decisions about what and how we educate our young people**
3	**Stop imposing on us policy and programs that are not developed with community and most often not supported by any local evidence-base**
4	**Provide real opportunities for us to train educators for our own communities**
5	**Resource our schools at a standard that provides educational opportunity**
6	**Adopt a 'social determinants of education' approach to policy development and implementation**

Recommendation #1
Adopt a mindset that fundamentally demonstrates the valuing of our knowledge systems and languages

*"Yolŋu Children grow up with two laws, Dhuwa and Yirritja. This foundational knowledge molds who a person is, where that person comes from, what their vision is, how they think, how they will be able to deal with contemporary life and whether they will be able to sort and analyse the idea they encounter in their lives in a balanced way"*
– Yirrkala School Vision Statement

As Yolŋu and Balanda educators we understand **that our students see the world first and foremost through Yolŋu eyes**. and that this is the lens through which they are 'implicitly geared' to interpret reality. It provides the foundation of their identity, language and very being. As our vision statement states, it is the *'heritage, culture and knowledge that the students bring with them'* that should be the *'starting point for the students'' life-long education journe*y'. If our aim as educators is to provide our children with the type learning of that allows them to flourish in all aspects of their lives, then **the continued development of this fundamental Yolŋu bedrock must be set down solidly first**.

With the successful establishment of a solid Yolŋu foundation, this knowledge can be leveraged through the socio-ecological-cultural constructivist approach that largely underpins Western education systems (4), scaffolding Western cosmological concepts off Yolŋu ones. An example of this is the Garma Maths curriculum that was developed by Yolŋu and Balanda educators here in Yirrkala 1986 and been used successfully to undertake this leveraging process for decades. Garma in the curriculum context refers to knowledge which has been agreed on and which is free and open for everyone to participate in. In Garma Maths students spend time exploring ways of representing and interpreting their own Yolŋu systems of knowledge and exploring the ways in which Western Maths is used to give order and value in contemporary Australian life (5). Yolŋu children have the challenging educational goal of incorporating two very different knowledge systems into their lives in order to become successful Yolŋu Australian citizens. The reasoning behind the arrangement and sequencing of the four strands of Garma Maths Curriculum is that these strands lead into the existing social and intellectual context at Yirrkala and Laynhapuy homeland center communities (6).
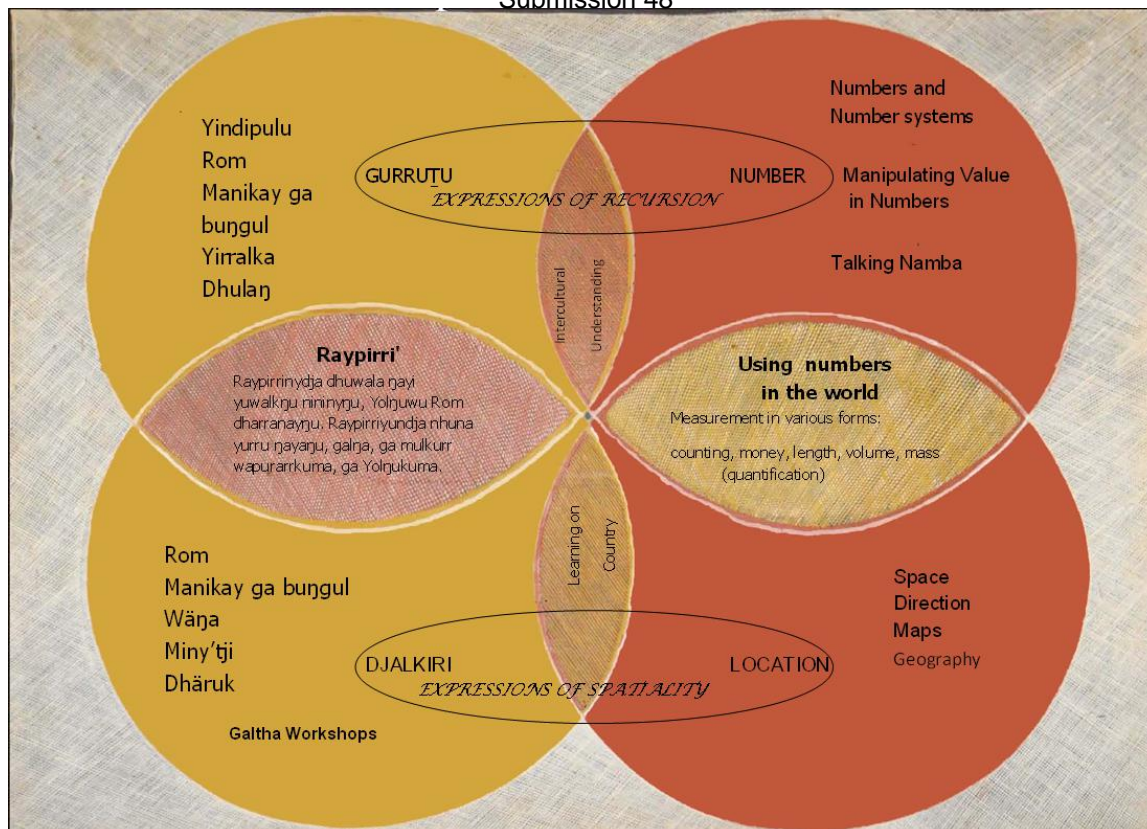
Image 1: Conceptual framework of the Garma Maths Curriculum. See also Appendix 2: Garma Maths Djalkiri Learning Continuum.

