LEARNING TO BE KUNWINJKU
Kunwinjku People Discuss Their Pedagogy
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I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by research of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed__________________________________ (Steven J Etherington)
Date______________________________________
ABSTRACT

This study is a grounded ethnography describing and theorising the ideas and practices of teaching and learning in a small Australian Aboriginal group who continue to speak Kunwinjku as their first language. Their pedagogy is a core component of adult-child relationships developed in the hearth family, which is the most crucial venue for pedagogy. The Kunwinjku curriculum of moral values, ideas, language, social skills, survival skills and creative techniques was received from, and authorised by, previous Kunwinjku generations, with adults permanently obligated to teach it to the succeeding generation.

Tensions between the intense endosociality of Kunwinjku family life and the relational demands of the wider Kunwinjku society are resolved through unique pedagogic features of the Ceremonies.

The global intention of Kunwinjku pedagogy is the production of a socially and morally competent Kunwinjku adult; someone who lives by “the Law”.

Pedagogic practice is built on comprehensive expectations about the mental processes of the child and the development of the child as an autonomous learner, and on strong adult motivation and responsibility to teach children. Teaching and learning are both intentional and their success is highly valorized.

The range of instructional tactics includes scaffolded approximation, mutual questioning, mentored field practice, repetition, drill and explicit direction and revelation. These are applied in co-constructed dyadic relationships; teacher and child-learner interact collaboratively as to goals and processes.

Schooling provided by non-Kunwinjku Australian society has been a problematic experience for Kunwinjku people. Kunwinjku people are alarmed at the failure of their younger generation to learn either the Kunwinjku curriculum (the Law) or to master the curriculum of the outside world. There is some evidence that the primary pedagogic relationship (adults as teachers and children as learners) is collapsing as adults surrender stakeholder status in the education of their children.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin by acknowledging God’s graciousness, which I have experienced through the many people who have sustained and taught me over the years.

I have spent most of my adult life living as a Kunwinjku language learner. While I owe a real debt of thanks to dozens of Kunwinjku people, I want to particularly say thank you to my teachers, knowing I can never repay their patience and their willingness to give me their time.

Mirndabbarl Manakgu made room for me and my family in his life over twenty-eight years. With his family we experienced the intimacies of Kunwinjku life in bush and town settings, in happiness and in grief, in peace and conflict over the years. He taught me to paint, he taught me the stories, he taught me the Law – for him, always, the moral Law, and he taught me Kunwinjku politics. I was also privileged to be involved in meetings between Mirndabbarl and his friend since childhood, Bill Neidji, who always encouraged me to speak to him in Kunwinjku and about strictly Kunwinjku matters, whether Christian issues or to do with family history and the ceremonial life.

Andrew Manakgu (my brother) a man of extraordinary humility, sense of humour and intelligence, was my friend and tutor for 28 years. He taught me to speak Kunwinjku by ignoring both my discomfort and my attempts to structure this process, and by utilising the toughness and sense of humour needed in relational pedagogy. During this research, Andrew’s advice when I faced problems in transcribing and translating taught me aspects of Kunwinjku I could have learnt in no other way.

Ngalmakgu Nabobob taught me to laugh at my language learning mistakes and so transform them into learning. Her unwillingness to repeat instruction made me an attentive listener. Her late husband Lazarus taught me how not to speak at all, but how to track, how to stalk and how to use hand signals in the bush.

Esther Djayhgurrnga taught me about the exquisite difficulties encountered by thoughtful Kunwinjku people working in cross-cultural settings.

I have been moved and encouraged by the example of some other Kunwinjku men and women of integrity and courage: Jeremiah Garlngarr who is committed to fatherhood as the supreme role in a man’s life; Raylene Gellar who exemplifies the tough love and the sense of humour needed to raise children in any circumstances - teaching and disciplining without rancour or despair; Yuyuwanga Nadjamerrek
(Bulliwanga) and Julie Narndal, strong women who loved to ask questions but were always willing to answer mine.

I cannot name the hundreds of Kunwinjku children who have always insisted on speaking to me in their language at any time and about any topic. It is their intelligence and their future potential that drove this research. I have only one final goal for this writing: that is will empower Kunwinjku children to learn what is right and helpful in facing the complex choices they must make much too soon.

I also wish I could still say thank you to the late Midjawmidjaw who understood very well the complexities of my position as a man, as a Christian man, as a Kunwinjku man, a Balanda man and a participant in Wubarr. He and other senior men have been good humoured and persistent teachers.

I also need to thank some of my fellow students: Bishop Philip Freier supported me pastorally and with the brotherly encouragement of a fellow writer of doctoral theses. Sister Robyn Reynolds demonstrated in her own life the advice she gave to me in regard to this research - “Be Humble! Just do it!” Stephen Harris encouraged me to study and to write initially, when I was feeling my way towards this task. Stephen’s passionate and scholarly commitment to exploring and empowering Aboriginal pedagogy should be celebrated. Peter Carroll has encouraged me in word and example since 1977. I appreciate deeply his integrity and his fellowship in the task of Kunwinjku Bible translation and of seeking to empower Kunwinjku people.

Paul Black has been my supervisor but must not be held accountable for faults in this thesis. They do not reflect his encouragement, advice, criticism and patience, all exercised on my behalf for nearly a decade.

Finally but supremely I thank my wife Narelle, who has demonstrated par excellence the practice of relational pedagogy in the classroom, and whose intelligent advice and loving encouragement through the years have been God’s greatest gift to me in this world.
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APPENDICES

The appendices are not printed, but are provided in the CD included with this volume. The full texts of all the interviews are provided as separate documents on this CD.

Please refer to chapter five for more information about how to read the interview texts.

Appendix One: Kunwinjku Interview Texts
Appendix Two: English Glosses of Interview Texts
Appendix Three: Preamble and Questions used in the interviews
Appendix Four: Working Bibliography
CONVENTIONS AND TERMS USED IN THE THESIS

SOME KEY TERMS:

**Bininj** Kunwinjku people call themselves this. It means, loosely, Aboriginal, or just “people”, though it can mean “man” as distinct from woman or child.

**Balanda** I have almost always used the expression *Balanda* in discussion, rather than “white people”, “English speaking people”, “the mainstream” and so forth, despite the fact that any one of these may be in view at the time and might equally well translate this word. In doing so I follow the normal Kunwinjku usage in lumping all non-Kunwinjku people together as *Balanda*. Usually, when Kunwinjku people use *Balanda*, it is not racial difference but differential power that is in focus, with the issue of language difference the second most likely concern in mind.

**Teacher** In some of these texts “teacher” means the Kunwinjku person doing the teaching, rather than someone employed in that role within the school.

USE OF ITALICS AND UNDERLINING

I have italicised Kunwinjku words cited in the thesis. Underlining is used for subheadings within subsections (as indicated by the section numbering) but I have also used it to indicate emphasis on a particular English word in lieu of using italics. The quotations used throughout the thesis from the interviews are italicised and formatted distinctively. Please note below other conventions about the way the interviews are presented.

CAPITALISATION

I have tended to capitalise some expressions to reflect their status in Kunwinjku discourse as significant entities: Old People, Ceremony and Law are examples. Sometimes School is capitalised when discussed as a general entity.

USE OF PERFECT AND PRESENT TENSE IN DISCUSSION.

I have decided not to attempt to maintain any consistency about the use of the “ethnographic present” tense (Barfield, 1997, p.156-7) or the past tense in reporting findings. Depending on the area of discussion, it has been necessary to describe aspects of Kunwinjku pedagogy as though they existed only in the past, or in a way affirming their continuation at the time of the interviews. Generally this usage has reflected the viewpoint taken by the relevant interview texts.
NAMES OF PLACES AND PEOPLE

Oenpelli and Kunbarllanjnja are both names of the same place.
I have Capitalised personal and place names. Neither English or Kunwinjku names and places are italicised in the text.

ABBREVIATIONS

Aboriginal is often used nowdays for Aborigine. The adjective is used as a noun because of changes in linguistic fashion. I have generally preferred in the thesis to use Kunwinjku or Bininj. I have not generally needed to use the term indigenous.

CDEP Community Development Employment Programme

CDU Charles Darwin University, formerly University of the Northern Territory (NTU).

CMS Church Missionary Society – a voluntarily funded Anglican Church organisation sending missionaries to North Australia since the first arrived at Roper River in 1908. NESB – Non English Speaking Background.

FATSIS Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (at Charles Darwin University which was formerly Northern Territory University)

NTDE – Northern Territory Department of Education

NTU – Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University)

RATE programme: Remote Area Teacher Education Programme. Batchelor College provided this bridging model of teacher training to allow indigenous students to study and undertake supervised practice teaching in their own communities.

References to other places within the thesis are given in the form of the section and subsection numbers enclosed in brackets: for example (8.1.1)

SELECTED KUNWINJKU WORDS

Djang a site where spiritual beings have become pictures on rock, and the ideas associated with that place.

Demed – the name of a hill near one of the Kunwinjku outstations, which represented a dog in one of the myths local to the area. For political reasons this name has been applied to the outstations resource organisation in Oenpelli. It is often mistaken for a set of initials.

Duwa and Yirridjdja are the two moieties in the Kunwinjku kinship system.

Other Kunwinjku words are glossed in the thesis as they occur.
CONVENTIONS USED IN THE QUOTATIONS FROM INTERVIEWS

[1] All discussion of Kunwinjku data from the interviews is cited by the alphabetical code for each interview followed by the paragraph numbers shown in the full English glosses of the interview texts in Appendix Two. For example [AN: 6] or AN (6) both refer to paragraph six of the interview with AN. References to more than one interview are formatted thus: [AN: 6; BG: 12, 33].

[2] Two of the interviews were with two people at once, with each interviewee shown only by one coded initial. PS is actually P and S; RN is R and N. This is explained in more detail in section 5.4.2.

[3] In a number of cases I have quoted only from part or parts of a numbered paragraph, the omissions usually indicated by … This means that the same paragraph number may apply to what appear to be different blocks of text, for example when the first and last sentences of a paragraph are cited separately in different parts of this discussion, for example [AN: 6] locates the sources of several different sentences in the same paragraph but which may be quoted at separate points in the thesis.

[4] Please note that I have relied on some interviewees more than others in discussion of particular topics, reflecting their expertise or clarity or interest in the topic. So, for example, MM is cited more than other informants in discussing Ceremonies; JU and ED are cited more heavily than other informants in talking about School.

[5] [Square Brackets] within a paragraph indicates either the interviewer or another speaker interrupting the informant. The interrupting speaker’s initials are given to avoid confusion about who is speaking. SE means the researcher is speaking.

[6] (Round Brackets) when used in a quotation from an interview include information added by the interviewer during transcription, usually adding a gloss for a Kunwinjku word, or supplying an ellipsed but clearly understood word or phrase.

[7] At some points in the thesis I have shown a sequence of quotations from several interviews. These are separated by bullets to ensure they are understood as separate.

[8] “Exclusive” and “inclusive” (abbreviated as exc. and inc.) indicate whether or not first person pronouns include the hearer as well as the speaker, a distinction mandatorily grammaticalized as part of the verb complex in Kunwinjku.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THESIS

1.1 ENCOUNTERING KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY

1.1.1 Orientation

This thesis reports on grounded ethnographic research about the pedagogic ideas and practices the Kunwinjku speaking Aborigines of northern Australia. The research was based partly on my own informal observations of this pedagogy over two decades, but more significantly on a series of ethnographic interviews in which Kunwinjku people have spoken about both the practices and the ideas and goals of their teaching and learning. I describe Kunwinjku pedagogy in both the family and ceremonial domains and how it interacts with the pedagogy of non-Aboriginal government schooling. Throughout my discussion I have suggested how a theory of human teaching and learning emerges from the Kunwinjku data.

This chapter is in two main sections: firstly, I introduce the phenomenon of Kunwinjku teaching and learning by providing a set of very brief descriptions of some of the very many pedagogic behaviours and events I observed. Then I summarise the contents of each of the remaining chapters of the thesis to provide a narrative overview of the research.

1.1.2 Encountering the Phenomena of Kunwinjku Pedagogy

Kunwinjku society is in a constant state of pedagogic activity; people are teaching and learning continually. I provide the following examples from among thousands of interactions I encountered in Kunwinjku life. The following are typical:

Basketry

A fifty year old woman is teaching a group of 8-10 year old children to make baskets from pandanus leaves. She talks almost continuously to the children who are seated, as she is, cross legged on the ground with their baskets in front of them. “Watch what I’m doing!” “Try that. That’s good!” “No, do it like this. Watch my hands.” “Okay. This is good.” “When you are grown up you can teach your own children and grandchildren” The children are fully engaged in watching and copying her, and don’t say very much apart from asking sometimes for directions.
Chapter One: Introduction and Summary

Lecture

T, one of the two most elderly artists working regularly at the Injalak Arts and Crafts Centre had asked me to video him telling the stories upon which his paintings are based. A group of younger artists, all men in their twenties and thirties is seated and listens attentively while T stands and lectures them. I leave the video camera running and sit with them. Some of his paintings are laid out on the ground in front of him and he refers to them from time to time as he tells the stories related to each. From time to time he addresses the audience as children: “Kandibekka wurdwurd!” – “You listen to me now, you children.” The young men do not interrupt and follow T’s discourse throughout his forty minute presentation.

R’s Directions on Food Distribution

R, a woman in her sixties, is supervising the young men of her extended family cutting up a kangaroo carcass for cooking and distribution. She explains who should be given each part of the meat and why, and then directs the cutting in detail, while pointing: “Cut it down this way.” “Just here.” “Cut it across here.” “Yes, that’s it.” “Give some to that old lady, and to your mother-in-law.” “Give me that bit”. She is obeyed immediately, the only questions are to clarify specific instructions and take turns with the knife. Smaller children distribute the food on small bunches of leaves used as plates.

Gathering Food

H, a woman in her fifties, accompanies her adult children and young grandchildren gathering yams and other food immediately inland from the beach where they are camped adjacent to Crocker Island. She points out the kind of vine to follow and dig up in order to find long yams (karrbarrda). One of the young men digs a metre and a half into the sand as she directs. She points out other easily gathered bush foods to the older children, who listen to her and ask questions, while the younger adults with the very small children follow their own agenda.

Learning the Fish

A group of woman has taken a group of pre-teenage children fishing. Mostly there is no conversation, but when the adults decide to move further up the creek the adult women start asking questions of the older children: “What’s this fish called?” Sometimes the children don’t know and they are told. Sometimes the children ask
question and are given the names they request for different species of fish and other items they encounter. Sometimes the adults answer with additional detail about preparation of the item or the reasons for its inedible status. The fish caught are cooked by the children under adult direction in the ashes. An individual child aged around eight gathers his own very small fish and boils them over his own fire in a can, just as some of the older women do.

**M teaches his son bark painting.**

M, a sixty year old man and his adult son are jointly painting on a large single piece of bark one of the stories (part of the *Yirrbardbard* cycle) associated with their clan. M is telling the story but interrupts himself from time to time to puff on a cigarette or to mix some fresh ochre, glue and water together on a flat stone to make paint of the required colour. He also interrupts the story from time to time, to give directions to the younger man: “*Yimdurnden kondah*” – “Now bring (the line) back this way”. “*Yiyimowon*” – “(Paint it) there”. “*Kurih yingimen*” – “Go into that (spot)”. “*Kaddum*” – “Up the top.” They leave the session after an hour or so to go and do other things and will return over a few days to complete the picture.

**A Warning**

R, a woman in her seventies is spending the day with her extended family fishing and cooking beside a large waterhole. She has mainly attended to the very small children, providing breakfast and telling them stories, mainly ones that made them laugh. One of the young adult men starts throwing rocks into the pool, a standard method of testing for the presence of fish which react by nearly surfacing. However, he keeps doing this, and the rocks get larger. R suddenly and loudly warns the young man to stop because of unnamed entities other than fish who may become disturbed. She is oblique as to the possible consequences, but she is obeyed.

**A Language Lesson**

A girl in her early teens is nursing her sister’s twelve month old boy and systematically identifying and introducing close relatives to the child, trying to focus his attention on each by snapping her fingers and “pointing” the baby, and trying to have the child copy her in addressing them with the appropriate kinship terms. The baby appears to set the agenda by focusing on various individuals in turn. Only sometimes does he try to verbalize, and seems to be enjoying the process.
Chapter One: Introduction and Summary

**A Group of older men teaches about firewood**

Collecting wood for a gathering of men at a ceremony, a younger man is instructed as to the kinds of firewood needed and their various burning characteristics – slow or fast, nice smelling and so forth. He becomes the butt of some well meaning jokes when the timber he brings is the wrong kind.

**An Older Man teaches Hunting**

L, a fifty year old man is training a young man to hunt kangaroo in the rocky hills near Oenpelli. He only speaks by whispering. Almost all communication is by hand signal, since, although kangaroos are held to have poor eyesight, their hearing is excellent. His admonition before they started up the hill had been terse: “Wokyak. Kanbidna.” “No speaking. Watch my hand (signals).” No explanation is given for the sometimes complex hand signals, but circumstances soon make the meaning apparent.

**Making Fishing Spears**

A father and son are straightening light bamboo spear shafts to make fishing spears. Conversation is mainly informal and about other issues, but occasionally the older man will interrupt pointing out why he is doing a particular process (heating the bamboo and using his teeth as part of the straightening process, tying on the wire points securely and so forth). Later he demonstrates the need to keep the tip of the spear under the surface of the crystal clear water when aiming, so as to avoid parallax error.

**Learning a Ritual Dance**

In preparation for the interment of a body after funeral rites at a remote outstation community, the professional dancers and ceremonial organizers paid and flown in by the relatives of the deceased are rehearsing in public some non-secret dances. Boys aged from around four to twelve years old have joined in the dances and are welcomed. The younger ones simply try to imitate the adults’ movements, while the older boys are encouraged to perform brief solo performances of what they’ve learnt in this imitative process with minimal direction. The boys of all ages are applauded for their performances by men, women and children watching. This is in contrast to the carefully crafted and corrected practice by the men away from public view,
where advice and assessment are direct and matter of fact. Later they will perform this dance in public.

**Adult Language Learning**

A woman in her seventies is teaching her grandson (aged around thirty) corresponding forms of kinship terms in the languages of two adjacent tribes. She says each set of words for his emulation - more slowly if he doesn’t imitate them exactly the first time. Both obviously regard the whole process as enjoyable. The lesson is punctuated by the old woman narrating some family history attached to certain kin in the adjacent tribes.

**Speak Well!**

M, a fifty year old man, corrects his young adult children who have been using a non-standard form of Kunwinjku. He accompanies the linguistic correction with a lecture on language use as an index of moral rectitude which is received in silence.

**Story Time**

A man in his sixties is telling stories to a group of a dozen children aged between five and twelve. Younger children are playing around in and out of the group who are listening attentively to the narrator, although occasionally one or the other will get up to go and attend to a younger child or get something to eat from nearby. Sometimes a child will ask a question and these are usually answered briefly by the narrator. The session lasts twenty minutes.

**History Lessons**

An older husband and wife start talking about “the old days” around the cooking fire. Children between the ages of five and young adult slowly begin to form a focused audience and interrupt with questions occasionally. A great deal of information is provided in a loosely organized narrative discourse over around an hour.

**How and Why People Teach and Learn**

Pedagogy is the structured discourse about human teaching and learning. This thesis is a report on what I have observed Kunwinjku people do, and what I have heard them say about their own pedagogy in their own society, and what I think their ideas may mean for other societies. The following sections of this chapter provide a
summary of the way this research was designed and carried out, and how I have reported and thought about the issues raised by Kunwinjku people.

1.2 THE THESIS IN SUMMARY

1.2.1 Navigation

This chapter can be read as a kind of expanded list of contents or as a continuous text providing a summary of the remainder of the thesis.

1.2.2 The Kunwinjku People and the Researcher

Chapter two is in four sections. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction to the Kunwinjku speaking Aboriginal people of Western Arnhem Land reserve in Australia’s Northern Territory. I describe their society and its recent history, including the arrival in the early 20th century on their country of Balanda, their name for non-Aboriginal people. Secondly, I have sketched a history of Kunwinjku encounters with both an employment economy and the school system imposed by Balanda, firstly through missionaries and then as a secular government school. Thirdly, I describe my own involvement with Kunwinjku society as a school teacher, but also as a learner of the Kunwinjku language and culture. Finally I describe the way I began to encounter and develop Kunwinjku pedagogy as an area for research. I have listed the questions and hypotheses that motivated this structured research.

1.2.3 Writing and Research on Aboriginal Pedagogy

Chapter three reports on seven areas of writing on issues related to Kunwinjku pedagogy:

- I discuss the notion of pedagogy and research about pedagogy in Aboriginal societies;
- I introduce some of the limited research about Aboriginal childhood, child psychology, child-rearing and children’s learning;
- I describe research focused on Aboriginal aspirations about pedagogy in school contexts;
- I discuss some theorization about schooling for minority group children in large societies;
- I discuss in more detail studies of how Aboriginal children’s experience of pedagogy interacts with their encounters with schooling;
Chapter One: Introduction and Summary

- I describe the issues involved in theoretical discussion about Aboriginal experiences in school;
- Finally, I introduce the relatively recent phenomenon of Aboriginal people writing about pedagogies in their own societies.

I argue throughout chapter three that there has been a dearth of research on Aboriginal pedagogy despite the reasonable assumption that Aboriginal societies must have had a well developed system of pedagogy before the arrival of Balanda and that this pedagogy might still be practiced outside the school and therefore may potentially address issues of pedagogy in the school. The epistemological models and theories on teaching or learning implicit in this pedagogy would have been transmitted orally, leaving no easily accessible record outside knowledgeable individuals in each Aboriginal group. While an attempt to study pre-contact education is therefore highly problematic, we still have access to older Aboriginal people and those who may remember practicing pedagogy as teachers or learners in strictly Aboriginal domains like Ceremony. I have argued in this chapter that Aboriginal voices are not only available and potentially helpful in this process, but need to be involved in theorization about pedagogy generally.

1.2.4 Designing a Grounded Ethnography.

Chapter four reports on ethical and procedural issues in designing a grounded methodology allowing Kunwinkju voices to be heard in discussion of what is a significant part of their lives. My involvement as a Kunwinkju second language speaker and informal participant observer over fifteen years posed some complication for utilizing a more formal approach to research. I describe the process of engaging people in reflection and interviews in ways allowing them to speak freely and in their own language. I discuss some of the issues raised by the processes of translation and representation of the resulting texts. The interview process was necessarily slow, but the analysis of the resulting data was also very time consuming, needing to address questions as to how Kunwinjku theorization could be presented without distortion and how it relates to non-Kunwinjku discourse on pedagogy. I also note the mechanisms for ensuring stakeholder controls, and de-identifying informants while also providing full texts for scholarly perusal.
1.2.5 A General Introduction to the Findings

Chapter five introduces the Kunwinjku people interviewed, using de-identified descriptions of their personal viewpoints and special interests and their relationship with the researcher. I describe some features of the corpus of translated texts generated from these long non-directive interviews and explain how these texts have invited discussion in the thesis, and how I cite and comment on parts of these texts throughout the thesis.

I describe some major areas of agreement across all the interviews and provide a preliminary summary of the features of pedagogy they reveal. Their descriptions are generally of a fondly remembered earlier period in their lives and that of their community, which they contrast with the contemporary Kunwinjku world, noting some problems in the practice of pedagogy they have observed more recently. The broad features of this remembered pedagogy are discussed, including the prospect they should continue as normative of expectations about pedagogy in contemporary Kunwinjku life. This remembered pedagogy was characterized by high levels of community solidarity and harmony and strong adult-child collegiality.

1.2.6 Hearth Family Pedagogy.

Chapter six presents my summary of Kunwinkju pedagogy, and my suggestions as to how it may be modeled as a coherent theory. I discuss the existence and scope of Kunwinjku discourse and ideas on pedagogy, and then describe its major features. Discussion of these key features will then be presented in detail in chapters 7 through 12. Chapter six describes in detail Kunwinjku pedagogy as rooted in intimate relationships experienced in the hearth family. I describe the way various family members engage in teaching the family’s children, looking briefly at roles specifically associated with certain kinship categories, the content and practice of the teaching, and the relationship between adults and children in Kunwinjku thinking. I describe the core features of the hearth family pedagogy:

- there was a curriculum of survival skills (like gathering and preparing food), moral principles and language skills;
- there was a high level of adult child collegiality with instruction taking place in shared experiences of real life tasks such as hunting;
Chapter One: Introduction and Summary

- Instruction took place as part of the normal daily routines of life as part of strong intergenerational relationships.