It is particularly crucial that we **value our children's existing Yolŋu knowledge and identity** if we want them to become **proficient speakers and readers of English.** It might seem that the best way to ensure this is to simply spend more time in class speaking in English and teaching English literacy, at the expense of students' first language and culture. This was the thinking behind the Territory's former 'First Four Hours of English' policy, an effective ban on bilingual education introduced in 2008 which led to the disastrous loss of a generation of trained Indigenous teachers, and of trust between communities and schools that had been built up over decades (7)– losses from which many of the NT's bilingual schools are only just starting to recover. In fact, this 'English only' approach tends to result in classrooms mired in miscommunication, where teachers who know little of children's home language and culture struggle to convey the most basic information, and Aboriginal aides – if present – often resort to translating everything said, saving the students the trouble of trying to learn English at all (8).

By contrast, at Yirrkala we seek to continually develop the **richness and sophistication of our children's first language**, alongside the gradual introduction of English, so that they can eventually learn and discuss complex ideas across the curriculum in both languages. At the same time, we aim to build a strong foundation in Yolŋu Matha literacy which students can then transfer to their second language. Our approach is grounded in more than four decades of practice in Northern Territory bilingual schools, and, theoretically,

in the 'developmental interdependence hypothesis' of Jim Cummins, which posits that a learner's ultimate cognitive ability in their second language depends on how much they have already learnt in their first (9). This program of sequential bilingual and bi-literacy education has been shown to offer the best social and academic outcomes for Aboriginal children, as seen in the most recent major Australian review of the research (10). It is also endorsed for the education of other minority language speakers in countries all around the world, by institutions as diverse as UNESCO (11), Save the Children (12) and the World Bank (13).

But we should not have to justify ourselves: it is **our right, enshrined in International Law,** to choose this kind of education for our children. The *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (14)* states that 'wherever possible, persons belong to minorities should have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.' The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (14) which Australia adopted in 2009, goes further, affirming in Article 14 that "*States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures*" to ensure their children can enjoy "*an education in their own culture and provided in their own language*". This right is also guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; indeedan investigation into Australia's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights raised the significant impact the lack of access to self determination and appropriate education has on the preservation of preservation and development of Indigenous culture, religion and language, raising concerns under article 27 (15).

Further, is also grounded in a strong contemporary evidence base. There is ample evidence that having a strong identity is essential to both the current well-being and the long-term prospects of our young people. For instance, Aboriginal people living in remote communities that value the maintenace of language and traditional practices have been found to have better health outcomes than would otherwise be expected given their economic disadvantage (16). In education, too, Guenther's comprehensive systematic review of factors contributing to educational outcomes for First Nations students from Remote Communities highlights the key impact that 'locally appropriate curriculum and pedagogies, fit for context' has on students outcomes (17). Indeed both ways, bilingual approaches have been shown to improve school-community relations (18), attendance rates (19) and produce better literacy results for students than like peers in non-bilingual school settings (20).

Both Ways models can lead to our children acquiring what is essentially a double degree in both First Nations and Balanda knowledge systems. They therefore present a **sophisticated broadening of what education can be in Australia, rather than a watering down of the mainstream approach**. The both-ways philosophy provides a broad framework that could be used to reimagine our reality through inclusive dialogue, leveraging knowledge systems that for many generations have gone untapped. These approaches not only hold out hope that the education system can cease to be a vehicle for continuing colonisation, but for also substantially expanding the range of possibilities afforded to students. Finally, and at the very heart of the matter, they fundamentally demonstrate a valuing of our knowledge systems and languages.

Policy recommendations

Short term initiatives:

1.1. Continue support for well established and evidence-based initiatives such as *Learning On Country* and *Bilingual Both Ways Education* that provide schools with the resourcing to run culturally-rich learning programs

1.2. Expand the number of people within the Department of Education whose job is to support the development of Both Ways and Bilingual programs in settings with both established and developing programs

1.3. Work with Senior Secondary Boards to develop mechanisms for the direct accreditation of First Nations knowledge and languages towards State and Territory Certificates of Education

Longer term initiatives:

1.4 Adopt as a strategic priority support for established both-ways, bilingual schools such as Yirrkala Community school and associated Literature Production Centre

1.5 Work with remote community schools to develop relevant education programs based in a local context which draws upon locally contextualised programs to draw on First Nations knowledge systems and languages

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Recommendation #2
Afford us the autonomy to make decisions about what and how we educate our young people

"As teachers we must be prepared for operating in the contemporary world in a strong and balanced way so that we will be able to achieve the visions and aspirations of our elders."

– Yirrkala School Vision Statement

We believe that the problems of educational opportunity in remote community schools have local answers. We know internationally that local autonomy has a direct relationship with improvement in education outcomes (21). We also know that Australian First Nations peoples governance capacity is greatly expanded when we have power to design our own rules, policies and procedures for running our organisations (22).

Indeed, the successes we have experienced in our both ways, bilingual approach to education have occurred because the community, through the operation of our School Council, **gained control of the decision-making processes in the school** (23). The School Council saw it as important for Yolŋu in our community to see us run our own affairs, by seeing our Yolŋu Schools become Aboriginalised. They believed and we agree with the many others from remote communities across Australia who identified the devolution of power from the centralised system back to community in tandem with the development of our own local workforce as central to our success historically and into the future (24). We believe the continued strengthening of local school councils and initiatives such as the Community-led school strategy as paramount to this.

Essential to the strengthening of this local autonomy is the development of our future Yolŋu education leaders. We have a proud history of Yolŋu Principals and highly influential Senior Cultural advisers at this school. These positions afford us authentic power within the Western education governance framework and legitimise the power of Yolŋu perspectives in our school. An example of this is presence of a male and female Cultural advisor, one from the Dhuwa moiety and one from the Yirritja moiety.

As the last of our RATE era teachers now enter the final years of their careers, we are seeing a significant drying up in this Yolŋu leadership pipeline. Whilst providing real opportunities for us to train as educators is a vital precursor to developing education leaders, we also believe investment in an explicit leadership training program is also required.

Finally, we Yolŋu want to make clear that in wanting to control the way in which our children are educated and our schools are run we do not mean we want to do so at the exclusion of Balanda contributions. We have engaged in decades of academic work with Balanda to develop a nuanced and sophisticated approach to working together. We have a special metaphor based on a lagoon near the homeland of Biranybirany that we use as a framework for this process:

"It is an area within the mangroves where the salt water coming from the sea meets the stream of fresh water coming down from the land. The water circulates silently underneath, and there are lines of foam circulating across the surface. The swelling and retreating of the tides and the wet season floods can be seen in the two bodies of water. Water is often to taken to represent knowledge in Yolŋu philosophy. What we see happening in the schools in a process of knowledge production where we have two different cultures, Balanda and Yolŋu working together, Both cultures need to be presented in a way where each one is preserved and respected. (25)"
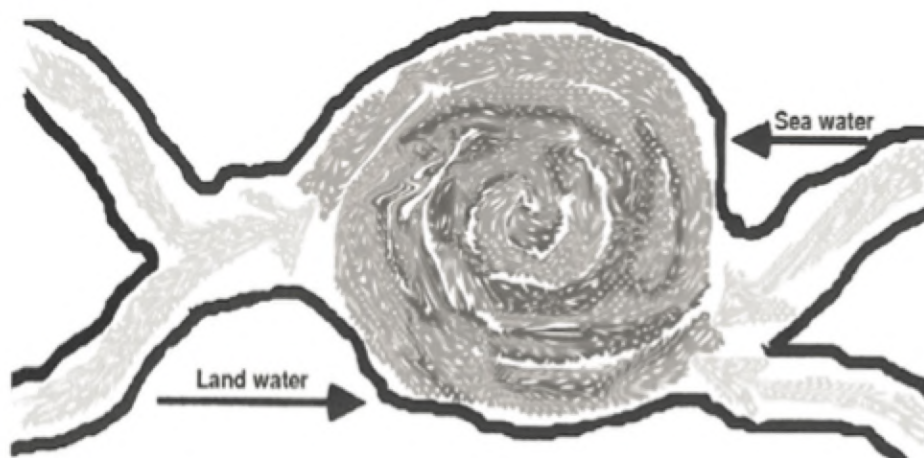
Image 2: Water metaphor showing the interaction between two knowledge systems within a Both Ways schooling environment

All we Yolŋu ask is that you as the Government enter into a legitimate 'bala ga lili' (give and take) reciprocal relationship with us giving us more respect and understanding and take some responsibility to become more flexible to locally contextualise our needs:

"This is not to be seen as a means to make it more difficult for institutions to develop programs with this community, rather, it emphasizes the need for such institutions to be suitably flexible so they find creative and innovate ways to meet Yolŋu requests for assistance (26)."

Policy Recommendations

Short term initiatives:

2.1 Adopt a mindset that when it comes to educating our children, the community are the ones who know how their children learn best

2.2 Provide consistent funding to support positions such First Nations Principals (or Co-Principals) and Senior Cultural Advisors

2.3 Reestablish networks for remote schools to collaborate on teaching and learning e.g. Remote Schools Networks, Bilingual Schools Network

Longer term initiatives:

2.4 Support the further development of local governance initiatives for remote community schools e.g. community-led schools strategy

2.5 Establish a leadership programs that supports the development of First Nations School Principals

2.6 Empower the development and strengthening of local School Councils

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Recommendation #3
Stop imposing on us educational policies and programs that are not developed in partnership with community and most often not supported by any contextualised evidence base

"The culture of Yambirrpa schools seeks to maintain a 'bala ga lili' (give and take) reciprocal philosophy where community involvement plays an integral part."

– Yirrkala School Vision Statement

Makuwira makes the powerful observation that when governments fail to engage authentically and meaningfully with Aboriginal communities they in fact **contribute to their own failure** through a 'helplessness to change things that improves the situation of the poor… thus contributing to the perpetuation of poverty' (27). Inflexibility in engaging with Aboriginal institutions like our school means that we end up bearing the burden of trying to close the gap between the Balanda and Yolŋu world, a phenomenon experienced by First Nations peoples globally.

We feel like we are constantly in a state of gatekeeping the precious curriculum and pedagogies that have been developed through collaborative academic processes of the last 50 years. We are lucky to have strong Yolŋu and Balanda who have been here for decades that can do this job quite well. We know there are many other schools that have such protection. We are forever guarding against the latest and greatest literacy program or policy seen as a silver bullet to our problems **when we know that our learning outcomes are highly dependent on a range of other factors** (17).

A prime example of this was the 2008 'Compulsory Teaching in English for the first four hours of each school day' (28). This was a policy that was launched using 'shaky' data (29) and flew in the face of the well established evidence based on bilingual education with dire consequences such as the plummeting attendance that followed the removal of step-model bilingual programs from Indigenous schools (30). While the policy has now been replaced, many bilingual schools never recovered.