Finally, I propose a foundational Kunwinjku principle: Pedagogy is a function of relationship.

1.2.7 The Old People and Contemporary Pressure

Chapter seven begins detailed discussion of core aspects of Kunwinkju pedagogy by first addressing Kunwinjku reliance on their recent human ancestors, whom they call “The Old People” and whose example and authority are crucial to contemporary practice of pedagogy. I present and commented upon the high value placed on these ancestors by Kunwinjku people, and their views on the role of the Old People as teachers and the significance of their authority in constructing and understanding the curriculum and methodology of contemporary pedagogy. I describe features of their pedagogy - the way the Old People taught - as remembered and valued by informants.

I report too the alarm Kunwinjku informants feel at the displacement and gradual loss of this older generation. This introduces a theme that reemerged in most of the interviews; the outside, non-Kunwinjku world is impinging irresistibly on even the most intimate parts of Kunwinjku life, including its pedagogy. This theme is developed in later chapters as I cite informant concerns about issues like children’s behaviour, language, social and economic changes and governance as these are involved in various aspects of pedagogy. I have implied in this and the following chapters that the rate and nature of the outside pressures on Kunwinjku life have overwhelmed their normal human capacity to respond adaptively and led to changes in their society they regard as pathological.

1.2.8 Ceremony as Pedagogy

Chapter eight describes Kunwinjku ritual and ceremonial life in terms of its strong pedagogic role, and as a distinctive domain for teaching and learning. I describe Kunwinjku experiences in a range of formal and informal ritual as well as major ceremonies, discussing the pedagogic features of each. I then discuss the relationship between the pedagogic practice of the hearth family and of the ceremony and the way ceremonial instruction relates to social alliances in Kunwinjku life generally. I discuss methodologies that are used in ceremonial instruction and I discuss
Kunwinjku views on issues of pedagogy and gender and the pedagogic functions of fear and secrecy in ceremonial contexts for teaching and learning. Ceremonial pedagogy involves a formalization of the role of teacher and processes of assessment, and I discuss how this formalization relates to hearth family pedagogy. I then discuss the significance of ceremonial pedagogy for a relational view of teaching and learning. Finally, I report some concerns Kunwinjku people have about the viability of their ceremonial life and the attitudes of their younger generation.

1.2.9 “Law” as Curriculum

In chapter nine I argue that the Kunwinjku conception of their “Law” reifies composite Kunwinjku views of what constitutes Kunwinjku adult identity – describing the whole of the life practices and ideas that characterize an authentic and effective Kunwinjku adult. Learning the Law means learning how to be a Kunwinjku adult, meaning the Law is a holistic Kunwinjku curriculum to be taught and learnt. I introduce this chapter by discussing Kunwinjku terminology about law and the various connotations involved. I have then discuss “subject areas” within this Law, in particular the highly valorized advanced language skills and moral obligations needed to operate within the formal kinship structure. I discuss the way Law reflects Kunwinkju group self-image, and relationality, which leads to a discussion of the issue of law breaking and social tensions and how these are addressed in pedagogic terms by Kunwinjku people.

The Balanda world has made a significant impact on the teaching and learning of the Kunwinjku curriculum, challenging its hegemony in Kunwinjku thinking and forcing some adaptations and I suggest Kunwinjku statements about “Both Ways” learning is defensive, given the way the Balanda world has tended to displace the Law as the Kunwinjku curriculum. Finally I discuss theoretical ideas linking ceremony and general socialization in terms of relational pedagogy.

1.2.10 Adults as Teachers; Children as Learners.

Chapter ten introduces Kunwinjku ideas about the way adults teach and the nature of children and the way they learn. I briefly describe the language resources Kunwinkju people use to discuss cognition and instruction in pedagogic discourse, revealing a complex and specialized lexicon. I then describe Kunwinjku ideas of child development and cognition, and how they relate to adults teaching them. I discuss the
main stages of Kunwinjku childhood and adolescence describing the terminology and particular pedagogical processes applying to each. I then discuss how Kunwinjku adults view their roles as teachers of children, and the nature of the relationship between adults and children generally. I suggest there is a Kunwinjku expectation that adults and children co-construct pedagogic relationships, but that children should move towards self-managed learning, and finally towards emergence as teachers in their own right. Finally I discuss the way the childhood autonomy which formed part of the remembered pedagogy are has now become something uncontrolled and therefore pathological in terms of its potential to harm the children.

1.2.11 Kunwinjku Teaching Methods

Chapter eleven is a summary of the practical teaching techniques used by Kunwinjku adults as teachers. Teaching occurs within frameworks set for pedagogy by economics, history, views of child development and cognition, and the timetables of the family or larger group. Within those parameters teachers choose from a range of resources and methodologies for teaching, with the selection and application of a method, or an eclectic methodology, occurring sometimes consciously, but usually automatically.

Chapter eleven links the broad pedagogic concerns of previous chapters with the real world constraints on Kunwinjku teachers, and describes the process they use in designing appropriate methods for teaching depending on the learner’s age and both the venue and content for instruction. Adults as teachers may choose to apply one or usually more methods from a set of core Kunwinjku tactics for instruction based on directed observation, reliance on oral memory and approximated performance in real life venues. Regardless of method or venue, teaching was attentive to children’s developmental readiness and provided emotional as well as cognitive scaffolding, supporting the learner towards independent performance. Instruction was always explicit as to goals and processes, but questioning was used extensively by teachers, and invited and expected from learners expressing the strong preference for mutuality in the pedagogic task.

1.2.12 Narrative as Pedagogy

Chapter twelve describes Kunwinjku preference for stories as the core methodology in formal teaching. I argue from Kunwinjku statements and from the specific lexicon about stories, that narrative is the preferred mode of instruction about moral values,
family histories, kinship responsibilities and theology (whether Christian or otherwise) and can be used to warn, encourage or simply entertain. The repertoire of oral literature was vast and suggested a number of oral text types, and a range of contents. I argue that stories and story time were the most intimate pedagogic experiences remembered by children, and that they therefore particularly represent a relational mode of teaching and learning. Narrative pedagogy has been susceptible to displacement by TV and other Balanda sources of teaching, and of time consuming entertainments. I describe the way technologization and commercialization may prevent the transmission of authentic Kunwinjku narrative to Kunwinkju children, despite intentions to preserve or transmit the stories by means other than intimate hearth family engagement.

1.2.13 School
Chapter thirteen describes Kunwinjku experiences of schooling provided by the Balanda world. Having described the principles and practices of Kunwinkju pedagogy in previous chapters, in this chapter I address the way these Kunwinjku pedagogic features interact with school pedagogies and expectations. Discussion of the school draws together two themes that emerged throughout the thesis: the pervasive impact of school and its pedagogy in Kunwinjku life, and Kunwinjku feelings of disempowerment and social fragmentation in contact with the Balanda world.

Kunwinjku people have a long experience of school based learning and remember having been well taught in the English language domain. Their comprehensive pedagogy stretched to fit the school environment, a process assisted by the involvement of experienced Kunwinjku adults and full adult employment. Social problems have increasingly made the school less workable. Attendance has declined as an expression of, and parallel to, the decline in adult attendance at work, ceremonies and even major rituals such as funerals.

Chapter thirteen poses and suggests answers to some distressing questions: Why does the comprehensive Kunwinjku pedagogy fail in the school environment, when some of its key features overlap with school based pedagogies? Why do Kunwinjku people seem to lose confidence in analyzing what happens when Balanda structures are involved in pedagogy? How do Kunwinjku want to interact with the school? What are their pedagogic aspirations in both school and non school
domains? To what extent does the now unsupervised nature of Kunwinjku childhood autonomy preclude effective school pedagogy?

1.2.14 Concluding Speculations

Chapter fourteen concludes by attending to two concerns I have developed throughout the thesis: theorization from the Kunwinjku data, and the contingency of a society’s pedagogy upon the social and economic parameters impacting that society. In chapter fourteen I briefly explore the potential for a relational model of pedagogy for interaction with other abstract theorization. I also propose a further refinement of relational theory, suggesting adult commitment to pedagogy is motivated to reproduce the identity of the parent, a kind of non biological personal reproduction, and that pedagogy practiced in groups of any kind, whether the hearth family, the ceremonies or the school, are aggregate processes sharing a venue in pursuit of this essentially individual personal goal.

I have then briefly note some major lacunae in research in Aboriginal education generally suggesting the need for studies of the way Kunwinjku and other similar societies perceive the relationship between school and employment, and the way in which local problems in economic and governance issues may impact Kunwinjku pedagogy indirectly even at the hearth family level.

I suggest as the key area needing further research the aspirations of children whose extreme autonomy and anomie in regard to both Kunwinjku law and the school curriculum combine to make them precociously the primary and perhaps sole pedagogic stakeholders in their future selves.
CHAPTER TWO
THE KUNWINJKU PEOPLE AND THE ORIGINS OF THIS RESEARCH
CHAPTER 2: THE KUNWINJKU PEOPLE AND THE ORIGINS OF THIS RESEARCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE KUNWINJKU PEOPLE AND THE RESEARCHER

2.1.1 Orientation to the Chapter

In 1.1 I introduced the phenomenon of pedagogy as real people doing real life activities. This chapter will describe the community in which these people and their pedagogy were observed, and describe key factors that impact the community and influence its practice of pedagogy, in particular, the intrusion of the school system and other aspects of Australian mainstream life in recent Kunwinjku history. I will provide a sketch history of Oenpelli, which has become the centre for Kunwinjku life, and a history of the way school-based education has become part of Kunwinjku experience. I need to provide some background for understanding comments in the interviews about various Balanda government bodies and practices and their impact on Kunwinjku society, so I will report my own observations on these issues as a participating resident in the Kunwinjku speaking community. I first provide an autobiographical account of my involvement in Kunwinjku life, and explain the way this research developed over a long period of immersion in Kunwinjku life. Finally, I will describe the genesis of a number of research questions and hypotheses.

2.1.2 The Kunwinjku Speaking Aboriginal Community

This research was conducted in the Kunwinjku language, spoken by approximately two and a half thousand Aboriginal people who live in a series of small communities in the western part of the Arnhem Land reserve and in the Kakadu National Park in Australia’s Northern Territory. Kunwinjku people are part of the small minority among Australia’s indigenous peoples who still operate in their own languages and retain significant elements of their traditional lifestyles. The frontiers of mainstream life have intruded into their society much more slowly than was the case for tribal groups in other parts of Australia, but in the last three decades the accelerating pressure of this engagement means Kunwinjku people are experiencing changes at a rate they identify as too much and too fast, often discussing among themselves their consequent feelings of helplessness and loss of control. The pace and nature of the changes forced upon them inevitably impact pedagogic ideas and behaviours.
Chapter Two: Origins and Motivations for the Thesis

The largest group (of approximately 1000) Kunwinjku people lives in Oenpelli (also called Kunbarllanjnja or Gunbalanya), with other groups living at least some of each year at very small communities, called locally “outstations,” where average populations vary from ten to fifty residents. Communities adjacent to Kunwinjku clan lands – Goulburn Island, Maningrida and Jabiru - all have significant minorities of Kunwinjku speakers. Kunwinjku and its dialects - Guninggu spoken in the most easterly outstations (serviced from Maningrida) and Kundjeyhmi, spoken by Kunwinjku people from the southern part of the Kunwinjku clan lands, now constitute a lingua franca across western Arnhem Land, mainly due to increased mobility since contact with the outside world, and the long history of intermarriage between tribes from these areas.

The Kunwinjku people, their language and aspects of their culture have been the subject of a number of specific studies. Spencer (1914) provided the first formal descriptions of the group. Linguistic research was reported by Capell (1940, 1942/3), Oates (1964) and Carroll (1976). Carroll, in a later work (1995), described the way Kunwinjku artists, painting on bark or rock, have represented aspects of Kunwinjku oral literature, and also providing a helpful overview of the history of the Kunwinjku people since contact with the first non-Aboriginal arrivals, the commencement of uranium mining in the 1970s and some of the employment history of the region. Carroll also interacts with a number of other writers on indigenous art and myth in this region, for example Mountford (1956) and Taylor (1987).

Ronald and Catherine Berndt have reported on a number of fieldwork periods with the Kunwinjku, in particular in their monograph on Kunwinjku culture (1970). Altman (1987) has reported on quantitative anthropological research among Kunwinjku (Guninggu) people living in the most easterly outstations of the language group.

Kunwinjku people continue to speak their own language in almost every part of life despite nearly a century of contact with the English speaking Australian population. Only a few adults claim to speak competent English. Their lifestyle retains many fundamental features continuing from pre-contact times, including:

- an intense loyalty to, and focus upon, family and clan, as distinct from the broader tribal group;
- a strong self-aware association with patri-clan land;
- a continuing adherence to the traditional kinship and marriage systems.
Some aspects of traditional culture are changing rapidly under the impact of increased exposure to the non-Aboriginal mainstream world, in particular the contractual (“promise”) marriage system, religious ceremonies and hunting and gathering activities. In conversation among themselves however, Kunwinjku people strongly assert their identity against Balanda (that is, non-Aboriginal people of any kind) and Aboriginal people from other language groups.

2.1.3 The Researcher’s Relationship with the Kunwinjku Community

When I began my formal research, I had lived and worked in Oenpelli and some of its outstations, and worked at learning the Kunwinjku language for 18 years. I did not commence formal research until 1995, so this thesis has grown out of my immersion in the daily lives of Kunwinjku people, and my various roles as a Kunwinjku speaker living and working with them over this period.

In 1977 I first moved into Oenpelli with my wife and three small children, where I had been appointed to set up a bilingual programme at the school. In the years 1977 to the end of 1983 we lived as part of an extended Kunwinjku family, dividing our time between our adoptive family’s outstation (at Wurlwunj, 40km north of Oenpelli) and the house supplied us by the NT Department of Education in Oenpelli. At both sites we lived as part of an extended family group of between ten and thirty Kunwinjku people sharing not only our house (in Oenpelli) or their rough bush shelters (at Wurlwunj), but meals and facilities, laughter, crises and sometimes tears. Most of the adults had never lived in a Balanda house, and we had certainly never lived in a Kunwinjku bush camp. Our efforts to teach and learn from each other the necessary skills and language to do this were an especially enjoyable kind of chaotic cross-cultural pedagogic experience. My wife and I had planned before we arrived at Oenpelli to live exactly in the manner of Kunwinjku people, reserving for ourselves only the three non-negotiable domains of western hygiene, the need to raise our children in English and our commitment to live as biblical Christians. Each of these resolves came under pressure as we embraced our immersion in Kunwinjku life.

My initial task at the school (setting up the bilingual education programme) necessitated learning and the constant use of Kunwinjku language. I worked with a team of Kunwinjku people designing and producing initial literacy materials in the language and then for two years (1979-1980) I taught primary school classes in Kunwinjku – including Kunwinjku literacy. During the same period my family and I
were involved in the range of activities that were part of living in the bush, hunting, fishing and cooking, telling stories and walking and driving for long hours through the bush. We were also part of the last *Wubarr* ceremony, which was held at Wurlwunj, and a variety of other ceremonies and more routine rituals discussed in detail in chapter eight. Neither I nor any of the Kunwinjku men I spent time with predicted that the ceremonial life we were seeing would be gone completely within twenty five years.

I left the school after spending two years as teacher linguist, two years as secondary boys’ teacher and two years as teacher training co-coordinator, to do yet another two year stint of theological and other training in Melbourne and Sydney in 1983 and 1984 before returning to work as Bible translator and language researcher for twelve years with a team of Kunwinjku people. I was eventually persuaded to commence systematic academic study, intending to focus on my areas of interest in teaching, learning and language.

Over this 18 year period I had formed some questions about the way Kunwinjku people teach and learn. I had been involved in many conversations with Kunwinjku people about matters of schooling, child rearing and notions of children’s intelligence and personalities, usually with Kunwinjku parents with children the same age as ours. I had formed the view that the Aboriginal parents felt disqualified from any potent involvement in their children’s schooling, while retaining and applying strong views about what was best for those children both in their own Kunwinjku society and the school and even beyond it. I also became aware that there was no natural venue for the voices of these parents to be heard, due mainly to the monolingual English speaking nature of the school system, and of Australian academia generally. I realized too, that this situation prevailed to a greater of lesser extent in many remote Aboriginal communities, and may have been a significant factor behind the disappointment about Aboriginal education reported so widely more recently by Aboriginal writers (For example Ah Chee 1991b, p.13; Marika-Mununggiritj 1991a, p.31; Pandella 1991, p.16; Brown 1988, p. 106; Lanhupuy 1987). The factors operating in Indigenous schooling seemed to me then as much political and economic as psychological or technical.

2.1.4 A Brief History of Kunwinjku Contact with the Non-Kunwinjku World

Kunwinjku people constantly discuss two issues of profound presumptive importance to pedagogy: the prospects for employment in what Kunwinjku people
call “real” jobs, and their growing despair about controlling the other key factor that shape their lives – the Balanda world and its irresistible pressure for change culturally, technologically, legally and in matters of personal lifestyle. Since these factors intrude into almost every interview as they do into everyday Kunwinjku conversation, I need to provide some description of the encounter between the Kunwinjku world and its invaders. Kunwinjku people generally agree, in informal conversation, about the broad trends in changes to their society across the 130 years since first significant contact with Balanda:

- There has been an accelerating movement to the established infrastructure and centralised services of the only significant township, Oenpelli, with a gradual increase in the percentage of Kunwinjku who move to this centre and become permanent residents;
- There has been a constant desire to acquire goods and some cultural behaviours from the Balanda, including especially tobacco, alcohol, vehicles and technologies for hunting and entertainment;
- There has been a varied availability of employment in working with Balanda, which rose to a peak in the 1960s and 1970s and has now declined catastrophically;
- There has been an accelerating change in the cultural allegiance of younger Kunwinjku people, whose lifestyle increasingly and consciously approximates their perceptions of Australian mainstream life;
- There has been an increasing exposure of Kunwinjku people to western mass culture and telecommunications;
- There are increasing psychological and social dysfunctionalities which Kunwinjku people associate with Balanda contact;
- Social problems have developed of a kind new to Kunwinjku life, especially those caused by abuse of alcohol and other substances, and the imposition of new forms of larger group systems of governance and power;
- These pressures to adapt continue to intensify.

The first Balanda began to visit the Kunwinjku world in the 1870s, during the period of expansion by Australian settlers into Aboriginal lands, motivated by commercial hunting of buffalo and later crocodiles, pearls and timber (Carroll 1995, p. 10-11). In the years 1891 – 1924 Oenpelli began as an experimental cattle and dairy property
set up by the government and run by Paddy Cahill between 1891 and 1924. Oenpelli seems to have attracted Kunwinjku people in increasing numbers to stay for progressively longer periods from the earliest days. There is some evidence that Cahill’s authority was resented by the people (Carroll 1995, pp. 12-13), who began to experience what is now a constant theme in their discourse – the irresistible power of the Balanda. Nevertheless, the attractions of a central settlement prevailed over these resentments (which were probably not felt by any individual until he or she had moved into Oenpelli). Issues of inter-group alliance and working relationships between Kunwinjku clans must have soon become a concern too, and continue to provide problems for governance in Kunwinjku organisations now, as people are forced to co-operate with other clans, with whom no previous alliances had been formalised, to create what is for them a radically new form of self-government.

Kunwinjku speaking people who had lived since time immemorial to the East and North of Oenpelli in isolated groups began to live in close proximity with each other, competing for whatever resources were on offer in lieu of their previous hunter-gatherer economic system. The movement back to clan lands, away from Oenpelli, was supported early by mission staff in the late 1960s, but only gained momentum with significant government funding for outstations from the late 1970s. This movement relocated people’s places of residence, but maintained both the now established reliance on Balanda resources and structures of large group governance.

The infrastructure associated with the Balanda world has grown too over time. Oenpelli in 2004 contains a large school (enrolling 250 students) which also services a number of outstation schools, as well as a small bank, two stores and the Injalak Arts and Crafts organisation - a government subsidised centre supporting the sale and promotion of local indigenous paintings and basketry. Another federal government funded organisation, the Demed association, also has its base in Oenpelli. In the late 1990s it employed twelve non-Aboriginal staff to provide air transport, building maintenance and other support to people living at outstations. A medical clinic, staffed by six Balanda and four Kunwinjku, is located in Oenpelli, along with the majority of its clients, but also services people living at outstations. The three other organisations based in Oenpelli and viewed as significant by Kunwinjku people are the Church, the police and the Gunbalanya Sports and Social Club, which has the legally protected monopoly for selling alcohol in the community.
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The lifestyle of Kunwinjku people has altered dramatically since the first contact with the *Balanda* world. People over fifty can remember growing up without permanent housing or the use of cash. Several interviewees recalled the days of mission “rations” before cash entered the community. Some people over seventy remember the advent of clothing, and their first sightings, as young children, of *Balanda*. Today, the majority of people live in large, mainstream style houses with electricity, water and sewerage, almost all built within the last twenty years – although these houses are usually overcrowded by Australian mainstream standards. The outstations centres have over the last thirty years developed from very sparsely equipped seasonal campsites to miniature towns with 24 hour power and water supplies, telephone and television reception, and with medical and food supplies flown in weekly, visiting *Balanda* school teachers, purpose-built school buildings and modern houses.

The availability of non-Aboriginal foods, tobacco and alcohol has meant the traditional diet has been almost entirely displaced in the Kunwinjku community. Hunting and other “traditional” activities are now weekend leisure pursuits and carried out using vehicles, rifles and store bought fishing equipment. Children and adults both watch TV and videos regularly, take part in organised football competitions and have become assimilated to many aspects of western lifestyle.

2.2 PEDAGOGY, EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-IMAGE

2.2.1 Employment and Pedagogy in Kunwinjku Experience

Kunwinjku people frequently discuss issues of employment in daily conversation. Their society is undergoing a rapid and accelerating change from its pre-contact hunting and gathering economy, to a local level micro-economy within the Australian (and global) jobs-based world of work. Adjustment has been complex, painful and may have now stalled. Some of my informants have discussed the link between jobs and school-based education in their interviews, so it is necessary to include here some discussion of Kunwinjku experiences of employment since first contact with *Balanda*.

In the late 19th century buffalo hunters, arriving from the west, attracted Kunwinjku people as co-workers, paying them in either rum (as some older Aboriginal people recall) or tobacco. This must have formed an early association in the Kunwinjku experience between work and access to *Balanda* materiel. Over the
next decades some Kunwinjku worked with cattlemen, crocodile skinners and pearl divers (Carroll, 1996, p.10-11; Bill Neidji, personal comment).

From 1925 the Church Missionary Society (CMS) managed the Oenpelli settlement as agents for the federal government, and the mission was run on the basis that adults and even children provided labour for the gardens and flocks, and constructing the airstrip, roads and houses, receiving rations and other supplies in lieu of their displaced traditional food sources. Gradually, work for wages systems were introduced. Up until the late 1980s the mission abattoirs exported meat and in peak periods employed nearly 100 men who were paid in cash. Until the early 1980s there were gangs of Kunwinjku men working full time in hygiene (before the sewer was installed with federal funding in 1988), building houses, road works and general maintenance. There was almost complete adult employment for men in the 1970s.

Employment opportunities then began to decline as mission control of affairs was relinquished in the wake of the Federal government’s policy of self-management after 1972. This policy assumed a community with sufficient skills, aspiration and cohesion to manage their own workforce, import supplementary skilled staff as needed, and run the complex bureaucracy required by dependent communities continually applying for and managing grants. Although this policy in fact depended upon non-Aboriginal personnel with good will remaining in training and administrative roles, the nature and exact responsibilities of this Balanda group was not canvassed, nor were other consequences of this decision predicted. By early 1980s more and more community jobs were handled by Balanda staff simply because they held the necessary qualifications and skills in English. Their wages consumed a large proportion of the increase in federal funding that became available in this decade. Their apparent competence was discouraging, if not humiliating, to Kunwinjku aspirants. In the last decade the decline in employment has accelerated with the abattoirs losing export sales and the standards of literacy and training required for employment in all jobs steadily rising ahead of Kunwinjku academic attainments, which have declined in the same period as rising unemployment and loss of motivation contributed to lower school attendance.