A more immediate challenge we face is the in form of high stakes, standardised testing such as NAPLAN. This data set is consistently used as a key metric in our success as a bilingual school even though both we and the research community know that *'NAPLAN provides an apparent measure of success that may suppress the actual measurement of success'* (31) as well as supporting *'potentially assimilationist expectations of education'* (24). We Yolŋu and Balanda would be more than happy to engage with the Department of Education in appropriately resourced research to develop alternative standardised testing tools for the unique remote and bilingual context.

Other policies that attract significant funding but are based on very little evidence include attendance strategies and boarding schools. There is no evidence to suggest that attendance strategies result in better educational outcomes (32) and we anecdotally find that the greatest impact on student attendance is the quality of the learning experience for students in the classroom. Further, we are forever working with families who have been convinced by boarding schools and their proxies (boarding liaison workers) that sending their kids away from the community to boarding school will result in better outcomes. This is not something we have experienced anecdotally across the decades at Yirrkala School nor is it something that is supported in the contemporary research literature (17).

Policy recommendations

Short term initiatives:

3.1 Adopt a principle of localalised decision making for policy decisions affecting remote communities

3.2 Work with schools to develop high quality assessment tools in both the local language and English that reflect the actual language acquisition progressions of bilingual learners

3.3 Cease NAPLAN as a compulsory requirement in remote schools with large cohorts of EAL/D learners and particularly in bilingual school settings.

Longer term initiatives:

3.4 Provide Departmental support for research into community-led curriculum and pedagogy programs towards developing a locally-contextualised evidence base for effective education

Recommendation #4
Provide real opportunities for us to train educators for our own communities

"Yambirrpa Schools believes the students are capable of learning high level knowledge and responding to the challenges required for employment and participation in local community life and in the wider national and international community."

– Yirrkala School Vision Statement

The international literature points to the importance of teacher quality on the variation in our students' outcomes (33). We also know our most important teachers are home grown (34). Indeed our local Aboriginal staff are the bedrock of our schools. We also know that the proportion of local community members with training qualifications has a positive correlation with student educational outcomes (35). Further, the presence of Aboriginal teachers in the school has an important mediatory role towards the protection of highly valued traditional cultural pedagogies (36).

However, there are few truly accessible pathways for First Nations educators in the Northern Territory to become fully qualified teachers. There was a time when the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) Program put many of us through locally-delivered and contextually-relevant tertiary education (37). Those teachers have been the backbone of many remote schools for a generation. With RATE long gone in the NT (although it still exists in highly successful form in North Queensland), we wonder where wondered our next generation of local teachers will come from?

In this respect we have taken destiny into our own hands and will this year start a pilot project with Laynhapuy Homelands School and The Cotton On Foundation that brings RATE back to the NT. While the NT Department of Education have provided in principal support for the initiative we are yet to hear of any plans to put financial resourcing in the return of this highly successful, well-evidenced and vital program.

Policy recommendations

Short term initiatives:

4.5 Fund a pilot of a Community-Based Teacher Education Program (such the program formerly known as Remote Area Teacher Education or RATE in the NT) to provide pathways for remote people to become fully qualified school teacher, in community, without having to leave.

4.6 Optimise the support through Centrelink for local students studying to become teachers and school support officers whilst working part time in remote schools

Longer term initiatives:

4.7 Roll out Community Based Teacher Education Programs across the whole Northern Territory to remote schools sites

4.8 Provide the funding and support to NT-based tertiary providers so that they have the capacity to deliver Community Based Teacher Education Programs.
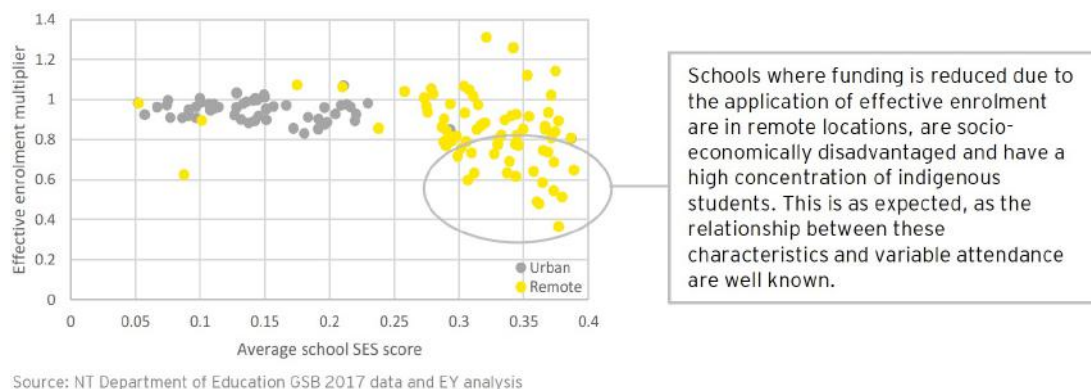
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Recommendation #5
Resource our schools at a standard that provides true educational opportunity

"In principle, human rights, and respect for those rights should not be evaluated in terms of budgets or administrative convenience."
– Mick Dodson (38)

Our schools are not funded to meet the current needs of our kids. These are not our calculations, they are the Northern Territory Government's. Indeed the recent Ernst & Young *Review of the Global School Budgets Funding Model* report published by the NT Department of Education (39) identified that current funding measures have had a disproportionately negative affect on disadvantaged students including cohorts in remote schools (key finding 10c, 10d, 11a, 11b). A central pillar of this current policy set up is **the attendance-based funding policy** (more officially known as the *Effective Enrolment Policy*), which funds students at a percentage of their attendance. This in essence means the cohort of students who are either disengaging or disengaged from school and **need the most help, actually get the least**. This is both counterintuitive and out of line with other states that apply extra loadings for these at risk students (40). Exacerbating this fact is the significant funding gap between public and private schools being reinfrorced in the NT. Under the new Commonwealth/Territory funding agreement Northern Territory public schools will only be funded at 76.6% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) by 2023 and there is no commitment to ever get to 100%. In contrast, private schools will be funded at 95% of their SRS by 2023 (41). We are astonished at how such a gap can exist in our country that purports the notion of 'a fair go'.

Schools where funding is reduced due to the application of effective enrolment are in remote locations, are socio-economically disadvantaged and have a high concentration of indigenous students. This is as expected, as the relationship between these characteristics and variable attendance are well known.

Source: NT Department of Education GSB 2017 data and EY analysis

Image 3: We know effective enrolment is fundamentally economically regressive and builds structural injustice into our education system.

This current funding arrangement **fundamentally sets school and students up for failure**. We Yolŋu and Balanda live the eternal guilt in knowing we are not meeting or students needs. We Yolŋu also suffer the consequences from other community members when some of our students fail. **Attendance-based enrolment is systemically unjust and we are making a strong recommendation that it be replaced.** We suggest a more equal distribution mechanism where the total funding resource pool is equally distributed based on a metric that uses enrolment plus needs-based loadings only.

Attendance-based funding is severely exacerbated by huge disparities between urban and remote settings in the area of special needs. Currently there is up to a **ten-fold gap between the maximal funding a student in remote community can receive with respect to urban counterparts despite having the same levels of need.** Under current NT legislation students in urban settings are able to attend special education centers called annexes. Students with the highest levels of needs attending these settings can attain upwards of $50,000 in funding, which provides options like the employment of a Special Needs Teacher and diverse curriculum opportunities. Remote sites are precluded from establishing annexes and thus the maximum funding they can attract for a student **with the same needs as their counterpart in an urban annex** is around $5,000.

Further worsening the situation for our students with disabilities is the fact that much of their NDIS funds are often being severely underspent, with some students having over $100, 000 left in their plans. A 'low-hanging fruit' fix for this problem is to make schools a provider of services and thus have the ability to develop fantastic on-site interdisciplinary initiatives. The pooling of these funds through the school as a provider (a practice that happens anyway through SESP) would be increased by a magnitude of up to 50 times in some cases would allow schools to fund innovations such as school-based Interdisciplinary Health Teams (e.g. school psychologist, OT, speech pathologist). The groundwork for such an initiatives already exists in our school through our fantastic relationship with our local Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisation, Miwatj which helps operate the only regular, doctor-led school clinic currently in the remote NT.

Finally we do also offer some insights that might be surprising. Contrary to popular opinion we think many schools are in favour of Global School Budgets (GSBs) as they provide us the autonomy to make choices over how we use the money allocated to our students. Our problem with GSBs is an indirect one in that schools are forced into 'wicked choices' not due to the GSB but through the fundamental lack of resourcing in it.

Policy recommendations

Short term initiatives:

5.1   Exempt remote NT schools from attendance-based funding

5.2   Allow schools to use NDIS funding to directly fund service provision within the school environment

5.3   Fund a special needs teacher position outside the Global School budget for school with enrolments over 100 students

5.4   Change NT legislation to allow remote schools to provide quality education to students with special needs which will allow them to meet their legislative requirements, including, but not limited to, the establishment of special needs annexes.

Longer term initiatives:

5.5   Increase funding to the Territory Education system to allow for an NT-wide disbanding of attendance-based funding

5.6   Fund remote bilingual schools at the same ratio as ESL intensive English classes in major urban settings

5.7   Implement best practice models of community school-based interdisciplinary health services

Back to Recommendations

Recommendation #6
Utilise a 'social determinants of education' framework to inform a community development policy approach

"We see Yambirrpa Schools as an important part of the community development process which has the goal of achieving a self-determining, self-managing community."

– Yirrkala School Vision Statement

We Yolŋu see education as one of the central pillars in a community development approach to improving the life opportunities for our people in Yirrkala and with the surrounding Homelands. Essential to this is a framework that reflects the fundamental interconnectivity of the social, cultural, economic, political and environmental aspects of our daily lives. We have long understood about this interconnectivity of all the social, economic and environmental aspects of our lived realities. This understanding is thus intrinsically built into our way of life and how we govern, interrelate and educate.

We note that this multi-determinant approach, which at its core, transcends the view that outcomes in areas such as education are the sole remit of a lead agency, has become a prominent driver of policy in other fields such as health (42). Of particular interest is the 'social determinants of health' (SDH) approach which has become a core policy paradigm in health from the World Health Organization down to local councils. The high-evidenced social determinants of health approach acknowledges the powerful causes of good and ill-health that lie outside the traditional boundaries of the healthcare system (see Image 4). This has led to innovative policy strategies that take a cross-governmental approach to health such as South Australia's *Health in All Policies* approach (43). At its core the SDH approach works on the premise **'Why treat people only to send them back to the conditions that made them sick in the first place?'**