2.2.2 The Personal Locus of Contact and Employment

The Balanda world has attracted Kunwinjku participation from its first contact. In the last two decades this attraction has grown as the isolation of the Kunwinjku community from the rest of the world has dramatically lessened, with telephones...
arriving to replace very limited two-way radio in the early 1980s and television in almost every Kunwinjku household by the late 1980s. This has produced a constant exposure to the panoply of mainstream entertainment and commerce, inevitably raising expectations and aspirations among younger Kunwinjku. In 2005 Kunwinjku people were buying and using a range of technologies including mobile CDMA phones, often used by children, satellite pay TV and computers. Some have begun to use internet banking when their employers provide access. But the long-term decline in employment and employability of the majority of Kunwinjku are operating powerfully in people’s personal psychologies.

There is a constant tension between the attraction towards increasing cultural assimilation and the realisation of how great a change in lifestyle is needed in order to access these attractions. The constant interaction with the *Balanda* world has heightened self-awareness and the valorisation of what constitutes uniquely Kunwinjku features, that is, features that cannot automatically or quickly be eroded or rendered irrelevant by involvement with the *Balanda* world. On the surface, this can produce a sense of self-esteem, but often Kunwinjku speak among themselves of their distinctiveness critically, comparing themselves unfavourably with the *Balanda* world they experience.

### 2.2.3 Resistance Strategies, Self-Esteem and Employment

At every step of increased contact Kunwinjku people have been forced to concede some self-esteem. From their viewpoint, contact with the non-Aboriginal world rendered them instantly incompetent in new and apparently permanent domains of life. It rendered them suddenly aware of themselves as poor, against the bounty of the outside world. The *Balanda* world of work defined them instantly as unemployable in all but the most marginal jobs. It rendered them ignorant and dependent should they seek to cross from their own world – despite the very powerful incentives to do so. They very quickly lost control over their own affairs both as a community in formation, and as individuals who lives were redefined around relationships with powerful *Balanda*.

The changes in diet and the loss of the automatic physical exercise previously demanded by the hunting and gathering lifestyle, and the inevitable frustration and despair of their new situation surrounded by the *Balanda* world, together with their unemployability within the mainstream economy, explains the increasing evidence of physical and mental health problems reported so frequently in connection with the
Kunwinjku people and other similar remote indigenous groups (for example, Berndt, 1982; Gray, Trompf and Houston, 1991, Tsey, 1997).

The intensity and the degree of invasiveness of the *Balanda* world has increased steadily over time, for example through the compulsory nature of school attendance, the presence of state police in the community enforcing a range of laws whose origins and mechanisms are unknowable to most Kunwinjku, the regulation of funds through banking and the medicalisation of aspects of life like childbirth and circumcision. The compulsive nature of this invading world is resisted by the strong Kunwinjku principle of personal independence, articulated constantly by Kunwinjku in their dealings with others, whether Aboriginal or *Balanda* – “Don’t force me!” This is a constantly operational and generally shared attitude in Kunwinjku society and is realised in events like:

- A child walking out of a class where the teacher disciplines him too directly;
- A Kunwinjku man leaving a job because the supervisor insisted upon attendance and production already agreed to by both;
- Passive resistance to *Balanda* or other Kunwinjku people trying to organise, or to hurry along the organisation of anything from funerals to public meetings.

Knowing how to subtly and in a graduated way resist the forced agenda of others, and how to “back off” and plan other strategies for manipulation when you meet resistance from others, are core elements in learning Kunwinjku social relational skills as children grow through the primary school age years.

This attitude of personal resistance is in automatic and inevitable collision with both the pace of change and the individual agents of change in the *Balanda* world. Kunwinjku people are being assimilated with their willing cooperation in many areas of life, but they resist strongly as individuals when the idea of a loss, freedom choice or dignity is threatened. This kind of resistance is usually expressed indirectly and subtly, so that many *Balanda* are unaware of the resistance they are encountering, particularly when they feel themselves motivated to interfere in Kunwinjku life by virtue of superior knowledge or personal kindness or sentimentality. Though the resistance is invisible to *Balanda* people, it is a conscious daily reality in their dealings with Kunwinjku people, who talk about this confrontation from their viewpoint constantly. There are two features to this resistance that prevent it assuming a politically potent form which could be acted upon by a large group of Kunwinjku.
o This resistance ethic does not necessarily reflect any notion of personal liberty, but recognises the need for someone under pressure to be allowed the dignity of choice, even when all options may be unpalatable, so the response rarely produces any alternative suggestion or positive demand;

o There is a profound lack of cohesion in Kunwinjku society beyond the family boundary, reflecting

a. The ongoing difficulties of adjustment to “town” lifestyles and the broader communal governance it requires, mean that individual agitators or even potentially prophetic leaders can only ever have a small audience, with little prospect of attracting people to a cause beyond the family or clan;

b. Without any independent employment there is the constant need to compete with other Kunwinjku to obtain the support of some or other Balanda, either in the form of wages for working with him, or other benefits related to the job (that is, resources in the hands of one or other particular Balanda). This radical and open ended dependency divides to succour.

2.2.4 Pseudo-Employment and Pedagogy

Over the years, Kunwinjku people have developed some broad strategies for managing the impatience of the Balanda world, whilst exploiting its economic power, and answering the need for job based income despite their automatic lack of qualifications. The pathological nature of these strategies, that is their propensity to harm those applying them, reflects the extreme imbalance of power that also makes these strategies inevitable:

2.2.4.1 The Perpetual Understudy

This is a category of employment providing long-term income, without putting the Kunwinjku participant in a position to be “forced” – that of the perpetual student. FM and JN for example, have both been students in Batchelor college courses for more than 20 years without graduating as independent teachers. They continue to work at the school as assistant teachers. Their salary and status may be less than Balanda teachers, but they retain employment without pressure, and the school system readily accommodates them in this permanent state (see 13.3). More recently an intermittent form of this “professional student” role has become available. From time to time the CDEP programmes (see below) run courses in a variety of basic
skills (vehicle maintenance, computing, bookkeeping etc.) where attendance is funded for several weeks, regardless of outcomes. The same students enrol each time, since they are usually the willing and sober, although the fact that the local liquor outlet has sold alcohol at lunch times over the last decade now means that almost no formal training events are scheduled after lunch hour. This situation inevitably leads to lowered expectation of learning on the part of both students and course providers. More seriously, adults who begin to see themselves as perpetual learners may no longer see themselves as capable of being teachers, either within their own families or at school.

2.2.4.2 “Signatories”

This category allows close working relationships with Balanda, while allowing Kunwinjku participants to be personally unaccountable in the work environment. It is based on the fact that Balanda need the Kunwinjku person only as translator or signatory to certain kinds of documents, beyond which they are not expected to train or perform. For example, DN (a forty-five year old man) “works” in a job where his knowledge of local families allows him to obtain necessary information and signatures to process the myriad forms encountered by welfare dependents. It also allows him considerable unexamined power in directing funds to particular recipients. DG, a forty year old man, as an officially recognised “traditional owner”, is paid to sign various forms which facilitate Balanda entry to Aboriginal land under the relevant state and federal laws that limit this access. He is sometimes “paid” additionally for his signature on particular applications, giving rise to the Kunwinjku perception that he is selling access to people’s land. (The complex issue of traditional owner powers is discussed at 14.2.5).

2.2.4.3 Committee Members

Every organisation in the Kunwinjku world that receives government funding operates on a model that institutionalises the competence and power of Balanda, and the passive resistance and avoidance of compulsion on the part of the Kunwinjku people. The simple mechanism is the use of a board or committee who are, in most cases, paid sitting fees and who describe themselves as providing assent to the proposals of the Balanda who do the day-to-day management of each organisation. They are required simply to sign cheques and accept minutes. Many Kunwinjku people believe this is in fact a transaction: sitting fees in return for assent to the Balanda agenda. This model of governance, based on a kind of pathological
symbiosis, is also utilised in the community’s Local Government Council, through which the great bulk of government funding is channelled into their society. This has implications for self-aware participation in governance.

One morning in 2002, I observed most of the Kunwinjku members of the Local Government Council outside their meeting room having a smoke, drinking tea and listening, as I had been, to a loud argument amongst the Balanda inside the building. Since a Council meeting would normally have been underway at that time, I asked some of the old men what was happening. They laughed and said, “Oh, it’s nothing to do with us. Those Balanda are just having an argument about their business.” The argument, I discovered later, had been about the nature of a new constitution for the community council. The verbal violence and the high level of English, the lack of any feeling of stakeholder authority, meant the Kunwinjku community council simply opted out of the process despite its potential impact on their lives.

In 2004, the council members all resigned without giving any reason apart from “wanting a break”. Discussing this with some of the councillors, I concluded their motivation was a recognition that the Balanda were inevitably going to control decisions, so meetings were a continuing humiliating process where Kunwinjku co-operation was always the goal and always achieved. Pseudo-employment of this kind leads to pseudo-governance. With over forty clans, it has also been easy for unscrupulous Balanda to exploit internal divisions, playing favourites with the largesse available to them through the raft of government projects bringing funds, through their hands into the Kunwinjku world. A Balanda individual who is “generous” in this way with government money may be disliked by Kunwinjku people who feel they have no choice but to exploit the corruption. Since there is no independent local level scrutiny by government agencies of detailed spending, particular Balanda can often accrue considerable power to influence local government.

2.2.4.4 “Culture” as Employment

There is another broad category of employment symbiosis which has serious implications for pedagogy. There are “jobs” occupied by people who can and will produce or perform items which meet the Balanda world’s demands for “culture”. Kunwinjku use the English word here to mean a selected and narrow range of marketable aspects of material culture and performances. Sometimes the requirement
is simply the presence on film of Kunwinjku people. In effect, Kunwinjku people using the English word “culture” mean by it, “those activities the Balanda world will pay us to do”. In terms of pedagogy, the financial incentives have the impact of not simply commoditising some cultural items, but removing performances intended as cultural transmission from Kunwinjku contexts to specialist production venues. The role of Balanda entrepreneurs in fixing times and dates for performances effectively removes formal, that is, self-aware cultural teaching from daily life, and also taints it by association, if not putting it under the control of, Balanda. I believe the obvious spiritual and psychological stresses in these absurd circumstances are only borne because the alternative is simply poverty – which may explain the thinking behind the fact some of the Kunwinjku adults involved in this “career” have coined a new Kunwinjku expression to talk about marketed culture, based on the English verb “pay” - manbu ngandibeyeng (that which they pay us for).

2.2.4.5 Working for the Dole

These employment strategies, to a large extent, reflect Kunwinjku initiatives but the currently dominant issue in employment for them is the use of the CDEP scheme, an initiative entirely driven by the Balanda world. The CDEP (work for the dole) scheme was introduced without choices being offered to the community in the late 1990s. CDEP workers are paid up to the amount they would have received in unemployment benefits without work, but with the capacity for additional hours to be paid as “top up”. This is usually paid to those in supervisory roles or who work more than the required 20 hours per week. Boughton (1998) reviewed research on local applications of CDEP and noted the limited nature of employment opportunities in remote communities, and the necessity for a large number of Balanda to be involved in training and administration related to CDEP (pp. 32-33). Altman and Johnson (2002) provide a useful overview of the operations of CDEP in an Arnhem Land community adjacent to, and similar to Oenpelli, which entails a large number of Balanda moving into the community with roles of authority over the indigenous recipients, automatically entailing their further roles as teachers of indigenous adults.

Employment is a complex area for government policy making, since communities like Oenpelli are relatively inaccessible, have no system for private ownership of land and very limited infrastructure, effectively shutting out private enterprise employment. Whether CDEP has been motivated by a desire to disguise
unemployment figures, or whether it can in fact implement gradualistic plans to move Aboriginal people from unemployable to employable to employed status, it faces the same obstacles among Kunwinjku people that limit all their employment aspirations: the need to rely on Balanda for expertise, and the lack of viable, local forms of employment for a majority of young people. The major implication for considerations of pedagogy is the unexamined reliance all future job planning places on school-based learning providing entry level skills. I will argue in chapter thirteen that it has not done so, and probably it cannot.

At present CDEP also faces a major credibility crisis among Kunwinjku people. Many are cynical about having been “forced” to abandon reliance on the dole to undertake menial tasks supervised by a growing number of Balanda trainers and overseers. Some have queried why it is that the Balanda have “real” (that is full time) jobs, when the CDEP participants are limited to the equivalent of the dole. In the Kunwinjku communities, CDEP is now used to provide all wages to Kunwinjku employees regardless of sector. For those few who move beyond an amount equivalent to the dole, departments need to budget top up funds for their wages. There is therefore a temptation for administrators to keep Kunwinjku employees in the 20 hours per week category. Unfortunately, in parallel to this economic pressure against full time work, the operations of the local liquor outlet and a severe and growing alcohol problem combine to block most attempts to involve Kunwinjku employees beyond the twenty hour mark. The liquor outlet opening hours mean many of the CDEP employees have drunk too much to work after lunch, leaving afternoon employment largely to Balanda staff.

All of this means the growing number of Balanda needed to supervise, administer and train people within CDEP structures has added significantly to the political power in the hands of Balanda in Kunwinjku life, who now constitute around a tenth of the adults in the Oenpelli community.

2.3 KUNWINJKU SELF-ANALYSIS AND PEDAGOGY

Kunwinjku views on, and practice of, pedagogy are impacted significantly by the invasive Balanda world which has displaced Kunwinjku people as their own leaders and teachers, changed the pre-contact timetables of life, introduced new but urgently essential things to be learned, and led to a catastrophic loss of the self-esteem which is pre-requisite to self-confident pedagogy, the assured reproduction of the social group, as much as to any level of effective self-government. In addition, mental and
physical illnesses must erode the capacity of a people to adapt or to teach or to learn even in their own pedagogic system. Some or other aspect of the Balanda role in Kunwinjku pedagogy was thematic in all the interviews in this research, and its nitty gritty details are the subject of daily discussion and argument among Kunwinjku people, whether these are about Kunwinjku self-image, children at school, the changing relationship between adults and children, the collapse of the ceremonies, or the need for Kunwinjku adults to continually position themselves as “mere” students learning from the Balanda, a phenomenon powered by the covert economics of CDEP, and reinforcing in both Balanda and Kunwinjku participants an expectation that Kunwinjku people are generally incapable without Balanda training. The further self-perception at least in the minds of some Kunwinjku people may be that they consider themselves incapable of teaching within their own pedagogies let alone being capable working powerfully for their own agenda within the school. I will return to these possibilities in chapter 13.

2.4 KUNWINJKU EXPERIENCES OF PEDAGOGY AND SCHOOLING

2.4.1 Pedagogy, Education and Schooling

Kunwinjku people experience and discuss pedagogy as it is applied in three broad domains. Firstly, they have described the pedagogy of daily family life – focused on the praxis of child rearing - which I will describe in detail in chapters five and six. Secondly, they think of pedagogy as a core part of ritual and ceremonial life. Formal ceremonies continued regularly in Kunwinjku life until the last two decades, and their cessation more recently will be discussed in chapter 8 where I will describe aspects of pedagogy practised in a number of ceremonial contexts.

Thirdly, in many of the interviews, pedagogy was discussed in terms of schooling, or using terminology based on the experience of schooling. I will therefore provide here sufficient information about the historical and recent Kunwinjku experiences of school to help with further discussion at the various points throughout the thesis where I report Kunwinjku analyses of their own pedagogy in terms of school and schooling. In chapter 13 I will discuss some of the problems interviewees have reported about schooling and changes in their society generally and its pedagogy.

2.4.2. How School Came to the Kunwinjku People

In chapters four through twelve, I will present a detailed discussion of Kunwinjku pedagogy as it has been practised both before the arrival of the school and outside its
influence. In chapter 13 I will discuss Kunwinjku views about the school and its impact on their pedagogy. This section sets the scene for that interaction. It is also necessary to provide some insight into the era remembered and discussed by most of my interviewees.

This section builds on a number of useful studies. Keith Cole’s (1975) history of Oenpelli provides considerable historical material on the Oenpelli school, drawing principally on CMS mission archives. Austin (1997) provides some valuable descriptions of non-Aboriginal thinking and the philosophy behind government policy about schooling for Aborigines in the NT generally during the period 1911 – 1939. Parish in his MA thesis (1990) draws on some English language interviews with Kunwinjku people and annual reports from the Northern Territory Department of Education for years 1980 –1989 in his study of attendance patterns at Oenpelli and one other similar schools. Shimpo (1978) provided an independent assessment of schooling in Aboriginal communities including Oenpelli. Maizie McKenzie (1976) provided passing references to the school on the adjacent community of Goulburn Island, attended as a child by my oldest interviewee, MM. I will be the major source for the period 1977 to 1982 when I was on the staff of Oenpelli school.

A school was set up at Oenpelli in 1925 when a CMS missionary, Mrs. Dyer, began in the second half of that year with “fifteen children speaking five languages” and considered this task had priority over many other duties (Cole 1975, p.25). In her own description of this earliest Kunwinjku encounter with schooling Dyer claims Aborigines who lived in the bush, away from Oenpelli “…wanted to leave their children for dura, their word for anything in the nature of writing on paper…”

A dormitory system was therefore set up to accommodate students (Cole 1975, p.26). The curriculum in these days apparently included singing, reading, writing and numbers (Cole 1975, p.28, 31). Photographs of the school in 1925 and 1927 show the teacher and students using slates and abacuses (Cole 1975, facing p. 25). A number of Aborigines from other parts of Australia have memories of schools that used slates or even shells on the beach as their equipment in the same era (Shimpo 1985, p.26; Rintoul 1993, pp. 115, 120).

An internal Church Missionary Society (CMS) report in March 1927 describes a school at Oenpelli with 30 children conducted for two hours each afternoon (Cole 1975, p. 31).
The following year the government’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, J. W. Bleakely, reported about Oenpelli:

…the teaching of the children in school is on right lines, aiming at cultivating their thinking powers. Their knowledge of English was fairly good and they seemed bright and intelligent. Though somewhat early to commence any definite vocational training, they young boys are learning garden work and to be generally useful, and the girls household duties, sewing, cooking, gardening etc. (Quoted in Cole 1975, p. 32).

The number of children had risen to 70 in 1932, although some were transients. Dyer wrote the children “…are taught the three R’s. We teach English, not pidgin.” (Cole 1975, p. 34). In 1937 there was debate within CMS about the effectiveness of having dormitories as part of the schooling strategy, with senior CMS missionary at Oenpelli, Dick Harris, advocating their abandonment, so that children would attend school of their own volition and live with their parents, a policy which was implemented after World War II (Cole 1975, p.40, 49). EM’s interview recalls her experience as a child in the dormitories, and provides some triangulation on contemporary relationships between missionaries, parents and children and the attitudes of each group to schooling.

In 1946, CMS accepted a policy document entitled A Policy for Aboriginal and Half-caste Education which encouraged schooling in the vernacular at its mission stations on the grounds that, for Aborigines, “…their real cultural heritage is enshrined in their own languages, in which alone all their thinking is naturally cast.” (Quoted in Cole 1975, p.54). The policy statement also required that the syllabus include vernacular literacy, as well as “native crafts and activities” taught by Aborigines “out of doors” rather than in the school, as a means of keeping the child bonded to his community and demonstrating to the community the “general idea of education” (quoted in Cole 1975, p. 54). The syllabus was also to provide for teaching of English, numeracy and basic vocational training. Cole (1975, p.55) cites three reasons for the failure to implement this proposed approach at Oenpelli: “the conservative outlook of mission teachers”, a lack of staff, and the vicious cycle affect whereby low standards of education failed to produce any Aborigines well enough qualified to act as teachers.

These recommendations may have been the first evidence at Oenpelli that the purposes of school-based education for Aborigines may include goals beyond the
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hitherto generally accepted notion of assimilation within the ideational boundaries of social Darwinianism. Its non-implementation reflects a continuation of earlier debates about the intellectual and moral capacity of Aborigines for schooling and the goals that should drive these institutions (Austin, 1997, for example, pp. 14-15; 44 - 45). The emergence of Aboriginal voices in discussion about curriculum and school aims will be discussed at 3.3.

In 1947 Professor (Reverend) Elkin called for a bilingual education system with a fully planned curriculum, as part of a policy for the training of both children and adults aimed at economic self-sufficiency in a context of increasingly westernising material culture (Cole 1975, p. 58-9). Elkin had been engaged by CMS to make recommendations, but more pragmatic constraints in fact guided developments for the next thirty years. In 1947 and in 1948 CMS was criticised by the Northern Territory Administration for (among other things) their tardiness in providing fully qualified teachers at Oenpelli, yet this situation was not remedied until the early 50s, and in the meantime nurses and other staff helped with the teaching (Cole 1975, p. 59-60). Also at the invitation of CMS, Ronald and Catherine Berndt commented critically on the lack of trained teaching staff, noted during their fieldwork in 1949-50 (Cole 1975, p. 64).

The period from 1953-1973, which Cole and Carroll both term “the welfare era” (Cole 1975, p.68; Carroll, 1995, p.13), saw much greater government funding for schooling as well as other areas, principally motivated by strongly assimilationist goals (Cole 1975, pp. 68ff.). By 1963-4 most school age children were in regular schooling. This was the period when MM worked as a stockman, and his children began attending the school. The Welfare Branch Annual Report for 1963-4 notes that around a quarter of the Oenpelli-based Aboriginal adults were trained and employed in a number of vocations, including teaching (quoted in Cole 1975, p. 79). In 1965 a new school building was opened with three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal staff (Cole 1975, p.80).

In 1971 the Commonwealth Government had taken over running of the school system in Oenpelli (Alf Wilson, then CMS superintendent, personal communication, 1995) as in other Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, providing additional non-Aboriginal staff and funding so that, at Oenpelli, an approximate parity in numbers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff continued (Cole 1975, pp. 95-96). Although the stated emphasis had shifted under the Federal
government in 1972 to a policy of self-determination, more resources had been directed to achieving a western-style education, and in 1975 the first steps were taken at Oenpelli to have secondary education buildings provided (Cole 1975, p.97). The extra funding led to the employment of additional non-Aboriginal staff, partly in lieu of sufficient qualified local Kunwinjku, and by 1977 the ratio of non-Aboriginal to Aboriginal teaching staff was 14 to 5. The school had become not only the prime venue for learning the mainstream *Balanda* culture, but by far the largest segment of the mainstream that many Kunwinjku people had experienced at close hand.

Ironically, self-determination when applied in education at Oenpelli, did not provide any opportunities for Kunwinjku people to take any form of control, and in fact reduced the relative number of Kunwinjku staff in the school.

The themes presented in this section remain core concerns in discussion about the school in the last decade and will be part of the discussion in chapter 13.

2.4.3 Schooling in a Period of Unprecedented Social Change: 1977-1983

Funding was made available from the Federal government for bilingual programmes in Aboriginal schools in the early 1970s, and in 1974 professors Geoff O’Grady and Ken Hale were commissioned by the NT Department of Education to visit Aboriginal communities and make recommendations about the establishment of bilingual programmes, including Oenpelli (O’Grady and Hale, 1974).

The programme ran at Oenpelli from 1977 to 1983 but was not fully successful. The reasons for its failure are complex and still have a bearing on Kunwinjku thinking about school. The intention had been to teach children literacy in their own language and then transfer them to a curriculum taught in English, simultaneously pursuing goals of cultural (or at least linguistic) maintenance but also of empowerment of the students to manage the English-language world of education and work. There was of course an implicit tension between these two goals, but other factors also mitigated strongly against the programme – especially declining school attendance and more significantly, lack of available Kunwinjku staff.