We note that the social determinants of health has had a strong influence on the approach taken by Aboriginal Health Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) in Australia in recent years. Indeed the evidence in education would also strongly support such an approach. We know there is a link between socio-economic disadvantage and academic outcomes in remote areas, but that 'poverty' unto itself is not a barrier to achievement (32). There is a complexity there that needs to be understand as we do know there are an array of 'complementary' community based determinants of education such as

overcrowded housing, violence, substance abuse, limited access to support services, becoming a young mother and the malaise associated with lost identities leading to mental illness that adversely affect academic performance (44).
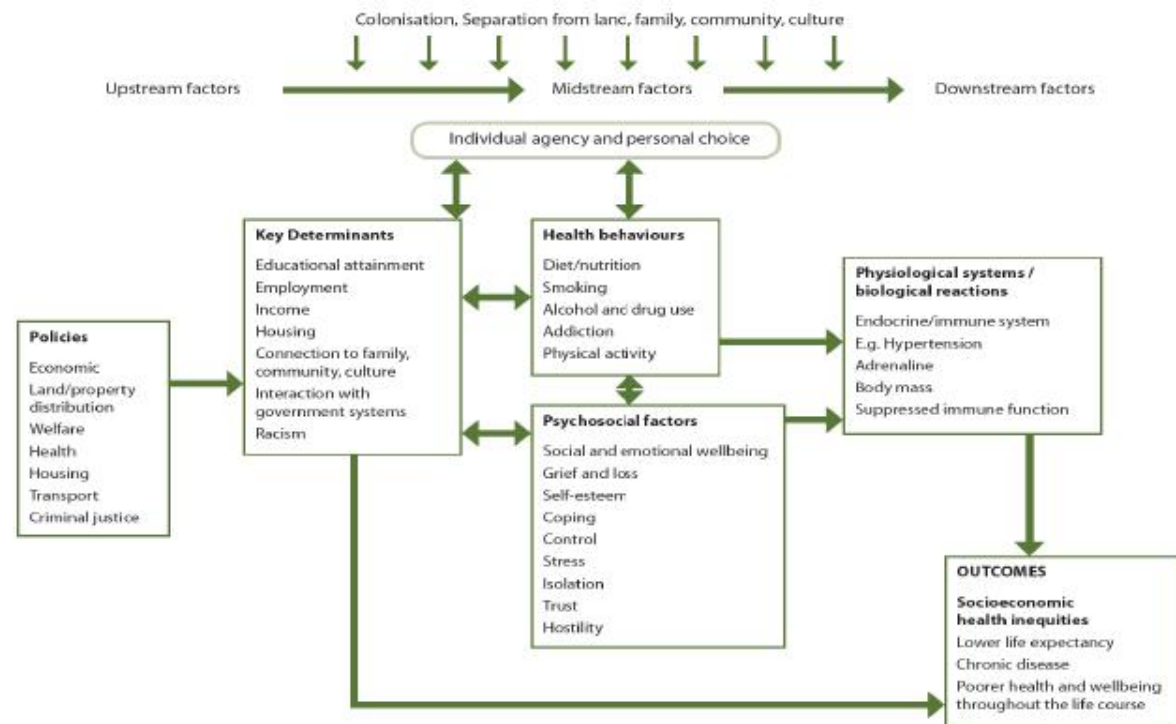

Figure 1: Conceptual model of social determinants of Indigenous health and health inequities. Adapted from Turrell & Mathers 2000:436

Image 4: Conceptual model of the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health (45)

We take one prominent anecdotal example with a relatively simple solution. Many of our wonderful local Yolŋu staff come to school chronically exhausted and sick. This is because they often live in overcrowded and at times unsafe homes. This situation can be exhausting and they need equality with their non-local colleagues in being provided with housing in order to have a realistic opportunity to perform to the best of their potential for our students. We applaud the recent changes to NT legislation that know make local recruits eligible for government housing upon attainment of Cert IV qualification or above. However housing stock is notoriously low across remote communities and a great efficiency in the roll of this is required.

There are innumerable other examples of the *social determinants of education* that have been noted by many involved in this consultation. These include the intergeneration trauma stemming from continuing colonisiation such as the Intervention Policy, the continuing fight for Land Rights and the importance of the Homelands movement. An interesting insight when discussing our young people who are graduating from this school into the

workforce was the belief that our current economic model fails to harmonise the gap between the public value afforded to roles in the Yolŋu paradigm with the economic value afforded through the Western Economic paradigm.

We thus make a key recommendation that government take a 'social determinants of education' perspective to policy towards an understanding of education within a wider socio-political and cultural web of interconnectivity. In a similar vain to the World Health Organization we thus ask: ***Why invest in our classrooms only to send students back into the community conditions that so limit their life opportunities?*** Addressing this question will require an 'education in all policies approach' that requires cross-governmental coordination on education as well as the fundamental expansion of the relatively narrow services remit schools have in community development currently.

Policy recommendations

Short term initiatives:

6.1   Develop a social determinants of education framework for informing policy development and implementation in remote communities

6.2   Transition the strategic function of remote schools from places solely for children's education to places where the whole community connects, is cared for and learns.