The period in which the bilingual programme could have been built up in Oenpelli was in fact one of extreme disruption to the community as the first negotiations over uranium mining preoccupied most adults from 1977 - 1979. At the same time, the first alcohol outlet was opened in Oenpelli, immediately leading to the new phenomenon of chronic drunkenness among a large number of men in their society (Carroll 1995, p. 16, Dabbs and Jones, 1996). Both these developments had a
profound impact on Kunwinjku self-image and self-confidence. In 1977, the first year of the bilingual programme, I observed children playing a new but evidently popular game in the playground. They explained to me that they were pretending to be adults arguing about mining, and they called the game “Meeting. Meeting”. On many occasions dozens of adults at a time were transported away from Oenpelli for mining meetings, usually taking their children.

During the next two years constant public drunkenness (the alcohol was then, and still is, sold six days per week) led to declining school attendance among Kunwinjku staff and students as most families became chronically sleep deprived and swamped with all the issues of dysfunctional and violent family life, and some children became seriously neglected. School and its bilingual programme had to compete for people’s attention with issues of economic and personal survival.

Some Kunwinjku people soon began to move away from these emerging problems at Oenpelli to the lands where they or their forebears had lived, and began building outstation infrastructure with initial, limited support from CMS (to be followed in the next decade with substantial government funding). Some later arranged to have the NT Education Department provide a version of mainstream schooling in some form at these homeland centres, some up to 100 km away from Oenpelli. Between the mid 1980s and the present day larger outstations have had some form of schooling based on regular visits by Balanda staff from the school in Oenpelli, despite sporadic residency or low numbers at some centres. The situation today is more complex, with children moving frequently between the Oenpelli school and schools on their family outstations. Kunwinjku staff paid to assist the visiting teachers at the outstations describe these schools as working effectively only when the Balanda staff attend, usually on a one or two days per week basis, despite several having purpose built buildings and a supply of resources for teaching.

I had started work at Oenpelli school in 1977 as the Teacher-Linguist to initiate the bilingual programme. Over my two years in this position, as I became more proficient in the language and more aware of community views, I realized that people were reluctant to see their language rendered into literate forms, which they automatically assumed were forms dictated and owned by the Balanda world. Ong (1989) has discussed this kind of response in non-literate societies.

I resigned as bilingual co-coordinator at the end of 1978, staying on in the school as secondary boys’ teacher and then the on-site teacher training lecturer.
employed as a staff member of Batchelor College in its RATE programme. The Education Department continued the bilingual programme until 1983, although none of the sequence of five Teacher Linguists who followed me stayed more than one year, and none was formally given the opportunity to learn Kunwinjku, as I had been. I continued in the school, and taught with a number of Kunwinjku men and women, several of whom spent much of their time instructing me in their language and their approach to teaching children.

No general history of the bilingual programmes in NT schools has yet been compiled, despite the comprehensive disagreements among its participants as to its success and even its nature, discussed in helpful detail by NTDE (1999, pp. 119ff.). The goals and progress of the these programmes in a number of Aboriginal schools in the NT can be traced through Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (1983); Gale (1990), Commonwealth of Australia (1974b) and the annual reports of the Northern Territory Department of Education, (1974-1984) particularly the report on the Bilingual Programme at Oenpelli School (NTDE, 1984b) which, although mainly concerned to comment on test procedures administered to students, does contain some helpful historical detail about the programme. Interestingly, it does not deal with theoretical issues, or reveal data on Aboriginal aspirations.

Shimpo (1978) had described divergences of expectation and motive between the Oenpelli community and its school, and I observed some evidence of a gulf between school and other aspects of Kunwinjku life, both in the approach of the school to its community and in the minds of community members. There was no parent body drawn from the community in this crucial period, as there is now, due mainly to the availability of federal government funding. Each class had, at least nominally, a non-Aboriginal teacher with one or more Kunwinjku teaching assistants. There was a pool of approximately a dozen Kunwinjku people who had previously worked at the school from the 1950s onward, but few of these were available to work at the school in this period partly because of community disruption, partly because some of these people were in demand to work in other areas like the local council, and partly because of attitudes within the school.

This period provoked some questioning on my part. I had been assured during my early inquiries about my job that the Aboriginal people had been consulted and were enthusiastic about a bilingual programme. Kunwinjku people certainly were highly enthusiastic about teaching me to speak Kunwinjku, which I tackled as my
first major task, but I found little awareness of, or commitment to, a bilingual
programme. I later discovered that Hale and O’Grady had actually spent only one
day in Oenpelli and similarly short amounts of time in other centres visited. (NT
Department of Education, 1974e, 1974f), This token or at least precipitate approach
to “consultation” remained the pattern between the Department of Education and the
Oenpelli community for my entire stay at the school, and it still the dominant model
of consultation between all government bodies and Kunwinjku people. Hale and
O’Grady seem to have been well aware of the inadequacy of this consultation
process, which was not under their control. They offered a number of
recommendations which would have made decision-making about bilingual
programmes contingent upon Aboriginal aspirations and involvement, and may have
had the effect, had they been fully implemented, of involving Aboriginal people in
school related decision-making through committees and as staff members in this
crucial period (O’Grady and Hale, 1974, p. 2).

In summary, I was brought face to face in my first two years at Oenpelli with
serious underlying problems in the way Kunwinjku people interacted with the
school:
• there seemed to be no parental or community stakeholder “presence” or influence
  in school based education;
• there was no clear cut system of accountability or assessment;
• Kunwinjku people valorised the learning and use of their language highly, but
  had no commitment to its use in written form in the school;
• the Education Department was out of touch with Kunwinjku thinking, and vice
  versa;
• There was a serious and unresolved problem about poor attendance rates of both
  students and Kunwinjku staff.
I felt that the school’s presumptive major stakeholders, parents and families, were
not acting as informed participants in that role at the point of engagement with the
school. I have discussed these issues briefly to provide some background to the
associations Kunwinjku people may have in mind when they refer to school and
schooling alongside their own pedagogy.

2.4.4 Contemporary Schooling Context
In the last ten years Kunwinjku staff numbers increased steadily, but by 1998, only two of fourteen professional staff at Oenpelli school were Kunwinjku people, other Kunwinjku people filling long-term continual traineeships as assistant teachers and ancillary staff. Since 1925, there have been only two Kunwinjku speaking people who have matriculated, although several others have enrolled for short periods in the Faculty of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Studies (FATSIS) at what is now Charles Darwin University (CDU). In 1995 two Kunwinjku women graduated as teachers. One of them, with four year trained status having finished a degree at Deakin University, is currently the school’s first Aboriginal principal. There are about two dozen other Kunwinjku people (mainly women) who have had some sporadic on-the-job training as outstations teaching assistants, responsible for running part-time, English-language based mainstream curriculum schools at their own outstations, although all use Kunwinjku as the language of instruction.

Poor school attendance has been the dominant ongoing theme in the school in the last thirty years (Parish, 1990; NTDE, 1999, pp. 143-145). In mid 1998 the Department has taken a post primary teacher from the school because of low attendance in the senior boys’ class (Jan Perrin, school principal, personal communication), which led to a mixed boys and girls class, an arrangement contrary to the often-expressed wishes of many Kunwinjku parents that older children remain gender separated.

Effective access by Aboriginal students to secondary education emerged as an issue in 1998, with Nicholls (1998a, p.1) describing it as the missing link in lifelong education, and the NT Member for Stuart, Philip Toyne, warning of future social costs of low secondary schooling participation rates (Toyne, ABC Radio interview, July 16th, 1998). The school at Oenpelli enrolls secondary aged children, but only in non-specialised courses up to year ten. Beyond this, high school enrolment is only available outside Oenpelli.

2.4.5 Non-Kunwinjku Schooling away from Oenpelli

In the last decade there has been an increasing use of boarding facilities by parents from remote Aboriginal communities, funded through the federal government’s Abstudy programme, though this movement has not been researched yet as it needs to be, given it operates across Australia, and without any formal means of measuring outcomes in terms of pedagogic effectiveness. For Kunwinjku parents there is in 2004 a choice of three boarding schools in Darwin providing supervised
accommodation and secondary education, with all costs met by federal government funding. Only a handful of parents utilize these schools, and at present there is only one student working at year 12 level. Many drop out to marry or because of school discipline problems.

Kormilda College has provided supervised boarding accommodation and schooling in Darwin since 1967, when it was set up by the NT Government specifically to provide secondary education to Aboriginal children without access to high schools in their own communities. In 1989 it was handed over to the Uniting and Anglican churches to run. Kunwinjku parents have been reluctant to allow their children to attend Kormilda, although some of the children were willing to do so. Most parents cite as their reason the risk of unsupervised contact between sexes, especially liaisons with young men or women from non-Kunwinjku communities, and the family “missing” their child away in Darwin. Students who quit Kormilda, almost always cite teasing by other students as their prime reason. Despite Kunwinjku objections, Kormilda has continued to attract other students, usually from English speaking Aboriginal communities, and an increasing number complete high school each year.

Mararra College, run by the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association, boards at any given time around half a dozen Kunwinjku children mingled with houseparents’ children and other boarders in single family house groups in Darwin. These children say they experience less problems than those who attend Kormilda, probably because of the small group boarding households and the quality of the houseparent couples, but as yet no students have managed to attend sufficiently to move through to the end of high school.

The other boarding school, St John’s College, is run by the Catholic church. Although there is no obstacle from the school’s viewpoint to their enrolment, this has not been pursued by Kunwinjku parents.

I have noted at 14.2.8 the need for research Australia wide into the patterns of use by indigenous parents of boarding schools, and how this has impacted future employment prospects of students, their engagement with their home communities and the various pathways through schooling in those communities.

2.4.6 Post-Schooling Structures

Kunwinjku people have some experience of organised post-school education provided by the mainstream. Apart from “on the job” training at the school and
clinic, and courses run for adults through the CDEP organisation, all provided at Oenpelli, there are three large institutions that have provided courses away from the Kunwinjku community.

- Batchelor College, now known as Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, provided teacher training and other vocational courses to students boarding at the campus south of Darwin and through short courses in some remote communities. Some Kunwinjku people have completed all or part of these courses in the last ten years.

- Nungalinya College is a joint training institute for theological study provided by the Catholic, Uniting and Anglican churches. Students board on campus for shorter or longer periods (usually three weeks at a time) completing certificate level training. In the past twenty years approximately 30 Kunwinjku adult students have attended Nungalinya, although only a minority have fully completed their courses.

- A smaller number (less than five in total) of Kunwinjku adults enrolled for limited periods, in bridging courses in FATSIS at what is now CDU.

2.5 DEVELOPING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.5.1 A Questions of Failure: or a Failure to Question?

Despite the longevity of their experience of schooling, and despite increasing resources and support, and increased awareness of the world of work in the mainstream, school remains a problematic domain within Kunwinjku pedagogy, as it does in other similar NESB remote Aboriginal communities. Kunwinjku students, even those who attend school regularly, perform poorly in schoolwork compared to Balanda children of the same age. Reports on schooling failure of Aboriginal people have been widespread and continue. It is only in 2004 that formal testing of children at schools like Oenpelli has been enforced by the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE), over the resistance by some teachers, and a lack of involvement by parents. It is difficult to objectively define this schooling failure because of the lack of data, and because of the complexities of testing in a cross-cultural and cross-language situation. Certainly not enough on-the-ground, synchronic quantitative research has been done in remote indigenous schools which would provide at least a measure of progress within the school. It would be expensive to base researchers for long periods or repeated visits in these communities, but the necessity is clear.
Without this focused research, the failure of school education in remote Aboriginal Australia has nevertheless been the subject of a long series of reports (Report of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985; Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, 1988; Commonwealth of Australia 2002). During the time of my employment at the Oenpelli school I realized that neither students nor teachers had any firm expectation of academic success as defined by the school system. Achieving mere attendance was considered problematic enough, and without any system of accountability to parents or governments, inevitably we as teachers expected and attempted less. This was my subjective view but I was not alone.

In 1999 the NT government published “The Collins Report” (NTDE, 1999) in an attempt to deal with the realities of school failure in remote Aboriginal communities. The report provides a number of indices of this school failure (pp. 4, 39-46) based on comparisons between schools similar to, and including, the Oenpelli school, and data from mainstream Australian schools. The report notes that this basis for assessment invariably means that any improvements in Aboriginal schools may be overlooked given the fact that mainstream school students perform so disproportionately better (NTDE, 1999, p. 31, citing Watts, 1982). This is the uncomfortable position from which I began to question why Aboriginal children should automatically fail relative to Balanda children. The Collins report notes that major indices of educational failure in the Aboriginal community schools of the NT are actually worsening (NTDE, 1999, p. 4) so the notion that somehow they are still actually “catching up” despite poor performance relative to the mainstream cannot be argued. The report asserts that middle aged Aboriginal people in remote communities claim their children and grandchildren have less literacy skills than their elders – a view I too have heard expressed by a number of older Kunwinjku people.

Research in the USA had addressed the issue of the failure of minority groups in mainstream schooling, testing explanations from a variety of positions, viewing it for example, as a symptom of culture conflict (Labov 1982, p.148), or as something inevitable given rapid social change (Premeg 1988, p.169); or with the impact of the dominant culture controlling definitions of what are the "official pedagogical subjects" (Bernstein 1990, p.111) within a "dominant curriculum which acts selectively on those who can acquire it" (Bersntein 1990, p.118). I began to wonder whether any of these models explained the Kunwinjku situation, and if not, how I
could explain what I saw. McDermott (1979) and Foley (1991) had both noted the limits to “anthropological” explanations of school failure for minorities but clearly, some explanation was overdue and it needed to account for Kunwinjku views.

Some Kunwinjku people actually seemed happy enough with the outcomes of their schooling, despite some criticisms of individual teachers. I wondered whether they were aware of the extent to which they were “failing” in mainstream terms, or saw any connection with issues like employment. I wondered whether they saw the disparity as simply another inevitable facet of racial and cultural difference, or school failure as simply another aspect of their general failure in comparison with the Balanda world. The only way to discover these things was by some sort of intentional interaction with Kunwinjku people themselves, which might then allow some application to their situation of “anthropological” and other explanations of school failure.

The phenomenon of schooling failure, whether attributable to the school and its system, or to Kunwinjku views on pedagogy, or to the chaotic changes in the Kunwinjku community, necessarily provoked a set of questions. Over the first year of my participation in Kunwinjku life, I had become intrigued by the deliberate and effective language teaching practices of young women with their children. I was involved in a number of ceremonies where I was taught, and noticed a range of teaching and learning activities that were an integral part of these processes. I saw almost daily the routines of effective teaching and learning around the family camp and on hunting and food collecting trips. I saw Kunwinjku children intent on learning skills, intent on hearing and learning from the regular story times in their family. Through dozens of informal conversations either as audience or participant, I began to realise the range of intellectual capacity, learning ability and personality types among my Kunwinjku students and acquaintances which seemed to match, allowing for local expressions, the sort of bell distribution curve of intellectual capacity I had expected as a teacher in mainstream Australian schools. I saw students master Kunwinjku literacy well enough to write long stories. I saw 13 and 14-year-old boys effectively learning Year 9 level maths and science when tuition was provided in their language. All of this informal, or rather personal, data suggested very strongly that the problematic nature of Kunwinjku experience of schooling could not be due to any lack on their part of pedagogic ideas and practices or any lack of a capacity to learn. Kunwinjku people learned constantly in the range of contexts across their lives.
creative as well as practical skills, language, art and technical skills – so why were they not functioning effectively as learners at school?

**2.5.2 My Questions**

This unassembled jigsaw of data and questions led me, by the early 1990s to formulate some more specific questions that had potential for organized research, since the answers would not only be salient, but were not immediately obvious:

1. What do Aboriginal adults, as the presumed primary stakeholders in their children’s education process, have to say about how it should happen?
2. Do they accept or demand or “own” the prime responsibility for the education of their children?
3. Do people budget or structure time, or have a specific methodology to teach children language skills?
4. How do they think viewing of videos and TV impacts children? How do they react to non-Aboriginal sources of teaching generally? What do they tell their children to think about these sources?
5. How do they understand and describe the goal or functions of the school system? What is the relationship between those ideas and the way non-Aboriginal society sees the purposes of schooling?
6. Discussions about school and learning are now inevitably school centred. Are Aboriginal parents critically aware of their own non-school based teaching and learning systems and their importance and power? Have these changed over time, perhaps under the influence of the school system?
7. Do they think these “traditional” or non-school systems should be used in whole or in part by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal teachers in the school? Could or should the school adapt in terms of teaching styles?
8. How do Kunwinjku people think learning happens, either in or out of school? Do they think (as one frustrated non-Aboriginal teacher once proposed to me) that for Kunwinjku, learning is simply a matter of “being there” so that a mysterious osmosis occurs without reasonable time on task or any notion of the mechanism?
9. Do Kunwinjku people think about notions of “curriculum”, that is, the content and goals of education? What do they say about educational aims in their own contexts?
10. What do people think the school should teach? Should it teach English and other aspects of mainstream curriculum, or an Aboriginal curriculum or a mixture?
11. Why is a rigid disciplinary system tolerated, even celebrated, in the pedagogy of ceremonial contexts, when it does not appear to be utilized within school based learning and is not welcomed when it is attempted?

12. Do Kunwinjku people see the link between schooling and workplace employment given the lack of recent experience of school to job transition?

13. Do Kunwinjku people see their own pedagogy as a domain where they can succeed –at home or in ceremonial life – versus schooling as a domain where they feel doomed to fail?

14. Do Kunwinjku people see any link between school learning and their struggles with governance and employment?

15. Have Kunwinjku people noticed and thought about the ways the Balanda world in general (and the school in particular) have impacted their own pedagogic ideas and practices?

### 2.5.3 Kunwinjku Questions about Schooling

Some Kunwinjku people were certainly talking about these issues. The following are examples of ideas I have heard canvassed in conversations between Kunwinjku people: “Why do we have to send our children away to Kormilda College?” “That child is very clever – he knows how to speak like an adult.” “Is it right or effective to give children a hiding when their misbehaviour is due to parental neglect?” “Who do these (non-Aboriginal) teachers think they are?” “That child’s mother should have taught him better than that!” “Should we make our nine year old son attend this Aboriginal ceremony?” Together with these sorts of questions, I was aware of often-repeated views in the community: “I don’t know any English so I can’t talk to those teachers.” “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about; he’s not an Aborigine.” “I don’t know how school works; I’m not a white person.” In 1995 a 30-year-old woman who was a four year trained teacher working at the school complained to me that the school doesn’t listen to parents, and that the parents don’t have any expectation that the school will hear them. Kunwinjku people have clear views on what they expect the school to achieve. Invariably parents say they want the school to teach English and the skills needed for participation in mainstream life. They also accuse each other of failing to send their children regularly so these skills can be learnt. This involves another question: why the gap between a rhetoric of commitment to schooling, and the realities of sporadic attendance?
2.5.4 Distilling a Research Hypothesis and General Research Questions

Only gradually did I realize that I had been operating on the postulate that Kunwinjku people could not only learn and teach, but had a range of views, expectations and learned habits that could be tied together as their pedagogy. This was in fact a testable hypothesis in the form: Kunwinjku people have a developed pedagogy – a set of shared ideas, practices and expectations about teaching and learning revealed in their discourse and observable praxis.

Assuming a grounded research approach, four practical research questions should therefore be: What do Kunwinjku people say about pedagogy, given the opportunity to reflect on it in their own language? What pedagogic activities do they practice? In what ways if any do their comments and actions reflect any underlying theoretical conception of pedagogy? Does Kunwinjku data imply or produce a general, higher level theory of pedagogy?

2.6 LINKS TO REMAINDER OF THESIS

I describe in chapter four how these questions led to a grounded methodology designed to allow Kunwinjku opinion to be heard. Before moving to that description, I will discuss some of the existing literature relevant to this investigation.
CHAPTER THREE

A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE
CHAPTER 3: SELECTIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO ABORIGINAL PEDAGOGY AS A FIELD

3.1.1 Scope and Limitations of This Chapter.
This chapter is necessarily highly selective. Pedagogy is multifaceted and its internal boundaries rather permeable, so I have given priority to literature that most informs or triangulates with the Kunwinjku data, either because it was written about similar kinds of Aboriginal communities or has used a similar methodology in approaching Aboriginal education, or because it had specific utility in my research design and analysis. I will note throughout the thesis my interaction with other writers not reviewed in this chapter, particularly from the fields of anthropology, psychology, teaching methodology and general educational theory. A full working bibliography of this unbounded field is in the appendix to the thesis.

My research interests were mainly in pedagogy outside the school, but in lieu of substantial research in this area, I will introduce here a number of non-Aboriginal writers who have studied Aboriginal students’ experiences of pedagogy in schools, sometimes in urban settings. Studies based on this school experience however have led to much discussion on the kinds of pedagogic experience and expectation brought to the school by NESB community children, inviting some speculation and theorisation about Aboriginal non-scholastic or “traditional” pedagogy. I have included two longer examples of academic interaction about theorising Aboriginal education in Australia following a brief discussion of two American approaches to minority education theory.

Finally, in section 3.3 I will introduce the relatively recent phenomenon of writings by Aboriginal teachers about the pedagogies of their own societies.

3.1.2 Introduction to Pedagogy as a Term and a Research Field
Explorations of pedagogy can only be isolated from the general run of human activities arbitrarily. Stephen Harris (personal communication, 1994) has suggested that a study of pedagogy needs to be aware of all the factors that come together when people teach and learn: cognitive, linguistic, economic, historical and political. This proved to be the case with the data I encountered, demanding some sense of prioritization of issues during analysis. The Kunwinjku data encompasses the nitty-gritty of teaching methods as well as broad models of human learning and its motivations. I have therefore used “pedagogy” to include anything within the range
Chapter Three: Selective Review of Literature

of ideas, expectations and the behaviours involved when people teach and learn. I note two qualifications: firstly, I have been open to the possibility that these ideas and practices may be unexamined, simply taken for granted within the cultural and social world of Kunwinjku people, rather than necessarily existing as subjects in organized or articulated form in public discourse in Kunwinjku society; secondly, I have been guided in my presentation of finding by the comments and concerns of my interviewees.

I am in fact using “pedagogy” in a similar way to Ochs (1988, p.26), who described "folk epistemology", which involves looking at the possibly unconscious, culturally rooted assumptions within which a given practice of pedagogy is constructed by and for a unique social group. Bruner (1996, pp. 46, 50) suggested the term “folk pedagogy” as the collection of ideas each individual in a society has about human learning and teaching that are automatically determinative of pedagogic practice. He suggested this pedagogy includes, for example, the constantly active if unreflected set of ideas about “…what children’s minds are like, and how [we] help them learn” (1996, p.46). The fact that folk pedagogies may be unexamined and distributed generally across a population without articulation by professional teachers makes folk pedagogic notions powerful parameters in teaching and learning events simply because they are the unexamined default tendencies. I assume any society’s organised theorisation about pedagogy will be focused on practical concerns about children, and that pedagogy for most people will simply mean the practical tools to express the predispositions a teacher (or any adult) brings to teaching from his lifetime within that social and therefore cultural group. Kunwinjku data focused in this way, but a number of informants revealed their own, sometimes complex, theoretical reflections.

In 1984, Paul Hughes, a leading Australian Aboriginal educator, called for the construction of a specifically Aboriginal pedagogy (Hughes, 1984a). Andrews and Hughes (n.d.) have outlined the factors that an Aboriginal pedagogy should engage, defining pedagogy as "the art or science of teaching" (Andrews and Hughes, n.d., p.11) but identifying such extra-scholastic factors as the political purposes of Homelands schooling (p. 17) and the ideological frameworks for education (p. 31). Coombs has suggested that an Aboriginal pedagogy might inform pedagogy as a science in a general way (Coombs, 1994, p.198). This suggestion was seminal, since
the Kunwinjku data, viewed from a grounded ethnographic perspective invites theorisation in a highly general way as I will discuss throughout the thesis.