6.3   NT Housing to prioritise the building and allocation of housing to local recruits in teaching

Longer term initiatives:

6.4   To support the development of adult education centers that become part of remote schools

6.5   Continue to support initiatives that allow First Nations peoples to live and learn on there traditional homelands

6.6   Support the empowerment of economic models that harmonises the gap between the public value afforded to roles in First Nations paradigms with the economic value afforded through the Western paradigm

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Appendix 1

An introduction to the people and pedagogies of Yirrkala School

Dhanbul Djamarrku_l_i: the history of bilingual education at Yirrkala School (12:25)

Available from: https://vimeo.com/220585972
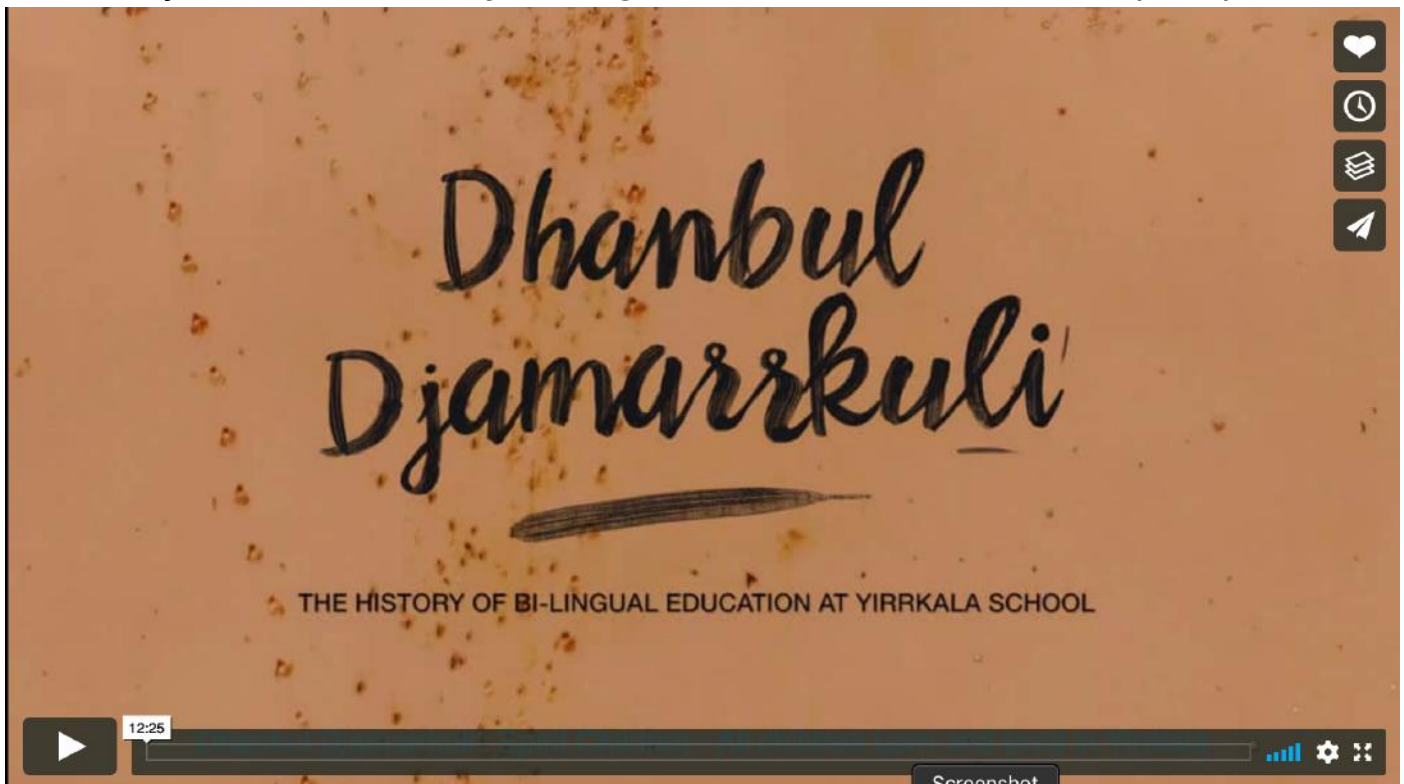
Hope for this Land: learning in the classroom and on country (13:25)

Available for download from:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/1kelm85ms53hl34/Hope%20for%20this%20Land_Draft_03052019.mp4?dl=0