3.2 A SELECTIVE OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ISSUES OF ABORIGINAL PEDAGOGY

3.2.1 Researching Aboriginal Children and Childhood

Hamilton (1981) studied child rearing practices in a small Aboriginal group in Maningrida, adjacent to the Kunwinjku lands, in 1968-69. She began her observation from an ethological perspective and discusses very frankly some of her concerns about the limits of this approach in handling Aboriginal data (1981, pp. 14-15). It is interesting that Vygotsky also noted the need to analyze human behaviour, in this case childhood learning of language, from a “specifically human” viewpoint (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 23). Despite her misgiving about method, Hamilton has described child rearing practices in fine detail and noted, for example, the relatively permissive approach to behaviour in the young, and an apparent lack of pedagogic programme in the minds of mothers as to matters like toilet training. Hamilton’s observations have not yet been supplemented by any subsequent research from more appropriate viewpoints by other scholars. The area of Aboriginal childhood and child development did not attract enough research to provide a framework for approaching theorisation about pedagogy. Roheim (1974) was an early researcher on Aboriginal childhood, although his work has not often been revisited. Hamilton (1981, p. 6-7) mentions his earlier report (Roheim, 1932) and very short reports from Goodale (1960), Hernandez (1941) and Malinowski (1913).

Hamilton relied for some of her discussion on child cognition (pp. 141-146) on works reported in Kearney, de Lacey and Davidson (1973). She also cites (p. 146) Seagrim and Lendon (1976) whose study on Central Australian Aboriginal people provided her, and this thesis, with some useful triangulation due to the remote NESB nature of their subjects. Hamilton did not refer to Boxall’s 1976 Piagetian study of Aboriginal children or to Davidson (1976). Nor did she utilize Ungunmerr’s study of Aboriginal children, also published in 1976 – which must have been the first academic study of pedagogy produced by an Aboriginal writer (see below at 3.1).

Paralleling the apparent lack of momentum in research on Aboriginal child raising, interest in the psychology or cognition of Aboriginal children also appears to have been sporadic. Kearney and McElwain (1976) and Davidson (1988) were useful
Chapter Three: Selective Review of Literature

anthologies of work to date. McInerney (1988) however has signaled an interest in aspirations as a legitimate new area for pedagogically related research, an issue I discuss at 13.6.2. At about the same time, Brandl (1980) reported only very briefly on the particularly crucial role of women in Aboriginal childrearing, but this research has not been taken up as a focus for study in NESB Aboriginal contexts. The Kunwinjku data may provide some impetus for updated and more extensive study of childhood and parenting in these communities.

3.2.2 Research on Aboriginal Aspirations about Pedagogy

I will suggest later the need for further research into children’s aspirations (13.6.2) but a number of studies have appeared attending to adult aspirations. Snowdon (1981) produced a paper based on very limited data, discussing briefly on his personal perceptions of Aboriginal adult aspirations about their children’s schooling. Roberta Sykes (1986), an English speaking Aboriginal woman, interviewed a number of Aboriginal educators, including non-English speaking school council members at various sites in Australia. Her interviewees had the choice of using interpreters (Sykes 1983, pp. 86-87) and she makes use of long quotations from the interviews throughout her analysis. Sykes’ approach is openly political, but parallels my research in seeking to give voice to Aboriginal stakeholders in schooling. Sykes’ grass roots research on Aboriginal opinion has not been repeated in an organized way at a national level.

David McClay (1988) conducted 126 interviews with Warlpiri people about their aspirations in adult education (McClay 1988, p.276). McClay had lived in the research community only 18 months before commencing research, so interviews were in English, and he concedes in principle the limitations caused by this (1988, p.276). A significant part of McClay’s work discusses political and developmental theory, and provides a political analysis of interactions between the Warlpiri and the mainstream world. In contrast with Sykes’ work, McClay seems more concerned with political debates between groups within the mainstream, rather than a concern to enable Warlpiri people to react politically with the mainstream themselves, utilizing the crucible of Warlpiri educational “struggle” as an iconic site for political theorization going on in mainstream Australia. Nevertheless, his analysis of the relationship between non-Aboriginal educational systems and the community, and
his discussion of what constitutes and reveals “aspirations” (pp. 269 - 276) both triangulate with my analysis of Kunwinjku data.

Graham (1994) has written an unusual but valuable Masters thesis on *Kardu* perceptions of schooling. He relied on a *Murrin Patha* speaking person from this small NESB Aboriginal community to translate texts collected when *Kardu* people spoke about bark paintings they created in response to Graham’s questions about their thoughts on “school”. Some interviews are shown with transcripts and translations, but it is not always clear whether the interview was translated into *Murrin Patha* after the interview. The methodology is difficult to assess. Specifically, it is difficult to judge the speaking position of someone who has been persuaded to paint a picture about “school” and then to talk about it (pp. 54 - 55). This is a reasonable research genre, and reflects a desire to allow Aboriginal participants to speak into what has been a “…vacuum of recorded Aboriginal perspective” (p.13). This ideology resonates with my research intentions. Graham’s discussion of the semantics of the term “school” in *Murrin Patha* (p.80) has some interaction with the way Kunwinjku people have reflected on schooling as a social institution (13.2).

McDonnell (1996) has analyzed attitudes to schooling among Burarra and Kunbidji communities. He interviewed a total of 20 adults and full transcripts are supplied. The interviews were in English, a second or subsequent language for all interviewees, and McDonnell notes the limitation this implies (pp. 53-4). This work will provide useful triangulation with my interview data, since the research community is adjacent to that of the Kunwinjku people and it is clear from the transcripts McDonnell has tried to non-directive in his interview questions.

Shimpo (1985) developed a theoretical model upon which to base policies encouraging the employment of young Aborigines. He argues that rapid and unwelcome changes in Aboriginal societies have led older Aborigines to “despair” about their young, and to develop “strategies to maintain their power” (p.24-28). In presenting his data, he has edited into a continuous 1500 word text a series of anecdotes and observations from one middle-aged Aborigine, who like my informant MM, comes from a “Top End” community (Shimpo 1985, p.25-28). Also, like MM, Shimpo’s informant has a large family and attended mission-run schooling on a seasonal basis (Shimpo 1985, p.25). Unlike MM however, Shimpo’s informant had trained and worked as a teacher. Shimpo claims that this text is highly representative
of opinions he heard from a large number of older Aborigines (p.25). I was unable to find whether the text was translated. Despite this fact, and its patchwork assembly, this text will allow some degree of triangulation with the Kunwinjku texts. Shimpo spoke during his research with a number of Kunwinjku people at Oenpelli.

3.2.3 Researching Aboriginal Children as Minority Students in Mainstream Schools

A small number of researchers have written about Aboriginal children in urban schools in Australia. I include three of these in particular because each has suggested aspects of the way children and schoolteachers construct pedagogic relationships together, a concern that emerges as a major theme in the Kunwinjku data. I will very briefly introduce each writer, returning to each at various points later in the thesis, particularly at 14.1.2 where I will discuss the way their views articulate with my suggested construction of Kunwinjku pedagogic theory.

Trouw (1996) researched inter-personal relationships and the application of scaffolded instruction in the teacher-learner dyad involving NESB children (including Aboriginal children) in an urban school context. Following Vygotsky’s seminal work on the social framework of childhood learning (1962 and 1978), Trouw is one of a number of educationists - for example Gindis (1988), Berk and Winsler (1995) and Pressley and Hogan (1997) - who have focused on intentional cognitive and interpersonal instructional behaviour used by teachers. I have borrowed the term “scaffolding” from this set to describe the cluster of interpersonal tactics used in Kunwinjku instruction generally, discussed in detail at 11.2.4. The term has also been used more specifically in language teaching methodology, for example by Gibbons (2002); which invites application to the way Kunwinjku children are explicitly taught language skills in the family contexts (11.2.4).

Malin (1989, 1992) studied motivations and practices in the relationship between Aboriginal children and their teachers in an urban setting, where the children’s’ and teachers’ language were both English, but where differences in expectations about inter-personal relations, pedagogic structures, goals and processes between home and school "micro-cultures" were potent. Malin also was attentive to Vygotsky’s ideas in her analysis of the collaborative nature of relations between the learner and teacher (1997a, p. 8). Malin is explicit that “…social organization of the academic task plus the social relationship between teacher and student play crucial roles in whether a student learns or not.” (Malin, 1992, p. 63). The teachers’ and
children’s awareness of, and agency within that fundamental micro-level teacher-learner relationship is concordant with my suggestion that Kunwinjku people think of pedagogy as contingent upon relationship (6.3.1).

Malin has tried to analyze the face to face praxis of the teacher-learner relationship by categorizing interactions she filmed, in terms of time engaged with particular learners in providing a range of “teacher resources” including not only collaborative working but affirmative feedback and other social/relational behaviour (Malin 1992, p. 67). Malin also attended to the child’s approach to this interaction, noting children may have their own relational agendas despite the initiatory and controlling role of the teacher (Malin, 1992, pp. 68-69), an issue I will discuss at 10.5, 10.7 and 13.4.8.

Hudspith (1996) also researched Aboriginal children’s classroom experiences in an urban setting from a structuralist perspective, focusing on the complex role of teacher-child interaction in the formation of children’s self-esteem and the process whereby children and teachers construct working relationships together, forming miniature “pedagogic communities” (p.309) by comprehending each other’s culturally rooted expectations as individuals rather than stereotypical representatives. Her methodology involved close observation and interaction with a group of urban Aboriginal children, and her interest in them as stakeholders provides triangulation with my comments on Kunwinjku children encountering and analyzing teachers in the school system (13.1.3 and 13.4.8).

I will suggest in chapter 14 that Hudspith’s analysis of classroom relationships is concordant with Kunwinjku pedagogic principles, in particular her interest in the potential for a productive intimacy in teacher-learner relations (pp. 309-311). She has analyzed an effective teacher of urban Aboriginal children in terms of classroom pedagogy that was “…visible, ‘transcendent’, and incorporative…” (p. 311) bringing together a number of Kunwinjku preferences in method discussed in chapter 11. Hudspith (1996, p. 315) described the teacher’s fundamental pedagogic quality as “abidingness”, “…which was defined operationally as pedagogic regulation which is transmitted and realized through principles rather than rules…”, and notes this pedagogic approach is supported by the way other researchers have tried to define effective cross cultural teacher qualities, citing Holm (1983), Malin (1989), Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993) and Kleinfeld, (1979).
3.2.4 School Based Studies of Aboriginal Pedagogy in NESB Communities

Trouw, Malin and Hudspith studied Aboriginal students who were minorities within mainstream schools. Their work complements some important studies of Aboriginal children in government schools in their own communities, where they constitute the overwhelming majority of children - the situation of most Kunwinjku children.

Michael J. Christie’s seminal PhD thesis *The Classroom World of the Aboriginal Child* (Christie, 1984a) is a particularly rich analysis of Djambarrpuyngu-speaking Aboriginal children’s experience of classroom learning in their local school, partly based on interviews with children in their own language, and focusing on the task children face in adapting to school pedagogy, in particular the classroom matrix of relationships, relational signals and interpersonal expectations that are in tension with children’s home experiences. Christie’s general suggestion is that the teaching methodology is the part that should change in this array of constraints. My concern has been to discover the extent to which Aboriginal participants actually feel this kind of turbulence, and whether techniques and structure are in fact the key issues from their viewpoint.

In a separate 1988 article, Christie addresses Aboriginal viewpoints, actually positioning himself as a spokesman for Aborigines, outlining five demands he says are consistently made by them in regard to mainstream education, beginning with the claim that western, non-Aboriginal education has "invasive" features (Christie, 1988, p.6). The principle underlying all five demands is that Aborigines have as their paramount aim the preservation of social cohesion and unity, and that schooling will therefore only operate within the bounds set by this general goal (Christie, 1988, pp. 6-9). He claims that even pre-schoolers have already internalized a "societal goal of unity" (Christie, 1988, p.8) so that consequently teaching methods need to take account of this, for example, by avoiding competitive behaviours. Christie’s research was based on the classroom as the locus if not the crucible where conflicting views on society and other issues of pedagogic importance emerge and interact, in ways Malin has described as “micro-political relations” (Malin, 1992, p.64). Other writers have followed this theme, focusing on children’s motivations as a school pedagogic factor.

Ralph Folds, (1987) has written about the failure of schooling provided to Pitjantjatjara people, whose society is similar to the Kunwinjku, making the suggesting that resistance by Aborigines to the majority society has been focused in
the schools, which in effect represent the mainstream in remote communities. Folds provides a model for analysis of classroom behaviour that needs to account for failure in the broadest relevant terms, beyond cognitive or methodological frames. His model will drive further research, since it is not clear whether in school resistance of this kind is personal or political, or whether it is self-aware at either personal or group level. The related concept of oppositional behaviour, suggested by Ogbu (1993), is discussed below at 3.2.6.

Bob Capp (1988) has also written in politically aware terms but focused on community rather than children’s motivations. He discussed strategies he sees as needed for one Aboriginal community to reverse the school-based "re-socialization" of their younger generation, and allow control of community affairs, and the appropriate training of Aboriginal people in required job skills within the community. The article is interesting because of its realism about social problems and politics within a small Aboriginal community, although the liberationist motivation on the part of Aborigines is assumed rather than drawn from grounded data. Nevertheless, Capp argues that the desire for community control of the school's direction and effectiveness is political, but that this political motive reflects fundamental belief systems: the relationship between society and school must reflect an ideological view of the community as part of what Capp suggests is a religiously authorized system, in which Aboriginal teachers derive authority from the power that attends land ownership and ceremonial roles. He assumes that face to face teaching would be done only by local Aboriginal people (Capp, 1988, p.123) and that the process of their authorization is a transparent social reality within their society. Capp also suggests, without noting the tension with his suggestions about religious authority, that English language skill is the key to power, allowing "demystification" of the mainstream English speaking culture, and therefore providing effective control of mainstream incursions (Capp, 1988, p.125). The tensions implied in this modeling also emerge in some of the Kunwinjku data.

Max Hart wrote *Kulila: On Aboriginal Education* in 1974. He was able to report some initiatives in education in a Central Australian Aboriginal context - the earliest bilingual programme at Ernabella and the emergence of Aboriginal family centres in particular. He also reported on the Hermannsberg Aboriginal Community school, which deliberately attempted to bridge the separation between home and school in Aboriginal contexts (Hart, 1974, p83). In chapter 13 I will report some
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aspects of this home-school separation that emerge in the Kunwinjku data, and Capp’s commentary on the emerging role of Aboriginal teaching staff (Hart, 1974, pp. 37-41).

Jack Goodluck (1980) has imposed a political framework on his description of the way Nungalinya Theological College utilized what he termed “folk education” methods in teaching adult NESB Aborigines (Goodluck, 1980, p. 11). Nungalinya staff were motivated by a desire to identify with the students, and utilized a notion derived from Freire (1972) of "teacher-learners" instructing "learner-teachers" (Goodluck, 1980, pp. 10-12). Goodluck's approach is typical of many who have worked with NESB Aborigines: he is well motivated towards his students, and, because has overlooked the problems caused by language and lack of experience in the appropriate registers of English, especially in regard to mathematics, decides that the mental "otherness" and political oppression of the people are the addressable sources of the learning problems. This can lead to politically re-labeling of standard classroom methodologies as "Folk Methods". For example, as Goodluck points out himself (1988, p.22), the effective classroom practice of Activity-Talking-Recording, can be renamed in Friere's terms, Action-Reflection-Planning. The lack of any mechanism predicted or described for improving learning outcomes is a major issue in acutely political readings such as Goodluck’s. However, the Kunwinjku data continually confronts issues of perceived relative power, so the prospect of re-analysis in terms of political praxis cannot be separated from pedagogy. I return to this discussion in chapter 14.2.

Jack Frawley (1992a) has proposed a number of "guiding principles" to help Aboriginal communities use the school as a resource for language maintenance. His underlying assumption is related to mine in this paper: "Ultimately, the responsibility for language maintenance lies with the speakers of the language, and this rests not only with the school, but with the community as well" (Frawley, 1992a, p.13). Significantly, none of Frawley's principles are about methodology. Restating them in my own words, they are Aboriginal Control, Aboriginal Power, Aboriginal Design, Aboriginal Funding Initiative, Aboriginal Teachers, and Aboriginal Linguistic Solidarity and Co-ordination. His distinction between power and control is interesting: in his conclusion he implies the need for government agencies to work in such a way that Aboriginal communities can dictate the way mainstream money is spent in their school. Perhaps the logical outcome of Frawley’s model of full
community control is an independent school, which may be more comfortable for both the government and the local community, though he does not canvass the possibility that the community may prefer to have the school provided and run by Balanda. The issue of language maintenance has emerged as a general concern in Aboriginal education (Hartman and Henderson, 1994) and has become a key motivation for interest in the school among some Kunwinjku parents (13.5).

Robert Veel (1991) researched the teaching of writing skills to English speaking Aboriginal students in NSW, engaging with general pedagogical theory but citing research on schooling of NESB Aborigines more widely. He has been concerned with relational rather than with political modeling of school-community relationships. Starting with an acknowledgment of the failure of school education provided to Aborigines in NSW, he outlines various kinds of responses that this failure could inspire on the part of educators. He particularly attacks the way people have wrongly linked notions of deficit and difference in the analysis of educational failure, citing the extreme Whorfism of those who assert a deficit model of Aboriginal languages, so that, for example, Pitjantjatjara was held to be incapable of expressing causal relations. Relying on work by Martin and Rothery (1987) and Rothery and Macken (1991) to explain the way general approaches to education set up parameters for classroom level pedagogies, he claims that both "...traditional pedagogy, and more progressive pedagogies can equally well fail disadvantaged students" (Veel, 1991b, p. 34). (He does not concede the unavoidable corollary; that both might equally well succeed). He suggests the "explicitness" or "visibility" of the pedagogical framework is not as potent as the realities of the relationship between the social groupings of teacher and student. He cites Bernstein's (1977) exploration of the gap between mainstream teachers, and minority students, where Bernstein analyzes the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students reflecting the structure of the society behind the school (Veel, 1991b, pp. 35-6). This analysis reflects the view that, in some way, the effectiveness of teaching and learning is tied to a socially defined relationship between teacher and student. He cites the approach advocated by Gray (1990) with NESB Aborigines as an example of effective "post-progressive" pedagogy on the basis of Gray's negotiated marriage between classroom and local cultures through what I would describe as a group of people from the school's community who are authorized to teach (1991b, p. 44). Veel's awareness of the mutual perceptions of school and community and their potential mutual
authorization is a productive element in interpreting the Kunwinjku data; in particular the implication that these systemic relationships are finally realized through immediate teacher-learner relationships, meaning this personal classroom interaction is the prime factor for school pedagogy. The Kunwinjku data certainly supports a preference for relational rather than political modeling of interactions within the school, as well as between school and community.

Stephen Harris has explored through an influential corpus of writings over two decades the links between NESB Aboriginal children’s learning, school, and political systems. His PhD thesis (Harris, 1977) examined the ways one Arnhem Land Aboriginal group (the Yolngu people at Milingimbi) taught and learned in a range of non-school contexts. He discussed the epistemology of this group (in relation to truth, belief and fact), their child-rearing practices, their view of time, their sources of personal motivation, styles of direct instruction and approaches to group behaviour, such as competitive activities. His research was based on participant observation with a group very similar in lifestyle and culture to the Kunwinjku people. Although Harris did not use the local language, his detailed observation and reporting of children’s behaviour and their pedagogic interactions with adults is sufficiently detailed to support his arguments, and to allow fine grained re-analysis by later researchers. His thesis, especially taken with that of Christie (1984a), which was reported on the same community, is particularly valuable as a benchmark for comparison with Kunwinjku pedagogy in family settings and particularly in schooling. I will comment in chapter 14.1.2 on the way both Harris’s and Christie’s models can be interrogated and possibly reinterpreted by the kind of relational model I present in the following chapters. I will note very briefly at 11.4.2 some of Harris’s early findings that should be revisited in the light of my list of Kunwinjku pedagogic features, acknowledging it was this approach that first aroused my interest in the prospects of theorising from my Kunwinjku observations.

Harris's later work on what he called "Aboriginal learning styles" (Harris, 1984) and "Aboriginal education strategies"(Harris, n.d.) provides a framework for an encounter with what the emerging generation of Aboriginal writers are saying about their own pedagogies, helping us to "hear" them. It has also provides an approach for utilizing knowledge about Aboriginal pedagogy in mainstream school practices. For example, if school staff know that certain types of teaching and learning “problems” in the school can be addressed by an awareness of the pedagogy of the home,
including the teaching styles and relational interactions they prefer, the school might address these, isolating solvable difficulties from those outside the control of the classroom such as community aspirations, access to further schooling, employment and the mutual understandings between the school and the community as to the overall goals of schooling. Harris in fact became more concerned with these inevitably political aspects of pedagogy in later writing.

In a 1992 paper to the American Anthropological Association Conference, Harris seems to be concerned less with techniques and large scale methodologies than with educational empowerment as a goal. He argues for a clear distinction between bilingual education strategies, which are fundamentally assimilationist techniques aiming at efficiency in academic gain, and bicultural notions, which are about the ownership and general purposes of schools in Aboriginal communities (Harris 1992, p.1). Significantly, he describes bilingual education in terms of its political value; noting its main achievement as the "...promotion of Aboriginal teacher education and the resultant increased control of schools by Aboriginal staff" (Harris 1992, p.2). I will return to this area of discussion in chapters thirteen and fourteen, where other factors complicated the application of this analysis in the Kunwinjku context.

Harris’s interest in Aboriginal control may have entailed his awareness of Aborigines as at least potential educational theorists as well as political realists. He paraphrases their view:

"...if the two worlds are so different then the job of schooling was not to try to teach only the dominant world, or to merely teach in two languages for that matter, but to teach children how to maintain their primary identity in the Aboriginal world, to become competent and confident in both worlds." (Harris, 1992, p.4).

In fact, a number of Kunwinkju informants have expressed this kind of viewpoint in response to their own analysis of the demands made on them by the school system (for example at 9.7.6). Harris acknowledges that he is not a spokesman for Aborigines (Harris, 1992, p.4) but in the absence of any large corpus of Aboriginal opinion, he was willing to take this model further, exploring the prospects for schools having a major role in the preservation of local cultural distinctives, despite the equally desirable but not locally controllable function of schooling in leading to mainstream socialization. Harris proposes a means for the Aboriginal community to
simultaneously limit the school's assimilationist effects, while utilizing it as a resource to take over aspects of Aboriginal learning previously outside its view. He describes his approach as a "...somewhat drastic culture domain separation strategy" (Harris 1992, p.5), listing some principles that an Aboriginal community would follow in implementing the strategy.

I will discuss the basic thrust of Harris’s strategy and make some responses in order to set the background for the complex decision making that Kunwinjku people have faced since the school system became part of their pedagogic world. Harris (1992, p. 6) has argued the need for separation of cultural domains in what would then become formally what they are by implication: bicultural schools, by which he means public schools in NESB Aboriginal communities. Harris assumed the desire of the Aboriginal community to consciously maintain its own identity whilst simultaneously learning the elements of another cultural identity. He noted some potential criticisms of this position, for example the problematic notion of anyone living a rigidly compartmentalized life, and the nature of “culture” and whether it is to be so highly valorized over personal aspirations. These tensions also emerge in the Kunwinjku data.

It is the relationship between pedagogic goals and processes in the individual on the one hand, and the cultures forming those individuals on the other that attract some of Harris’s attention and which emerged as a concern for some Kunwinjku interviewees. Most provocatively, Harris has suggested that the end result of an effective bicultural strategy would be a "150%" person, (1990, p. 1), a person with two cultures, but with another aspect that emerges from this experience, and which is, presumably, not tied to either. This model, which Harris acknowledges he borrowed from McFee (1975), attempts to model the nature of Biculturality, in which the two (or more?) cultures are not added to each other. Rather the bicultural person is one person who stands in a sharply more self-aware relationship to his experiences than someone who has never been forced to inspect his own epistemology and identity – issues of everyday self-examination for bicultural people. New tools are needed within the self-constructing consciousness and these equally distance the analyzable components of the self from each culture. It is not one culture looking at the other part of the self. However, when this notion is applied to school curricula, as it is intended to be, it encounters the insurmountable issue of time. Given that we are talking about what can be achieved in the years of schooling, a community and its
individuals need to decide to what extent the school can achieve socialization into either one or both of two cultures, and what aspects of either will need to be sacrificed to make space for the other. Any one human being has only one set of experiences, even though it may be made up of a number of cultural elements learnt in separate domains. In other words we may end up at best with someone who is 50% socialized into each culture when these are viewed as mutually exclusive domains.

Perhaps the most optimistically constructed potential outcome of bicultural schooling informed if not driven by local aspirations will be that Aboriginal people who are predominantly socialized into their own culture may learn enough language and other skills of the mainstream society to interact with it for their own purposes. The issue of personal (and collective) purpose, of the aspiration of Aboriginal people, is self-evidently fundamental to the creation and success of any local bicultural approach. The question of what is enough learning within each cultural domain will be answered individually. In particular, those who will have the vision to train as teachers, or leaders in other spheres that involve mainstream immersion from time to time, will deliberately replace some of their opportunities for Aboriginal learning with mainstream learning. The use of the school as a venue for bicultural learning is discussed briefly in chapter 13, conceding the way extrascholastic factors have undermined this model.

One of the motivations for my research was my desire to hear what Kunwinjku people saw as their relationship with the school. Harris’s model predicts self-aware Aboriginal control over localized forms of schooling. This political potential, should it be realized, could equally well mean that the community decides not to pursue biculturalism, at least not through the school, but to regard it as a resource for learning mainstream culture, appointing or accepting non-Aboriginal staff, and insisting that their own children take part in this domain of socialization, leaving Aboriginal aspects of education to a parallel, non-school pedagogy.

Harris seems to anticipate that Aboriginal communities would prefer Aboriginal people as school teachers (Harris, 1992, p.6), but this sort of preference, if it exists, could only be exercised on the two conditions that there are available, appropriately qualified Aboriginal people and that government policy accepted local control over its funds for staffing. (The availability of local community members as teachers will be discussed at 13.3.4.)
Harris developed his model for Australian Aboriginal data, but a number of writers have addressed pedagogy in minority groups within the USA. I will comment on two in this category who bring together awareness of both the classroom and the political realities to be accounted for in theory.

3.2.5 Two American Models of Minority Education as Potentially Applicable in Australian Aboriginal Contexts

Lisa Delpit (1988) has wrestled with the tensions between the goals of social reproduction of the minority groups and their need to use schooling for empowerment and as an entrée to the mainstream embedding society and its economy. This involves two concerns that underlie my research and emerge constantly in Kunwinkju discourse: relations of power and the way perceptions of race influence group associations and relations between groups of humans.

Delpit notes that schools are usually run by the “culture of power”, so that homes not sharing this culture, “transmit another culture that children must learn at home in order to survive in their communities” (Delpit, 1988, p.286). She also discusses language choices which reflect and express differences between the power of the centre and of marginal groups, and may cause classroom problems (Delpit, 1988, p.288-289). When the social group of the students is physically distinct, and has a completely different language, or a very different dialect (as when Aboriginal children are taught by Australian mainstream teachers), this kind of tension is significantly increased, and emerges as a concern among my informants.

John Ogbu, (1993) examined the issues of why children from some minorities succeed in school based education, when those from other, apparently similar minorities fail even when facing similar cultural differences and other educational disadvantages (1993, pp. 86-87). He notes that research has usually failed to assess why those who don’t fail manage to succeed, disallowing a comprehensive explanation of minority school experience. (p.85). Ogbu has attempted to isolate factors that predicate academic success for minority children who cross cultural boundaries to do schooling. After surveying approaches to theorization about academic failure between 1960s and 1980 (pp. 83-84) he suggests the salient factors are:

- Whether or not the minority is “involuntary” (p. 87) by which he means it has become a minority, on the model of North American Indians, by virtue of the disproportionately greater size and power of a group that has engulfed it.
• The level of self-esteem and the kinds of aspirations of a society due to its remembered history of disempowering interaction with that majority, so that “…school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the effect that the nature of the minorities’ interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure” (p.88). This could include a reactive, “oppositional” form of social identity (p.95) with implications for classroom learning (p.102).

• Conscious pursuit of goals achievable beyond but only through schooling. That is, school participants “…succeed when they perceive and experience or anticipate significant economic and other benefits of education” (p.95).

Malin was more optimistic than Ogbu. She asserted that correctly done, a school can provide “a substitute for external motivational - structures such as anticipated employment - that are socially absent for minority groups who have faced a history of institutionalized discrimination)” (1997a, p. 8). Although Ogbu has focused on success in school pedagogy, his model may have explanatory value for “success” in non school learning as well. Ogbu notes the tentative nature of his model (p. 87). In fact, Australian theorization about its Aboriginal pedagogy is also tentative. I will discuss two recent public debates about general approaches in accounting for Aboriginal pedagogy in schools to demonstrate the need for both further grounded data and further thinking, and to introduce a number of issues that emerge throughout this thesis.

3.2.6 Recent Australian Discourse on Theorizing Aboriginal Pedagogy

Part 1 “Culturalist” versus Critical Political Perspectives: What should a theorist on Aboriginal Education take into account?

Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996, p.6), writing from a politically aware, critical perspective, acknowledge the contribution and widespread influence of Stephen Harris’ writings on Aboriginal education, recognizing his challenge to both assimilationist views of Aboriginal schooling, and the notion that Aboriginal students were essentially uneducable, or “victims” of cultural deprivation. They suggest, however, that Harris’s focus on ideas of culturally different learning styles could be used as a “convenient scapegoat” for Aboriginal schooling failure, allowing political and historical grounds to escape analysis (p.6). They make a number of charges against Harris, Malin and others (un-named) who share his views (1996, p.7-8), claiming that they are:
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- Naive, in looking to the application of learning style models to what is a complex political and historical context;
- Guilty of “binarism and reductionism”;
- Unwilling to account for historically and socially constitutive factors in Aboriginality, assuming that only cultural dissonance and difference are determinative of inequitable outcomes in Aboriginal education;
- Over-rating “formality” as a feature in learning (arguing that Aboriginal people use both formal and informal teaching and learning, as do all cultural groups, so the use of formal verses informal categories is something of a false dichotomy);
- Insisting that Aboriginal schooling be analyzed without account of the likelihood or desirability of social and cultural change in Aboriginal contexts (although in their comments on p.7 they overlook the political aspects of Harris’s domain theory);
- Stereo-typing or oversimplifying by failing to recognize class, gender and sub-culture tensions within and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups.

Having implied the rights and needs of Aboriginal students to appropriate their history in political terms, Nicholls et al. (1996, p.9) describe a “unified curriculum” approach they used at Batchelor College 1993, where the College decided on what was to be taught, as well as employing a politically aware manner of teaching. They provide no evidence, however, that the voice of either the Aboriginal community or students directed this approach, suggesting a failure on the part of these writers to apply rigorously the politically liberating model of curriculum with which they challenge other educators (p.10): “It is time to move on to an educational theory which at the very least poses the urgent sociopolitical questions with which Aboriginal people must contend.”

In response, Education Australia (Issue 35), carried articles by three educationists:

[1] Firstly, Malin (1997a) made an eirenical reply, agreeing that learning styles theory has been misapplied and that there is a need for structural reform in educational institutions failing Aboriginal students (p.6). However, she argued for a multilevel attack, both in teacher practice and government policy, implying that one model may be incapable of tackling both classroom teacher needs and broader issues
of social justice (pp. 6-7). She notes that Nicholls et al. have overlooked Harris’ later views on learning styles.

Malin notes a number of “work in progress” sites applying a pragmatic cultural difference approach to pedagogy in classrooms (p.9), cites research by both Hudspith (1996) and Trouw (1994) in urban settings and pointing out that it is premature to say this approach has been thoroughly tested.

[2] Gary Partington, (1997) argued against both “culturalist” and social justice approaches to explanations of inequality. He cites the academic success of members of non-Aboriginal minorities despite similar experiences of racism and similar handicaps due to the use of languages other than English in the home (p.15). He implies this challenges any certainty that Aboriginal school failure can be explained simply in terms of racial politics or cultural dissonance. Partington concedes that while in particular instances more attention could be paid to a “deprivation” model of Aboriginal schooling, what is needed is an approach that pre-supposes nothing about a student on the basis of his or her ethnicity. He uses Schwab’s (1983) suggested curriculum process as a matrix for analysis of particular student failure (p.16). (It is interesting that the only inter-personal relationship implicit in Schwab’s four areas, as Partington describes them, is that between student and teacher. Parent-teacher and parent-child relationships are not specified.)

[3] Parkin (1997) agreed on the widespread impact of Stephen Harris’s ideas on learning styles, arguing that moving towards a more politically informed approach to Aboriginal education will still necessitate incorporating some or other version of learning style theory (p.10) no matter how modified or what position it occupies in a hierarchy of concerns. Parkin’s approach is broadly to insist on a multifaceted theory where cultural issues, political issues and classroom praxis all operate together, rather than in tension (p.12). Parkin is very aware of the complexity of relationships between stakeholders in pedagogy, especially the individual’s role in making choices from within his or her own cultural group (p.11). The teacher’s role is in helping the students achieve complicated, bicultural learning goals (p.12) reflecting parents’ aspirations, which have primacy in the process, so that “It is not the teacher’s role to determine the future of Aboriginal children.” (p.12). Parkin suggests a “…pedagogic triad; the learner, the teacher…the knowledge they construct together” (p.12). Of course, this is not a pedagogic triad but a classroom triad. Nor is it a triadic interpersonal relationship. Neither of the two participants develops a curriculum or
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authorizes each other as teacher or learner. Parkin did not address the problematic issue of potential dissonance between the goals of the school system and of the parents. Yet this tension is at the heart of analysis of small social groups encountering mainstream schools and was a concern for a number of my informants.

Part 2 The Harris-McConvell Debate and the Missing Data

The dearth of reliable first person data about Aboriginal aspirations and thinking about pedagogy generally, has seriously limited Australian academic discourse about this pedagogy for the three decades 1970s to 1990s. I will use one academic exchange from this period to illustrate the way in which Aboriginal people and their schooling were deeply involved in this discourse as objects, albeit sympathetically viewed objects, with the result that conclusions drawn about them always lacked the authority of their informed participation.

In 1991 Patrick McConvell wrote a critique of Stephen Harris’ proposition of cultural domain separation as a model for schooling in Aboriginal contexts. This was published in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the editors asked Harris to respond in the next edition of that journal. McConvell’s critique and Harris' reply together highlight some profound issues in the formulation of both praxis and theory for Aboriginal people interacting with schooling provided by the dominant culture and seeking to simultaneously maintain their own traditional educational systems.

Although both McConvell and Harris cite a few Aboriginal sources very briefly, and McConvell quotes a short text with translation (1991, p.15), the paucity of Aboriginal input to this debate was striking. Both agreed on the problems posed in the use anecdotal evidence and quotations from individual Aboriginals, and yet both acknowledge their dependence on this kind of data (Harris 1991a, p.19, McConvell 1991, p.13). Harris stressed the need for apparently contradictory metaphors quoted from Aboriginal commentators to be disambiguated (Harris 1991a, p.20).

One of the issues of contention between McConvell and Harris was the application of the concept of “two-way” or “both ways” education. Both Harris and McConvell attribute the articulation of this notion to Aboriginal speakers (Harris 1991a, pp. 20, 23; McConvell 1991, p.13). However, they dispute what these speakers meant by it, and how it can be applied. McConvell (1991, p.21) says the idea “…arose from Aboriginal people themselves combining ideas from the two cultures”, which implies a model where sharing and exchange between the two cultures is actively pursued. He claims that Harris’s insistence on a doctrine of
complete separation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains is a distortion of the Aboriginal view (McConvell 1991, p.13). This makes a case for going back to Aboriginal people for some interpretation. Both men acknowledge the way that data from Aborigines can be mishandled within “western discourses” (Harris 1991a, p.24) yet the obvious remedy is provide a large enough body of Aboriginal material to allow it to be read in terms of its own discourse.

Another issue discussed by McConvell and Harris is the degree to which Aboriginal culture should, or could be, open to change. Neither of them is comfortable with the profound tension between a minority culture’s need or even desire to adopt or adapt, and its desire to maintain its language, social cohesion and identity. For example, McConvell has argued throughout his paper the potential benefit of Aboriginal interaction with the white world “…given a level playing field - an equal ‘two-way’ exchange” (1991, p.23). He also stresses the need for “…the hearts and minds of the younger generation of Aborigines to be won over to maintenance of Aboriginal culture…” (1991, p. 23). This tension is certainly as palpable as McConvell and Harris believed, and a number of my informants had views about it. Finally of course, the call to cultural maintenance can come only from the parents and family of their younger generation. It is simply a matter of non-Aboriginal sentiment that we insist on what goals those parents and families have for their children.

The Harris-McConvell discussion provides some justifications and even urgency for seeking grounded research where Aboriginal voices are heard and can influence Balanda discourse about them. I will discuss in chapters 13 and 14 some aspects of the continuing exclusion of reliable quantitative data on Aboriginal school participation and success.

3.3 ABORIGINAL VOICES ON ABORIGINAL PEDAGOGY

3.3.1 Introduction: the Rise of Aboriginal Voices

Despite the lack of grounded and quantitative data, some first person Aboriginal theorization is beginning to emerge albeit on a small scale. I will introduce here some emerging writing about Aboriginal pedagogy by Aboriginal people involved in schooling, but reflecting also on their non-school experiences. Incidental Aboriginal opinion about education can be gleaned from the growing number of biographies and autobiographies of Aboriginal people. Apart from Yami Lester’s autobiographical account (1981), none of these is particularly focused on education, but occasionally

From the 1970s a small number of Aborigines has written specifically if briefly on Aboriginal pedagogy. Paul Hughes (1981-1987) wrote and spoke with the authority of a senior public servant; Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman (1976) may have been the pioneer in writing from a NESB Aboriginal viewpoint on issues of pedagogy, which has now begun to emerge from a younger generation of Aboriginal writers. These have usually been NESB Aborigines, and have strong and recent affiliation with NESB Aboriginal communities, and although their contributions have often been very brief and anecdotal, they constitute a particularly valuable resource since they have articulated viewpoints they took into the task of working within school based pedagogy but hoping to take full account of non-school styles of teaching and learning from their own experience and societies.

These writers are part of the increasing number of Aborigines training to become schoolteachers. This has been the most recent phase of a very slow and painful process. Pearl Duncan became the first Aboriginal teacher in 1954, but by 1965 there were only two Aboriginal tertiary graduates (Brown, 1988, p.106). Williamson (1994, p.1055) traces the emergence of a substantial body of trained Aboriginals becoming teachers in their own communities as numbers increased from 72 Aboriginal teachers Australia wide in 1979, to around 500 in 1990.

Batchelor College has been a significant location for this kind of writing, particularly through its journals: 


Two monographs have added to the corpus of this genre. Firstly, Henry and McTaggart, who worked in the Deakin University’s Batchelor College Teacher Education Program, compiled reports by Aboriginal teachers on various aspects of what could be called the Aboriginalization of pedagogy in school-based education (Henry and McTaggart, 1991). In 1988, Harvey and McGinty compiled papers from a national conference on Aboriginal Adult Learning, (which appeared as a special
This first generation of writers are necessarily building their own speaking platform, drawing on the previously unarticulated (or at least unheard) aspirations of their parents' generation to form appropriate metalanguage and models for pedagogic discourse among themselves and in their own societies. I will discuss very briefly some of their writings.

3.3.2 Some Aboriginal Viewpoints on Aboriginal Pedagogy

The Yirrkala community has produced a significant group of school-based Aboriginal writers who are already reporting from that workface, and who have been major players in reconstructing their own society's education resources and goals:

Marika-Mununggiritj (1991b, pp. 33-34) has written a short but provocative article about the principles of Aboriginal pedagogy. She has completed a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education from Melbourne University, and is actively seeking to find an Aboriginal model for adult education. She has been explicit about the need to bring pedagogy into relationship with more important community concerns about security against outside pressure, and preserving social cohesion.

Marika-Mununggiritj et al. (1990) have written about one community's aspirations about educational independence. This article details the process that led to the emergence of community control of the school in one community similar to Oenpelli. Referring to themselves as a "community of researchers" (p.46) this group of Aboriginal teachers is aware of the newness of their role as educational leaders, yet significantly dependent on authorization from broader community leadership, in particular the elders who had a dual basis of authority to teach: their seniority and their knowledge of "sacred language" (Marika-Mununggiritj et al., 1990, p.36).

Wunungmurra (1989, pp. 9-10), an adult educator from Yirrkala writing in Kularlaga, has outlined the extent of the impact on his society of the mainstream world, and describes the development of the Homelands Centre Movement in the 1970s as a strategy for going back to a system of authority based on elders. I discuss the pedagogic authority of Kunwinjku elders in chapter 7.

A fuller flowering of this involvement of Aboriginal teachers in North Eastern Arnhem Land has been seen in the homeland centres schools of the Laynhupuy region. The beginnings of this have been described by Munungurr et al. (1987). Aspects of the parallel processes of Aboriginalization of curriculum and
methodology in these schools have been described in Ruluminy (1991) and Ngurruwuthun (1991). There has been no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of these schools from either a Balanda or an Aboriginal viewpoint, so statements about applying either Aboriginal methodologies or governance structures still need to be regarded as experimental, and in chapter 13 and 14 I will note some problematic aspects for both in Kunwinkju experience.

Sue Ah Chee was one of the founding editors of Kularlaga and has written a number of articles in that journal. Her interest has been in drawing on traditional Aboriginal sources to form a contemporary "andragogy" for Aboriginal adult education (Ah Chee, 1991a-d). She has also been prepared to utilize the thinking of non-Aboriginal writers, particularly McClay and Christie (Ah Chee, 1991c).

Marjorie Bilbil has also been a major contributor to Kularlaga. Her writing is often in the form of poetry (for example, 1991c, d, e), reflecting on traditional Aboriginal lifestyles, particularly the concept of the transmission of culture (1991a, b).

Julie Cook, a Batchelor graduate who later lectured in the NT Open College at Katherine, has reviewed Michael Christie's 1988 paper, "The invasion of Aboriginal Education" (Cook, 1991b). She argues that Aborigines must reclaim control of education, since mainstream controlled schooling is destructive of Aboriginal identity; perhaps implying that school based learning is too effective in at least some ways.

A number of students have qualified as teachers through Deakin university's D-BATE courses in association with Batchelor College. An article by a group of these students (D-BATE Students, 1988) in Ngoonjook addressed the question of what constitutes an Aboriginal teaching style. Whereas most of the teacher trainees have written anecdotally, the D-BATE students have attempted a synthesis of their findings. They link all the issues of methodology to a process of authorization by the community's "Elders" who are the authorities with whom the teacher negotiates the locus of instruction (either in or outside school), the topic and content of lessons, and so forth. This is a good insight into the way the emerging Aboriginal teachers see their relationship with their own communities, and raises issues of the relationship between the kinds of expertise and authority that are regarded as inherent in a role or in a person within the community, and those that are derived from another source.
From their viewpoint pedagogic “style” is subsumed in discussion of pedagogic relationships.

Bindarriy et al. (1991) wrote about "Obstacles to Aboriginal Pedagogy" under assumed names, because of their sharply political focus. They implicitly define pedagogy as the practical, interpersonal processes of working in a school and making its relations with the community more effective. They report the way in which the first generation of Aboriginal teachers struggled to gain a foothold in an Education Department school as a first step to community control. It provides a realistic insight for other Aboriginal teachers who contemplate acting as the agents for empowering their own community to “own” a school.

Bebuka et al. (1993) wrote while students in the Batchelor College Teacher Education course. All are from the Galiwin'ku community and they aimed this paper partly at members of their own community. The first section is a summary of features of traditional pedagogy, but their aim is to describe the impact on traditional teaching and learning made by the mainstream English speaking society. They argue that this impact necessitates an adaptive response by the community, incorporating English as well as literacy in both English and Aboriginal languages as parts of the community's pedagogy. This paper is interesting in that it is intended to persuade community members about the need to change their thinking, raising another aspect of the relationship between the emerging Aboriginal professional teachers, and traditional authorities in their own society.

3.3.3 A Synthesis of Aboriginal Propositions on Aboriginal Pedagogy

It is important to build up the picture of Aboriginal folk pedagogy described by these writers since this may provide the best approximation of what Aboriginal parents have in their minds at present, and reveal what point of departure these teachers used in creating appropriate methodologies in their schools. These writers are not talking about the distant past, but seem to be reflecting what their parent's generation practiced, in other words, the behaviour that will be recognized as effective and appropriate teaching and learning by the community. Although most of the articles were quite short, often only a page or so, there were a number of issues where several writers overlapped and a number of issues where they have at least implicitly disagreed, but taken together, these viewpoints provide important triangulation to the views I report in this thesis. I have noted at several points the sections of the thesis.
that discuss the same issue, even if not taking the same viewpoint. The following are my summaries in my imposed ordering:

[1] An accepted traditional, non-scholastic curriculum already exists in Aboriginal communities (P. McTaggart, 1991, p.23). This was a presupposition to my research.

[2] The traditional curriculum was passed down from one generation to the next by older, respected family members. In other words, key familial relationships had a built in, permanently operational, teacher-learner strand (Sams, 1991b, p.26; Marika-Mununguritj, 1991, p.33; Djamalaka, 1991, p.14; Bilbil 1991a, p.15; Banbuy 1991a, p.16). So, learning always took place in a web of kinship (D-BATE students, 1992, p.33). (See chapters 5-6)

[3] The gender of the teacher was often determined by the aspect of life being instructed. Often the teacher was a woman (Banbuy 1991a, p.16; Roberts 1992, p.69; Bebuka et al., 1993, p. 67; Ah Chee 1991a, p.31). Men also had gender-specific teaching roles too, for example, in teaching "dreaming" stories and hunting (Banbuy, 1991a, p.16). Fathers taught about bark painting (Banbuy 1991b, p. 21); uncles or fathers would teach fishing skills, or the use of spears (Roberts 1992, p. 69); (See 6.1.3 – 4).


[5] Often teaching and learning occurred as a kind of commentary while traveling over clan lands, covering topics such as "Dreaming Sites" (Sams 1991, p.26; Bilbil 1991e, p.12; Ah Chee, 1991a, p.31), bush tucker (Bilbil, 1991a, p. 15) and mortuary rites (Bilbil, 1991c, p.19-20). (See chapter 12 on Kunwinjku use of narrative.)

[6] Teaching was usually done in an informal or incidental way, as part and parcel of the routines of life, rather than in a special venue or at a set time (Sams 1991, p.26). It could happen, for example, on hunting trips (Roberts, 1992, p. 69) and occurred over the whole lifetime (Banbuy, 1991b, p. 21). (See the summary of Kunwinjku teaching methods in chapter 11.)

You could describe this informal traditional learning as an "apprenticeship" style (Bilbil, 1991b, p.25; Wilson 1991, p. 13), where the teacher modeled what was taught as a doer, rather than a theoretician (D-BATE Students, 1992, p.33), with a place for conversational exchange between teacher and learner, including discussion and questions (Bilbil, 1991c, p.19). In fact, there is the suggestion that group instruction was utilized in some family contexts (Sams, 1991, p.26; Bilbil, 1991, p.20). (Chapter 11.)

Language learning was always a crucial part of the education process (Bilbil, 1991e, p.12; Swan, 1991, p.13). Language was the "first thing" learnt (Bilbil 1991a, p.15). Sams (1991 p.26) locates language and other learning in the kin network setting: "...through language learning he or she must carefully listen to their elders and parents..." Teaching was oral, and much of the content was oral literature (Bebuka et al., 1993, p. 67), sometimes involving the learning of a “sacred” language (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p.36). (See section 9.3.5.)

Not only was education embedded in kinship relationships, but these relationships themselves were the subject of teaching, and deeply associated with language. Swan, (1991, p.13) says this meant learning proper knowledge of kin obligations and respect. He reports that "I was taught how to respect my elders and to respect my language, which I still do now". (See general discussion of Law in chapter 9).

Art was both the subject of instruction and its vehicle (Bilbil, 1991c, p.19; Banbuy, 1991b, p. 21). Bebuka et al. (1993, p. 68) report that "All children learn at the right time from bark paintings about the symbols, where they come from, what their tribes are, what moiety - Dhuwa or Yirritja, - what their skin groups are, and about fresh and salt water". Teaching about beliefs and laws was part of this instruction about, and through, art (Marika, 1979, p.10). (See 12.2 and 12.4.3.)