Appendix 2

Garma Maths: Djalkari Stand Learning Continuum

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Elements		Level 1 (Preschool)	Level 2 (Transition)	Level 3 (Year 1 and 2)	Level 4 (Year 3 and 4)	Level 5 (Year 5 and 6)	Level 6 (Year 7, 8 & 9)	Level 7 (Year 10, 11 & 12)
		Yumurrku		Dhayka ga Melwurum'		Gumurr-Betjŋu ga Gurrmul		Wirrkuḻ' ga Ḏarramu
Rom	Gurruṯu	1a I can identify myself as a Dhuwa or Yirritja person	2a. I can identify the moieties of immediate and extended family	3a. I can identify the moiety of my waŋa	4a. I can identify the moiety of my ŋäṉḏi, märi and waku waŋa.	5a. I can identify where all my waŋa and my ŋäṉḏi, märi and waku waŋa are	6a. I can explain my role in my ŋäṉḏi, märi and waku waŋa	7a. I can begin to apply my role in my ŋäṉḏi, märi, waku and yapa waŋa.
	Hunting	1c. I can join in hunting with family and use other materials to practice hunting skills (e.g. gaḏiṯjirri)	2c. I can name different hunting tools	3c.I can begin to describe rom associated with hunting (e.g. sharing)	4c. I can describe the purposes of the different hunting tools	5c. I can describe how to make them different hunting tools	6c. I can make my own hunting and gathering tools	7c. I can teach younger children about making objects/tools, under supervision of elders
		1d. I can identify places where they can hunt	2d. I know how to be safe when I am hunting with others	3d. I can tell stories about how prepare and clean up when hunting	4d.I can apply rules for cleaning up the remains after hunting	5d. I can use simple hunting techniques with guidance e.g. middens	6d. I can use simple hunting techniques independently e.g. middens	7d.I can use complex hunting techniques with guidance e.g. use of fire or moon
Manikay ga buŋgul	Buŋgul	1e. I can join in with buŋgul and copy others	2e. I can begin to practice independently some common buŋgul that I know	3e. I can independently start to participate in buŋgul	4e. I can embody the spirit of the animal that I am dancing about to develop my responsibility to the animal and the clan	5e. I can describe ŋäṉḏi-pulu, märi-pulu, waku-pulu and yapa-pulu buŋgul	6eI can identify when to join in with ŋäṉḏi-pulu, märi-pulu, waku-pulu and yapa-pulu buŋgul	7e. I can participate confidently in a wide range buŋgul and manikay with expression
	Manikay	1f. I can join in with manikay and copy others	2f. I can begin to practice independently some common manikay that I know	3f. I can independently start to participate in manikay	4f. I can describe and understand what the manikay is about by listening to the words	5f. I can describe ŋäṉḏi-pulu, märi-pulu, waku-pulu and yapa-pulu manikay	6f. I can identify when to join in with ŋäṉḏi-pulu, märi-pulu, waku-pulu and yapa-pulu manikay	7f. I can interpret the concepts of my own and other clan song cycles
	Deep Manikay	1g. I can identify when deep manikay is taking place and responding appropriately				2g. I can practice in my mind the deep manikay including the names and melodies		3g.I can join in with deep manikay where appropriate including the names and melodies
Yirralka wäŋa		1h. I can say the names of places in their home community and local environment	2h. I can name my yirralka waŋa	3h. I can recognise my own djalkiri wäŋa and name features of it	4h. I can describe the features of my own djalkiri wäŋa	5h. I can describe the features of their djalkiri wäŋa and surrounding areas	6h.I can investigate my relationships to other homeland communities	7h. I can identify and describe the general characteristics of the Miwatj region
		1i. I can name the features of their own homeland			2i. I can describe the features of my close relatives wäŋa			3i.I can define my riŋgitj on other people's land
Wäŋa	Seasons	1j.I can describe some things that happen when seasons and day/night change	2j. I can name the significant events happening in the current season	3j.I can name the local seasons and weather patterns	4j. I can identify indicators of seasonal and weather changes	5j. I can describe how the seasons and weather affect people's lives	6j. I can explain Yolŋu land management practices for different times of the year	7j. I can put into practice activities that are relevant to the current season
	Ŋatha	1k. I can name common bush fruits and foods	2k. I can identify the moiety of common bush fruits and foods	3k. I can name the main places where local bush foods and animals are found	4k. I can identify bush foods found at different times of the year	5k. I can explain how different bush foods grow in different ways,	6k. I can describe who has rights for getting food from different places	7k. I can explain special ways for cooking, cutting and sharing traditional foods
	Animals	1L.I can name common local animals	2L. I can identify the moiety of common local animals and name my waŋarr	3L.I can recognise and draw different animal tracks	4L. I can identify where common bush animals are found at different times of the year	5L. I can name some body parts of different animals	6L.I can describe the journey of my waŋarr	7L. I can describe different manikay that are related to animals
	Dharpa	1m. I can name some common trees and their important features	2m. I can identify common trees using their features	3m. I can identify and know the moiety of common trees	4m. I can name some tools and useful objects made from trees	5m. I can identify the processes for making food from trees	6m. I can prepare tools and food from common foods	7m. I can describe different manikay that are related to trees
	Mirritjin	1n. I can name common bush medicines	2n. I can describe the uses of common bush medicine	3n.I can identify different bush medicine plants	4n.I can classify different part of plants which are eaten and used for medicinal purposes	5n.I know where to find different bush medicine plants	6n.I can find and prepare appropriate bush medicines under the supervision of elders	7n.I can describe how traditional healing practices can be used together with medicine from other cultures
	Gapu	1o.I can name different parts of the environment	2o.I can talk about places were water can be found	3o. I can describe different types of water including rain and its importance	4o.I can explain how to find, get and collect water	5o.I can name different Dhuwa water and Yirritja water names (metaphors)	6o.I can identify special waterholes and their meanings	7o.I can explain stories about other types of water, why they are important and how they are connected

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Miny'tji	1p. I experiment with different colours e.g. ochres/clay/charcoal on my face/arms	2p. I take basic direction from elders about using different patterns	3p. I begin to use tools for painting e.g. hair brush	4.p I can describe the story of different colours and miny'tji	5p. I can independently refine my own miny'tji through practice	6p. I can begin to use my miny'tji on different mediums e.g. bark under guidance	7p.I can analyse and describe deep aspects and stories of miny'tji and how it is used to make art
	1q. I experiment with different patterns on my face/arms	2q. I take basic direction from elders about using basic patterns	3q. I begin to paint my own waŋarr	4q I can describe the basic story of my waŋarr and use basic patterns independently e.g. diamonds	5q. I can independently refine artworks of my own waŋarr and associated patterns	6q. I can identify the artworks of my Ŋändi and Märi waŋarr	7q. I can analyse the symbols and patterns of my own and my Ŋänḏi's miny'tji
Dhäruk	1r. I can pick up and use words from Yolŋu languages in undifferentiated way	2r. I can differentiate the Yolŋu languages spoken by different people	3r. I can identify my clan's dhäruk and use some words from this language during play	4r. I can identify the name of my mother's, father's and grandmother's languages	5r. I can recognise my mother's, father's and grandmother's languages	6r. I can use some features of grammar and specialised vocabulary from their father's language	7r. I can identify and use 'strong' vocabulary, including an adult range of hand signs and structures which feature in older people's language in a wide range of contexts