Ceremonies were an important venue for teaching and learning (Bilbil 1991c, p.19) although some knowledge was restricted (Banbuy, 1991b, p. 21) suggesting conscious control over the syllabus by people with specialist teaching roles (as is the case with Kunwinjku ceremonial teachers noted below in chapter eight).

Epistemology and practice of teaching are both strongly linked to the authority of the “elders” in Aboriginal society (see chapter 7).

There was recognition of some people acting in specialist teaching roles, for example, "song men" taught their skills to chosen successors (Bilbil, 1991d, p. 22).
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[15] School based, mainstream oriented schooling intruded into the system presented in the viewpoints above. It has been an instrument of oppression, or of colonization (Lanhupuy, 1987, p.1; Collins 1991b, p.31; Cook, 1991a, p. 34).

[16] School based, mainstream oriented schooling has also failed to achieve its own goals in Aboriginal contexts (I. Brown, 1988, p.106; Ah Chee, 1991b, p.12).

[17] As a political minority, it is essential that Aboriginal people take control of their own educational future (Ah Chee, 1991b, p.13; Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p.33). Cook, (1991a, p.34) argues that this will allow Aboriginal communities to regulate the changes brought through schooling, allowing such change "…only if they can see it directly assisting their struggle for cultural integrity and survival".

[18] Aboriginal knowledge should be incorporated in mainstream curricula, since it will benefit mainstream students too (Ah Chee, 1991b, p.12). Further, this inclusion could help preserve aspects of traditional knowledge: "By putting the knowledge onto the paper this makes our culture stronger in the modern world" (Bebuka et al., 1993, p. 69).

[19] School based, mainstream oriented schooling has led to language loss (Pandella, p.16). Marika-Munungiritj et al. (1990, p. 37) comment "…the missionaries didn't realize that when they stopped us speaking Yolngu language in the school, they were stopping our way of thinking".

[20] The non-Aboriginal invaders did not recognize or value the pre-existing pedagogy, and effectively removed the authority to teach from community members (Marika-Munungguritj et al., 1990, p. 36).

[21] Aboriginal education should involve locally-based teacher training (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991a, p.43). Lanhupuy (1987, p. 3) sees this as part of the effort by Aborigines to "decolonize" themselves (see 13.3 and 13.5).

There is a serious caveat in relying on these statements, even assuming I have accurately summarized what the writers have said. They all wrote in English, and after at least commencing formal teacher training. It is possible their viewpoints reflect the influence of teacher training staff, or even the wider Balanda world that provides the training. More seriously, this wave of writing has led to no general and more mature reflection published from this group of people. There is a need for research on the way the most successful (in Balanda academic or administrative terms) of Aboriginal schoolteachers has assimilated to or even abrogated the Balanda school’s processes and goals, and whether in doing so they are in conflict or
accord with the Aboriginal communities they serve. This could be predicted as simply another dimension to the rate and scope of change in remote NESB communities.

3.4 ORIENTATION TO REMAINDER OF THESIS

Chapters two and three have built a case for research that listens to Aboriginal viewpoints in regard to both the school and their own interests in terms of their preferences on pedagogic relationships, methods and goals. In chapter four I will briefly discuss the issues and processes in designing a grounded approach to account for Kunwinjku pedagogic behaviours, and to understand and learn from their statements and thinking about that pedagogy.
CHAPTER FOUR
DESIGNING A GROUNDED ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY
CHAPTER FOUR: DESIGNING A GROUNDED ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

4.1 QUESTIONS AND PROCESSES IN RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1.1 Tensions in Research Design
This chapter describes the method I have used to obtain interview data and how this relates to my less formal observations as a participant in Kunwinjku life and pedagogy. In designing this grounded research methodology, I sought to address a number of ethical and procedural questions:

[1] How do I balance my desire to allow a Kunwinjku voice on pedagogy, while pursuing a rigorous and transparent analysis and presentation of those views?
[2] How do I formalize my long term but informal participation with more formalized observation without distorting the personal relations upon which both the data collection and its reliability depend?
[3] How do I satisfy the urgent need for “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of Aboriginal pedagogy as a necessary preliminary to theorization and at the same time impose some theoretical ordering for heuristic and presentation purposes? This question could also be put in two other complementary ways: How do I compromise productively between using fields and terms from educational discourse generally and Kunwinjku discursive requirements? Or equally problematic: how do I explore pedagogic theorization in comfortable and productive terminology, while respecting the parameters and paradigms set by the Kunwinjku data?
[4] A kind of benevolent presumption is rampant in Aboriginal research. How do I conduct my research ethically in a community which is already irritated by its role and status as an object of research, avoiding additional pressures and providing for informant confidentiality, and in particular, in providing accessible and useable reporting to the community? This entails the further question of how I present both interview texts and findings in English without excluding Kunwinjku access to both and without disregarding the primacy of oral discourse in Kunwinjku life.

4.1.2 Ethical Questions Examined

4.1.2.1 The Ethics of Researching “Failure”
There is another general ethical problem preliminary to research about Aboriginal pedagogy. To an appalling degree, research about Aboriginal teaching and learning is focused on diagnosing and responding to failure. Clearly, such research is needed,
but if its social-theoretical underpinning remains unexamined, it will be impotent. Because failure of the school system in Aboriginal contexts has been general, research focuses on general trends, de-centering the individual and locking him/her into the role of perpetual, pathological object moulded by systemic or political factors managed by non-Aboriginal investigators; essentially as units responding to inevitable forces beyond their control. This realization supported a research design that invites and allows Kunwinjku people to speak, rather than one where I could test the conformity of their deeds to their words, or of their words to my ideas of those of other non-Aboriginal theorists.

A second more subtle result of the emphasis on researching school failure is the temptation to anticipate a general pedagogic incapacity in Aboriginal societies, and maybe unconsciously seek refuge in the two easy explanatory options: tolerant dismissal of the subjects whose profound difference allows what would otherwise be a pedagogic failure; or political and systemic blaming, leaving Aboriginal people as continuing objects.

4.1.2.2 Ethics of Research with Real People

The Kunwinjku experience of disruption to traditional educational contexts and of problematic school-based education is typical of life in a small, minority society under catastrophic pressure from an embedding and invasive mainstream society. Their experience is like living in a crucible, and any observer must address the moral decision of whether to observe from within or without that locus of rapid and uncontrollable change.

There is in fact no independent and stable platform for the researcher within a zone of turbulence and precipitate change. The school can be seen as the hot spot within the crucible: not only as a microcosm and agent of that change, but as the prime point of contact pressure between races, between cultures, between languages, between systems of knowledge, between personal values, between networks of relationship. The resulting turbulence attracts us as theoreticians; the school as an experiment where a startling range of ideas interact and invite analysis - ideas about the formation of racial identity, the socio-politics of education, classroom praxis, issues of language and power are obvious examples. The fact that living people are involved and that their failures and frustrations are real, as are the futures that may be imperiled by school failure - can be easily overlooked.

4.1.2.3 Some Personal Ethical Issues
Chapter Four: Designing a Grounded Ethnographic Methodology

When Glaser and Strauss coined the term “grounded theory” (Agar, 1986, p.16) they introduced a more complex relationship between hypotheses and data, where the “ground” reveals a continuous fluidity of data, and analysis simultaneously develops new hypotheses and possibly new and more focused demands for data. They didn’t point out that this is likely to take place within a framework of personal relationships, where the research process can also alter mutual personal expectations. I had to face two issues flowing from this essentially interpersonal aspect of grounded research:

[1] Preliminary to beginning the interviews I had to face the prospect that becoming a formal researcher may distort my existing relationships in some unforeseen way, perhaps straining friendships as I reverted after nearly two decades to a typically Balanda mode of interaction at least for some purposes. I am thankful that this has not been the case, but a second and surprising issue did emerge during the process. I felt initially that I would betray my adoptive family and friends by undertaking this very un-Kunwinjku act of organized research. On the other hand, by moving from observant participant to participant observer to formal researcher, perhaps some approach could be found which would help put control of education into Kunwinjku minds and hands. I thought “real” theorization may well depend on real suffering. Or rather, that real suffering may at the least yield some potentially helpful theory.

[2] A more personal, ethical issue was presented by MM in his interviews (MM and MM2). It is clear that he intended to commission myself and GB (his son) to take responsibility for teaching young Kunwinjku people about their language. As part of this charge to us, he expected to read the transcript of his words, and see whatever GB and I prepare as teaching materials based on the interview. (Both GB and I have acted on this charge.) This was another personal and more acute form of discomfort to the researcher.

4.2 DEVELOPING A RELIABLE MECHANISM

4.2.1 From Ethnographic Theory to a Workable Process

Rist (1980, p.8) has warned that “ethnographic” doesn’t simply mean non-quantitative; there is in fact an obligation to scrutinize the objectivity of non-quantitative data. Le Compte and Goetz (1982, p. 37) acknowledge that ethnography may never attain 100% external reliability, but that external reliability can be maximized by explicitly addressing the five issues of “…researcher status positions, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytical constructs and
premises, and methods of data collection and analysis.” I have tried here to provide sufficient detail about each of these concerns to allow an assessment of validity and reliability to be made. In chapter two I provided some description of the “social situations and conditions”.

Spradley argued the essential and irreplaceable role of verbatim statements in ethnographic research (1980, p.67). Unrestricted vernacular language ethnographic interviews seemed the most straightforward means of employing this verbatim principle, subject to the complications, noted below, of collection and translation of these texts.

4.2.2 Grounded Theory as a Fruitful Constraint

I decided early in my research design process to focus on what Kunwinjku people actually wanted to say, regardless of whether their behaviour was in accord with their declarations, though reserving the right to describe the practice of their pedagogy as I observed it. Ethnographic interviews provide a venue for this kind of voicing. This kind of interview also accrues data that is potentially rich and minimally categorized or directed (Spradley 1980, pp. 124-5). My experience in following a grounded theory approach made me think of it as a type of liberating constraint. On many occasions, after struggling with various ways to present or interpret Kunwinjku ideas, I found re-reading and following explicit Kunwinjku commentary provided a solution. This was particularly corrective when I was attracted away from the explicit data to one of the myriad side issues that grow up around pedagogy, whether in the school or at home, whether as to curriculum, systemic policies or methodological issues.

4.2.3 Issues of Reliability and Validity

LeCompte and Goetz (1982, p.35-36) warn of the threat to reliability when researchers are imprecise in describing their process. I will describe in detail the social and mechanical processes of interviewing, and discuss some problem areas in approaching analysis and presentation, in particular issues of social turbulence and change in the research community and the politics of language.

A high degree of validity is possible in transcribed, unedited texts, but the corresponding loss of predicted replicability needs to be addressed. I have no way of objectively demonstrating the extent to which my interviewees are “typical” of Kunwinjku people either as to viewpoint or oratory. I provide some compensation by allowing enough people from both genders and all adult age groups to give their
views, which I have taken together while noting individualistic viewpoints. I have provided this information in a de-identified way in some detail in chapter 5 to allow others an interrogatory reading of the actual texts, which are in appendices one and two. In presenting my findings throughout the thesis I have incorporated a significant amount of the text, usually as chunks of one or more paragraphs, reflecting the potential for “thick description” possible in this kind of grounded material, but also reflecting my own doctrine that Aboriginal voices must be on stage.

Clearly the potential scope and utility of any interview depend absolutely on the nature of the researcher-subject relationship (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, p.38) which I will discuss further 4.3.1 below. Interviews entail not only the crucial relationship between two people but the nature of interviewing as a speech act as well as a social event in those relationships. Spradley (1979, p.55) describes an ethnographic interview as a “particular kind of speech event”. He demonstrates its similarity to a “friendly conversation” and compares those two speech act types (pp. 55 - 58). My interviewees had all known me, and all shared with me a variety of life experiences, houses, jobs and emotional episodes over the eighteen years before I began formal research, so the intimacy hinted at by Spradley was achievable.

Spradley builds from a comparison with a friendly conversation to show how ethnographic intent adds certain procedural and formal elements to what might have otherwise been a “simple” conversation. In my case this meant constructing an opportunity, authorizing a range of topics and preparing some subsidiary questions (see 4.4.1 below).

From a Kunwinjku viewpoint there is an additional problematic issue. Kunwinjku speakers recognize a variety of speech act types defined by their social functions, for example, formal story telling, hunting stories, personal histories, procedural and instructional texts, conversations between friends and public speeches. While most English speakers have either first hand experience or at least an awareness of the formal “interview” as a speech event, Kunwinjku people rarely utilize this speech act type within their own speech community. There are short, informal interview events, such as questioning of someone back from a journey, or suspected of wrong doing, but the notion of being asked to speak reflectively on a particular abstract topic is comparatively rare, and when it does occur is usually at the instigation of the speaker rather than any interviewer.
This matter is further complicated for the interviewer by the Kunwinjku preference for answers in narrative form. For example, a question about opinion will often be given in the form of a narrative, usually about a real event which reveals the answer needed clearly, but only indirectly. One of the women I have interviewed was discussing the prospect of an interview (in my hearing) with another lady and said, “Nabulanj [interviewer’s subsection name] wants us to tell him stories.” This did not mean, in practice when we did the interview, that she used extensive narrative or answered in figurative ways, but rather reflected the usual Kunwinjku distinction between “answers” which are short – often single words in response to simple questions of fact, and “stories” which are evoked by a relaxed setting and a request for someone to make a personal viewpoint or re-tell history. In fact, the texts that emerged in these interviews show a mixture of types, some embedded in others: longer narrative answers, personal anecdotes, sample conversations, lists and simpler replies. (I have of course tried to avoid “yes” “no” types of questions except in clarification.) Most interviewees volunteer parenthetical explanations at some points in their interviews about people, dates or obscure vocabulary items. Less often, but in a number of texts (for example MM and JN), extended figures of speech are used to describe theoretical models.

Because I have chosen to allow Kunwinjku people to set their own agendas on speaking about education, a quantitative approach was not applicable even to provide some triangulation within my research project. Particular issues may arise from the interview data which need quantitative assessment, and I will make some suggestions for further research in chapters 13 and 14 which may entail quantitative analysis. Parish (1990) and NTDE (1999) have provided some quantitative data on the research community, particularly in relation to children’s attendance at school, although this did not reveal anything new: school non-attendance was already, and continues to be, a recognized problem.

4.3 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PHASE

4.3.1 The Researcher as Informal “Participant Observer”
For most of my time with Kunwinjku people, although I participated in the whole range of life events, and I certainly observed in the process, I was not doing formal “participant observation” research. I was not a self-aware researcher, nor was I seen as a researcher until I started setting up interviews. The benefit to this long unstructured period of participation and observation was my perceived longevity –
the most expensive research tool, and a position in people’s thinking as part of their routines and life events rather than as an outside investigator. Saville-Troike (1989, p. 111) describes a researcher deliberately positioning himself to acquire “…the rights as well as some of the obligations of an insider”. I was positioned in this way by accident, but I deliberately exploited the way I had become sufficiently a part of the community over a long period of time, so that I hoped my role as researcher would both encourage confidence and minimize observer effect (Saville-Troike 1989, p. 113).

Becker (1966b, p. 34 and Jackson, 1997, p348) noted the difficulties of comprehensively defining the term “participant-observer”. Spradley (pp. 55-62) was prepared to describe the characteristics of the participant observer role and propose types of participation. My experience between 1977 and 1998 is nevertheless difficult to define. Despite my long period as either an “active” or “complete” participant in Spradley’s terms (p.60-61), I did not keep written or taped records. My naive personal ideology was that I would only do and say what other Kunwinjku people of my gender and age were doing and saying, subject only to the moral principles of my own Christian beliefs. This allowed me a high level of participation but ruled out photography, audio tapes or note-taking simply because they were not Kunwinjku things to do. I did note down words and phrases but only as part of my language learning – in fact I was sometimes told to make notes about language, since, as my Kunwinjku teachers said to me, that is the way Balanda learn things! My observations were intensely focused on mastery of language, kinship terminologies and other social and practical skills I needed urgently in order to function as an adult Kunwinjku person.

Despite these limitations, Kunwinjku responses to my interviews and my analysis of them, will be shaped significantly those 20 unintentional years of naïve participation in shared experiences and conversations. Becker noted (1966, p.35, footnote) the simultaneity and multifaceted nature of the analytical process of a participant observer in the mix of ongoing experiences, and this certainly describes my experiences up to the point of deciding to do “formal” research. Becker stresses the provisional and sequential nature of participant observer analysis and that “final comprehensive” analysis may not be possible until field work is completed (p.35). I suggest an end point for my participant research, at least about this topic, has been
somewhat arbitrarily but necessarily fixed by the commencement this series of interviews and their analysis.

4.3.2 A Note on the Observer Effect Problem

It seems on the face of it equally possible that interviewees may try to say what I want them to say or try not to say what I want them to say, depending on the nature of our relationship and their individual acuity in understanding the research process. Given the long term nature of my interaction with interviewees, it is equally possible that an interviewee might sense that I want him to disagree with me and do so to keep me happy! Becker (1966, p.37) says the researcher, if not researching incognito, “…must learn how group members define him and in particular whether or not they believe that certain kinds of information and events should be kept hidden from him.” Becker’s reasonable advice is of course quite difficult to implement – how to find out if, and what, other people are withholding from you is problematic. Some, not absolute, protection is provided against this possibility by the longevity of my participation in Kunwinjku family and group life, by my access to the language, and by interviewing enough people.

This longevity can also help prevent misunderstandings of my motives. Fetterman (1984) has warned of some of the ethical dilemmas potentially facing a researcher working within a social group. He advocates a systematic awareness of the moral issues as a defense, focusing on the researcher’s “multiple sets of responsibilities” (Fetterman, 1984, p.232). He specifically notes the possibility of being thought of as an “evaluator”, implicitly answerable to someone outside and possibly above the subject group (Fetterman, 1984, p. 214). Kunwinjku people would certainly avoid any activity they thought motivated by any external evaluation that is evaluated by someone they did not feel they had authorized. Longevity of participation and access to language are again some defense in my context for this kind of motivational misunderstanding, but allowing interviewees to speak with a minimum of directive questioning is a key strategy against misapprehension.

Nevertheless, longevity and intimacy of relationship can also be problematic. Fetterman raises the issue of rival groups within the research subject community (1984, p.215), and certainly this was a potential problem for my project, since longevity meant I was drawn into friendships and alliances which at least passively distance me from other groups or individuals. My only defense against this problem is to ensure I interviewed people from a wide enough cross section of clan and
family groups, and this has been possible. Fetterman also notes that moral judgments about research issues can only be made responsibly when the researcher knows the situation and the people involved “well enough” (p.211), a concern that motivated my discussion in chapter two.

Even taking all these factors into account, there is the final issue of personal liberty. Informed consent is not a substitute for informed assent. Inevitably, people participated in my research through a series of informal invitations, and could elect without confrontation to avoid being interviewed.

4.4 INTERVIEW PHASE

4.4.1 Developing Interview Questions and Processes.

It is the balancing act of ethnography to have sufficient, and sufficiently sharp, questions to motivate responses, without these shutting out possibilities unimagined by the researcher, or unconsciously filtering out ill-fitting or disconfirming data. It is then the balancing act of interviewing to use the necessary range of question types embedded in that special form of conversation, in this case with friends and family that make an interview. Spradley advocates three broad categories of question:

- Descriptive questions (Spradley 1980, pp. 80 -84 )
- Structural questions (Spradley 1980, pp. 107 - 8) which enable listing of items within “domains”.
- Contrast questions (Spradley 1980, p. 125 - 126) involving contrasts which Spradley calls dyadic and triadic.

I had prepared a bank of questions of various kinds, including all of these types, but only intruded any questions into each interview when an interviewee suggested that I ask questions, and occasionally for disambiguation where essential. These factors were necessarily variable across interviews.

Translation of questions is problematic even between related languages, and I spent a lot of time designing a bank of questions which could be modified depending on the individuals interviewed. Questions in themselves always need contextual definition, and some inbuilt way of indicating the questioner’s motives. In Kunwinjku, the grammatical form of questions is less significant than relationship, and the conversational context in which they occur. There is no pressure in Kunwinjku conversation generally to answer a question quickly, and some people are remarkable within Kunwinjku society for the long delay – sometimes up to thirty seconds - they practice before answering other people, particularly when seeking to
avoid offence or misunderstanding. (The questions I kept ready for use in the interviews and reviewed from time to time over the course of the research are listed with English glosses in Appendix Three.)

**4.4.2 First Interview as a Pilot Study**

I tested my interview technique with one Aboriginal man with whom I already had good rapport, and who was familiar with tape recorders and transcription. This allowed me to refine my approach to the series of interviews with other community members, and to preview the issues that may be raised. I hoped to “set up” the interviews so that the informant would speak as long as he wished on whatever he wished, but I had the difficulty of having to find a trigger for this. In MM’s case, I have observed him since 1977 in a range of pedagogic events and making comments on pedagogic issues: teaching young children, talking about language learning and morals, and criticizing the operations of the school as well as the running of particular ceremonies. I referred to some of these as a starting point that might allow him to talk about other pedagogy at length. I had a few very general questions ready, but I only used one of these, since MM clearly had his own agenda and motivations for speaking, which he did for nearly an hour on a range of topics (see text of MM in appendices one and two).

I was unprepared for the impact on my thinking of this interview with MM, despite a theoretical awareness of interactive nature of ethnographer and “data”. In practice all this can be uncomfortable, although the feeling of lack of control or predictability is stimulating too, and made me re-draft questions and begin seriously analyzing the data as potentially sophisticated theorization ranging over personal, moral and historical issues beyond what I had usually associated with pedagogy.

**4.4.3 Selection of Interviewees and Community Responses**

I was concerned also that my relationship with MM may have made the process easier than it would be with others. Spradley (1979, p.25) describes the relationship between ethnographer and informant as “complex”. After twenty years of shared experience, this is an understatement about my relationship with Kunwinjku people. They, in common with small group societies are constantly conscious of relationship networks and the formal, particularly the linguistic; expressions of these relationships comprise a major discourse strand in daily life. If complex, the relationship between researcher and community is also determinative of who is likely to co-operate with a researcher. LeCompte and Goetz (1982, p.38) have pointed out
the potential for unconscious selectivity here. Some discussion of my approach to
selection is therefore necessary.

It was inevitable that eventually most Kunwinjku people, at least in Oenpelli,
would discover my research project, and I resolved early to allow anyone who
initiated a request to be interviewed to take part. Nevertheless, it was up to me to
make at least the first invitations, and I decided to ask people I considered
opinionated, or at least willing to state their views. I asked both male and female who
are parents or old enough to be parents. I have interviewed men and women of
retirement age, middle aged people and couples with children of school age. One
middle aged man I interviewed is responsible for organizing the Yabburlurrwa
ceremony. One of the older women was a dormitory girl in the 1930s. Another
younger woman has a university degree and teaches at school. Others have more
mundane backgrounds. I have approached people from a variety of clans. I provide at
5.4.2 some background on each interviewee – sufficient to allow a considered
“reading” of their viewpoints but maintaining confidentiality.

The majority of people I have approached about interviews have been very
enthusiastic. Those who haven’t been interested have said so fairly directly. Despite
general approval however, the process has been very slow, with people sometimes
making three or four attempts to get to an agreed time. The major practical
difficulties in arranging and carrying out interviews stem from the unpredictable and
time-consuming nature of daily life in the Kunwinjku community. Family and
community structures are struggling against pressures which occasionally render
these structures dysfunctional (in the opinion of Kunwinjku people). In short, the
demands on community opinion leaders are multiple and constant, and public
meetings were clearly an inappropriate way to present my research aims and
methods. I preferred the normal Kunwinjku methods of slowly visiting everyone and
having a series of one-on-one conversations.

Apart from asking organizations for a general approval to do this research, I
did not carry out any activities aimed at raising “community awareness” in the
manner associated with visiting Balanda, such as putting up notices in key areas,
addressing various committee meetings and so on. My fear was that my activities
would be construed by Kunwinjku people as politically motivated, perhaps part of
the ongoing tensions between School and Local Government councils. However,
after carrying out around a dozen interviews, I decided that my motivational bona
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fides had been tested, and that a significant number of people now had talked to someone who had been interviewed. In June 1998 I therefore decided to call a meeting of people I was yet to interview, and to talk to them about progress made. I hoped to encourage them to continue to want to be involved. Some people already interviewed came along and brought others. I had never put myself in the role of a “Balanda calling a meeting” before, and I was nervous. Fortunately, previous interviewees did most of the talking. About a dozen people attended, and the eight who had not yet been interviewed seemed very positive. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow up immediately on this because two of these people became embroiled at that point in school political process that led to the transfer of the principal; some became involved in a protracted Kunabibi ceremony at another community, and others in lengthy family funeral arrangements. This background is necessary to explain the slowness with which the interview process needed to move; and secondly, the fact that many potential interviewees, who had willingly agreed to be interviewed, were not in the long run available.

4.4.4 Mechanics of the Interview Process

Each interviewee was approached informally, but at some point in the conversation I said I wanted to talk about a specific matter, thus transforming the conversation from informal to semi-formal in their thinking. In whatever way was appropriate given my relationship with each person, the following points were then made. All the conversations I mention here were in the Kunwinjku language:

- I am researching how Kunwinjku people teach and learn in Aboriginal and other contexts;
- I want to know what you would like to say about it;
- I want to interview you confidentially but in a way that allows today’s younger generation to have access to your ideas;
- I will be writing these ideas down and other Balanda people might see them, but they won’t know who said what;
- You can talk to me later if you want to do an interview, or maybe I will ask you again - is this okay?

Each person was then approached again after a few days or even longer, and when I was ready to interview, so that if they agreed, the interview could be done immediately or within a day or two. I suggested that another person or persons could
come along as well both for moral support and to watch the process (and maybe decide to become involved or at least supportive). In the case of female interviewees this was an absolute precondition to the interview proceeding. The interviews were carried out either in my office or the grassed area around it - the choice being left up to the interviewee. Most chose the office because of the noise outside from birds, traffic and children. My office is visited daily by Kunwinjku adults and children, and is a relatively familiar place. I provided tea, coffee, biscuits and in some cases, when requested, cigarettes – as I would do on the normal pattern of Kunwinjku people visiting each other.

After some preliminary informal talk, I set up the equipment, explaining what I was doing as I did it: Three tape recorders were used in full view of interviewee, with a clip-on microphone fitted to the interviewee from one of them. (The others used flat microphones). Once it was clear that the interviewee could stop me at any time, and have the tapes turned off, I read through the preamble to the questions. The preamble has three crucial functions:

1. It provides sufficient information about confidentiality, and my motives, for the interviewee to give informed oral consent for the interview;
2. It provides a record on tape of the formal consent process;
3. It sets the scene as to the range of issues the interviewee can address;

I discovered in informal conversations over a number of years, that the best way to encourage people to talk about teaching and learning contexts in a general was to begin with the specifics of the Oenpelli School. Kunwinjku people generally have some view to express informally about the school, and this was more accessible than inviting people to talk about abstract or usually unexamined processes, or about ceremonial details. I began my preamble by talking about the school and then asking people to comment on how they had learnt as children, and then how children learn at home or in ceremonies now or in the past. The preamble was designed to suggest to interviewees the range of topics they were free to address and encourage them to start from their point of interest. The impatience generated by this preamble, shown by some interviewees wanting to begin speaking, is I think, evidence that the preamble worked in this starter motor role. The text of the preamble is given (with its English gloss) in Appendix three.

Following my experience with the first interview with MM, my intention was to ask no questions at all if that were possible once the interviewee began speaking,
and certainly not until the interviewee had exhausted what was on his or her own agenda. While they are speaking I made notes as to which areas I wanted to follow up with this particular person. I asked questions in as non-directive way as possible to begin with. For example: “You said you lived in the dormitory for a while. Would you like to talk about that?” Once a topic was developed, I then asked more specific questions. No two interviews developed in the same sequence or covered exactly the same topics. Depending on what the interviewee had said, and the relationship between myself and the interviewee, and their background, I have sometimes launched into a topic they haven’t yet mentioned, or asked them more confronting questions. For example, I have asked about ceremonial teaching only where the person involved was in a position to discuss this topic with me, for example GW.

There were indications that Kunwinjku people felt some level of control over the interview process. One woman (JU), an experienced school teacher, asked me for my list of questions after about twenty minutes of interview, saying she would use my questions to prepare answers and return for a second interview. I agreed to this on the basis that my intention had been to give Kunwinjku people the opportunity to control the agenda. She did return a couple of weeks later and we did a second interview. On another occasion, a man being interviewed stopped the process after half an hour and asked me to read what questions I was planning to ask about ceremonial issues. He said he wanted to “vet” the questions off tape. After some unrecorded discussion he told me to resume taping.

At the end of each interview, my informants were given the opportunity to ask me any questions about the process. (Some have done this.) I then gave each person one of the three audio tapes of the session. (One then went into a fireproof safe in my office for later archiving at Charles Darwin University and the other became the working copy for transcription.) Immediately after the interview I filed notes made about the process, for example noting when the interviewee stopped the recording, or consulted other people.

4.5 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.5.1 Analytical Processes and Coding Issues

Rist (1977, p.44) quoting Filstead (1970) says qualitative method places the researcher “close to the data”, allowing and perhaps necessitating the researcher “...thereby developing the analytical, conceptual and categorical components of explanation from the data itself.” This is not straightforward. Ideologically, it would
be most satisfying to see analytical categories and an analytical framework develop through the sort of processes advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), where the texts interact and interrogate each other, and hypotheses are adjust continually to what emerges, although this raises questions about the relevance of the researcher and his planned audience. The process of analysis is then one of continuing mutual interrogation between hypotheses and emerging relationships among data. The resulting analysis might then reflect the ideational models of interviewees. The distinct feature of such grounded theory approaches is that hypotheses are brought out of the data, rather than brought to the data for confirmation. Of course, I had hypotheses before I had data, and this needs to be explicit in analysis, without directing or filtering my approach to the interview texts.

It is also necessary to develop a disciplined introspection about the researcher’s mental process in analysis, particularly as to what constitutes salience, since the value of data is in the eye of the researcher. Spradley (1979, p.173) states as a non-problematic notion, “Ethnography is the study of cultural meaning systems; it is the search for all relationships among symbols...” Yet my interviewees are pre-occupied by relationships between people and leaves open the question of who owns and interprets the symbols, so while I accept that Spradley’s point has validity at the later stages of analysis, a grounded doctrine means the primary focus needs to be on what informants value explicitly as categories of interest.

Dobbert (1984, p.39), in fact, presents the notion of ethnographic focus on patterns in terms of people as individuals or in groups in relation to material objects or ideas as well as to each other. I want to bring people into the analytical scene early, because that is what my interviewees talked about most. Spradley’s model of “componential analysis” does point out the distinction between analysis applied to “the psychological reality of the informant’s world” and those applied to “structural realities” which may be independent of the perception of the subject (Spradley, 1979, 175). Of course, these “structural realities” may exist or be constructed only within the researcher’s mind. Indeed LeCompte and Goetz, (1982, p.43) note the need to look at the relationship between “scientific categories and participant reality”, implying the question of whose reality is to be preferred.

The procedure I followed, hoping to at least acknowledge if not to defer to the above concerns, is in fact simply described though very time consuming and open ended. It had four broad stages:
Chapter Four: Designing a Grounded Ethnographic Methodology

[1] During the processes of transcription and translation I followed the suggestion of Miles and Huberman (1984, pp. 64-65) in annotating the texts in response to any items of interest or categories that emerged. Miles and Huberman (1984, pp. 56 - 57) also outlined ways of developing a post interview coding system. My version of this is described in the next three steps:

[2] Each interview text was paragraphed and these numbered in a fairly arbitrary way, with no claim made as to the *linguistic* defensibility of these divisions. The intent was to provide a system of reference for analyzing and citing texts.

[3] The topic/s covered by interviewees in each numbered section of each text were then listed (for example “story times in the family”) within each of the numbered sections.

[4] Rereading the interviews as a whole suggested some ways to express and combine or separate topics, and also suggest hierarchies of topics, for example, “story times in the family” became part of a meta-topic “narratives in teaching” and so forth.

Topics from the combined interviewees were then indexed alphabetically in the one document and referenced to the interview/s and numbered section/s where they were discussed by interviewees.

[5] The next stage was to impose a system of presentation in some kind of theory-neutral academic discourse, assigning a range of concerns to various chapters. For example issues always addressed by Kunwinjku people as “law” I judged best discussed together as a kind of curriculum for Kunwinjku pedagogy. Provided the heuristic or presentational nature of this approach is born in mind, the tendency to categorize or reinterpret the data can be noticed and allowed for. The principle of *caveat lector* always applies and can be utilized by inspecting the full texts in the appendices.

Beyond the taping of interviews, the texts needed to be transcribed, translated, analyzed and presented in an appropriate way. Each stage presented some difficulty and I will discuss the most significant problems here. Each interview was transcribed as a Kunwinjku language text on computer. A Kunwinjku man with many years experience in literacy in his own language has greatly assisted me by making independent transcripts, with which I compared mine. I then translated each interview, checking with Kunwinjku informants when required, particularly where some older people used now obscure terms.
4.5.2 The Problems of Translation, Genre, and Representation

Ethical and technical issues operate in parallel in constructing printed texts from oral performance. I considered the possibility of translating the texts in a way accessible to Kunwinjku people speaking and reading English as a second language, but abandoned this because the Kunwinjku texts are also given. I was not so easily able to solve problems of which English genre was appropriate, given the text typology of the interviews was unusual in Kunwinjku oracy. Carroll’s (1995) collection of stories differs in general text typology from the corpus which will emerge from my research in that his written texts were performance texts, “published” by their utterance. The interviews may not be thought of by Kunwinjku speakers as performed or published. They are of a more complex genre, often embedding short narrative segments.

A number of writers have warned of the problematic nature of publishing transcribed texts, addressing the following issues:

- The nature of print technology presenting texts from primary oral societies (Ong, 1986) with the implications of technologizing Aboriginal texts and “forcing” these into “western” orthographies (Rhydwen, 1996, p. 81).
- The possibility that transcriptions reveal a relationship of relative power between ethnographer and subjects (Roberts, 1997, p. 167; Scollon, 1995, p. 382);
- The resultant need to negotiate and collaborate, avoiding the unexamined acceptance of English as preferred language (Green et al, 1997, p. 170);
- The potential use of English in the form spoken as a second dialect by Aboriginal informants. Muecke discussed the use of “Aboriginal English” in publications (Roe 1983, p. iv) in connection with his editing of Roe’s texts. His discussion is a most useful summary of the issues involved in avoiding what Preston (1985) called “The Li’l Abner Syndrome”.

I will address these concerns briefly.

I have decided to translate into English which is more readable than an interlinear or literal gloss, but does not try to emulate any particular English register. My aim was to allow people to speak without the considerable distortion and disadvantage, and in most cases the sheer impossibility, of having to use English, yet my translation of Kunwinjku will inevitably distort Kunwinjku voices in some way. Stephen Muecke (in Roe 1983) had edited an anthology of short traditional stories
told by Paddy Roe in what Muecke termed “Aboriginal English” (Roe 1983, p. iv). In his introduction he discusses several issues, drawing on his 1981 thesis, that I have also needed to consider in translating interview texts. Interestingly the relationship between Muecke and Roe is not dissimilar to my relationship with a number of my older interviewees. Like them, Roe is an old man with wide knowledge of his own culture and oral literature and an authority to speak derived from this social position (Roe 1983, p. i). A major difference however is that Muecke always worked with Roe in English, since Muecke did not speak any relevant “traditional” Aboriginal language (Roe 1983, p. v).

This fact undermines Muecke’s justification for publishing traditional stories in Aboriginal English rather than in translation (Roe 1983, p. v). He gives two grounds for this preference: his most attractive argument cites the way that Aboriginal English has become a “bridge” linking Aboriginal and mainstream English speaking Australia and is the language in which new expressions and forms of Aboriginality are emerging (Roe 1983, p. iv). His other argument is implausible, pointing out the “inexactitudes of translation where Aboriginal words, concepts and linguistic structures did not match those of English” (Roe 1983, p. iv). This sort of objection to translation per se can be applied to any act of translation, and does not confront the situation where the informant speaks no form of English. A further difference between the Kunwinjku texts and Roe’s stories, is that at this stage I am not preparing texts for publication. Muecke rightly observes the essentially non-Aboriginal nature of editing and publication in print (Roe 1983, p. iii), although some of my interviewees have, like Roe, stated the desire to be published (Roe 1983, p. i).

In the meantime, I needed to make a decision about how to approach translation in a way that would minimize the risk of distortion even when the reader could consult the interlinear text. I looked at the possibility of translating each interviewee’s English “voice” to sound like a non-Aboriginal person with similar gender, age and social status. For example, I could have attempted to translate MM’s text as the words of either an elder statesman, or a professor, or a grandfather giving advice to a young adult grandson. He reminded me of all three at various points in his text. However, not only would this approach have made unrealistic demands on my creativity, but none of these, or any other models I thought of, approximated his real situation sufficiently well. I decided that the reader would have to do some of the
work, and accordingly I have kept my translation to the minimum needed to read the texts with comprehension – assuming the reader has noted the background, age and gender of the interviewee. Muecke made the same decision (Roe 1983, p. vi) to allow himself freedom to retain as editor the flavour of the original real-life situation in which the text was spoken and heard.

I have talked about options in publication format with a number of my interviewees and they have all said they are happy to leave the choice to me, reflecting the usual Kunwinjku disdain for hardcopy text. I believe there is some evidence that Kunwinjku people do not take seriously written texts as entities apart from their authors – authority is always personally vested and realized.

Roberts (1997, p. 167) and Scollon (1995, p. 382) have both linked transcription to the relationship of relative power between ethnographer and subjects. In a short but rather seminal article, Green et al. (1997, p.172) warn of ideological pressures in transcription, challenging the notion that transcription is simply a tool-like process, and pointing to the ineluctability of transcription as a kind of representation, and therefore potentially, a politically directed action. They also draw attention to the unstated assumption about “…the power of English to represent everyone and everything.” (Green et al, 1997, p.170) but this is a much less useful caveat, since presumably all languages have the capacity to represent whatever their speakers wish. My problem was to ensure that whatever representational strategy I encountered in the texts would be translated intact to the English in a way transparent to Kunwinjku stakeholders. Green et al advocate a consultative approach so that the speaker being transcribed makes choices as to the physical output of the transcript (Green et al, 1997, p. 170). While this certainly depends on the English language skills of the original speaker, I believe the collaborative nature of the interview process I have followed provides the necessary control should Kunwinjku informants want to use it.

4.6 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO OTHER CHAPTERS
I have tried to provide a transparent description of my own motivations and operations as an observant participant in Kunwinjku life for eighteen years, and my subsequent development and applications of a grounded research methodology based on long ethnographic interviews in the language of the Kunwinjku people. In the next chapter I will provide more details of the interviewees and introduce the
findings of the research in a general way before detailed reporting and commentary begins in chapter six.
CHAPTER FIVE
A KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY
CHAPTER 5: A KUNWINJU PEDAGOGY

5.1 INTRODUCING THE FINDINGS

5.1.1 Orientation to this Chapter
In the first four sections of this chapter I will introduce the corpus of interview texts and note both the unique perspectives brought by each interviewee, and the strong agreement in themes and concerns when the texts are taken together. I will provide an overview of the approach I have used in analysing and discussing the findings, providing some caveats about reading this analysis.

In sections 5.5 and 5.6 I will discuss the dominant theme of the interviews – the existence of a normative and complex Kunwinjku pedagogy rooted in family experience. I will use this discussion to foreshadow the range of pedagogic issues raised in the texts and which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. The interviewees share with all Kunwinjku people a daily preoccupation with the issue of contact with the dominant mainstream world. Often their comments on pedagogic issues involve some analysis of the way the Balanda and their school have impacted their world, especially the pedagogy of the family, so our discussion will need to return to this concern in each chapter.

The chapter concludes with a preliminary attempt at abstracting two principles that emerge throughout the discussion of the data in later chapters and which, I will argue in this thesis, frame and drive all Kunwinjku pedagogy.

5.1.2 General Findings
Before introducing the process of analysis of these texts, there are two general findings that need to be presented. The first is that, within Kunwinjku society, there are individuals thinking and talking in some detail about the practicalities of pedagogy in their society. Some of them have theorised about particular issues within pedagogy. They have spoken about their experiences of, and their thinking about, a broad range of issues involved in activities of teaching and learning in contexts including the hearth family, ceremonial processes and in the school. Their viewpoints are articulate, often critical, sometimes presented with passion and in many cases obviously reflect an extended process of thought. Taking the interviews together it is reasonable to claim that there is a Kunwinjku pedagogy. It exists in an unassembled form, distributed across the society. The individual speech acts constituting the interviews provide the data to build up a complex analysis of human
learning as it has been realised in Kunwinjku historical and social domains. The interviews reveal Kunwinjku theorisation about issues as diverse as the psychology of learning, child development, the relational nature of epistemology, the nature of curriculum, teaching and learning across generations and the role of teacher.

Hamilton (1988, p.128) found no general interest among the group she studied in talking about issues of child development and learning. This was certainly not the case with Kunwinjku people who discuss these issues in normal daily conversation and were certainly willing to do so in interviews.

A second general finding relates to the Kunwinjku language. The interview texts are almost all richly articulated and provide evidence of the remarkable breadth of Kunwinjku linguistic resources for handling the whole range of pedagogic thinking. This is clear evidence that pedagogy is a significant topic within general Kunwinjku discourse.

5.1.3 The Interview Texts

The interviews collected in the course of this research constitute a large corpus of Kunwinjku text which is provided in full as Appendix One. The value of this corpus far exceeds any analysis I can bring to it here. I have included it, along with my English translation, in the hope that readers will respond with respect and excitement to both the riches of language and of ideas they contain. Reading them as a whole reveals the self-aware picture from within which Kunwinjku people speak. I hope you will hear what they are saying, and become deeply aware of the position from which they are saying it.

The texts are not only about pedagogy but about recent Kunwinjku history, language and kinship. They also address issues of racial identity and reflect the political processes of minorities caught up in a larger democratic society. These voices are worth hearing. My intention was, outlined in section 2.5.1, to allow Kunwinjku people to speak. They have spoken, they have plenty to say, and it is rich, provocative and, I will argue, full of theoretical potential applicable beyond Kunwinjku experience. My own theoretical distillation of their ideas should not of course be blamed on them.

5.1.4 Caveat on Handling the Interview Texts

These interviews are oral texts and should only be read as oral texts: each speaker had actual interlocutors in mind. In some cases it was the immediately present researcher, but in others the speaker seemed to address a particular group present
only in his mind during the interview; for example MM specifically addresses young adults [MM: 4 and 12]. In general, the texts reflect the repetitions, interruptions and hiccoughs of oral texts but often exhibit an intentional structure, and if read aloud the structures will begin to emerge despite my sometimes mis-timed questions and the artificiality of the circumstances of interviewing. Some texts have a strong structure both within longer paragraphs and overall, particularly the two interviews by MM and that of JN. I will necessarily selectively extract and edit, and perhaps inadvertently distort material from these texts in the process of building a larger argument. For this reason I provide the interview texts complete, hoping they will be read independently of the discussion I lead from them.

5.2 INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

5.2.1 A Caveat about Theoretical Reification

I need to defend the process whereby I present as a single if complex entity a theory which presently resides only in individual Kunwinjku minds. Theory derived from interested and articulate individuals in a small society can reasonably be associated with the society as a whole. The process in assembling the parts of such theorisation, as articulated by individuals, into a working general theory is legitimated by providing as much transparency as possible about the process.

5.2.2 Validity and Triangulation

There are a number of checks against likely distortions between the raw data of the interview texts and my statements about it. Some of these relate to the collection of the data, others to issues of how it is presented:

[1] I have provided the texts of all interviews as appendices, including the original Kunwinjku transcripts, which are paragraph numbered to match the English translations cited throughout this discussion.

[2] I provide below a profile of each interviewee’s unique perspective, allowing consideration of the influences that may have shaped their statements.

[3] I have brought into the discussion a significant amount of Kunwinjku language data related to issues and statements in particular interviews and to the topic under discussion generally. This data not only provides an in-in text glossary as required, but also provides a form of triangulation, since the existence of so many lectionary items related to pedagogy cannot be explained as an artefact of the interview process or observer subject relationship.
[4] Although some triangulation is possible with sources outside the Kunwinjku community, the intensely “grounded” nature of this research entails reliance on internal consistency within the community studied. I have noted in the discussion points where the Kunwinjku society as a whole seems to me to challenge or support particular statements made in these texts. This process does not remove me as subjective operator, but does allow me to call on observations made over a much longer time frame than that of the interviews, and of a very much larger range of Kunwinjku individuals. None of the general views emerging from these interviews is at odds with what I hear Kunwinjku people saying informally at home and in casual contact. There is a high degree of unanimity among the interviewees and their views seem to me to reflect an approximate “average” of viewpoints among the Kunwinjku people.

[5] Interviewees have acted with a high degree of agency in the interview process, reducing the likelihood they were motivated to accommodate the researcher. Four of them requested initial or follow up interviews on their own initiative (see my notes below on AN, JD, JC and NN). Some other examples of this independence include:

- GW (58-60) halted the interview to discuss an agreed approach as to what could be recorded and published about ceremonial issues;
- JU organised to be re-interviewed after sufficient preparation time (see comments on JC and JU interviews below);
- AN (16) explicitly differs from what he thought to be my opinion of the school;
- RN suggested other people who should also be interviewed [RN: 204-213];
- GW (8) and MM (37-42) both made explicit their intentions about the use of the texts resulting from the interviews;
- Within interviews, participants often made suggestions about which topic they wished to cover [JC: 30; JD: 2; MM: 33; RN: 129] or requested that I ask them questions [JN: 2; PS: 2] or revealed awareness of their own rhetorical strategy [JN: 35; MM: 34]. ED made explicit her decision at one point to use English briefly [ED: 4].

[6] Questions were usually only used when requested by the interviewee or when the researcher felt the need to restore momentum or essential disambiguation. In many cases the interviewees followed their own agenda, sometimes for almost the entire
interview. (On some occasions questions were used when the researcher thought the particular interviewee would be interested in commenting on a particular issue.)

[7] Kunwinjku people discussed issues not predictable as responses to the interview process. The text used to provide ethical clearance and to “set up” each interview is provided in full in Appendix Three, and can be heard on most of the tapes of interviews. All the interviewees went beyond the parameters suggested by that preamble. In particular, all spoke one way or another about relations of power, especially the history of their relationship with Balanda world and issues of governance generally in their community.

5.2.3 The Notion of Folk Pedagogy

Bruner (1996, pp 48-50) described the powerful ways unexamined “folk pedagogy” impacts teaching in all cultures. Perhaps the most striking point about folk pedagogy, or what Bruner called “folk psychology” (pp. 26,45), is that it resides in distributed, pervasive but unorganised form across the individuals of a class or community. Most people, Kunwinjku or otherwise, hold unexamined and usually unexpressed views on pedagogy. Perhaps this could be thought of as “passive folk pedagogy”. A minority of individuals is articulate and some of these at least will think in theoretical terms. Only in large societies is a coherent body of theory likely to emerge. Regardless of its articulate sponsors, however, people’s views whether examined or unconscious are potent in shaping pedagogy, since these ideas translate unconsciously into instructional methods whether in the family or beyond.

The assembly of this data and its expression as a theory accurately representing that data is the general task I have undertaken. Whether this task is legitimate from a social or philosophical viewpoint, Kunwinjku people knowingly cooperated in it, and I have attempted to synthesise their views in a way that allows us to discuss Kunwinjku pedagogy as an entity. A number of my informants were obviously interested in theorisation, even if only about a particular branch or aspect of pedagogy. Their thinking encouraged me to look beyond compiling a mere checklist of viewpoints, and to discover a common theoretical link across all the interviews. Despite the practical or even political importance to any social group of their shared expectations and ideas about pedagogy, it requires a critical mass of thinkers, with the leisure to do the thinking, before theoretical discourse develops momentum. Kunwinjku people are in a process of rapid social change, which means most of the best thinkers are continually preoccupied with the practicalities of managing the
impact of that change. For example, after completing the transcription and translation of JN’s interview, I gave him his copy. He commented about the pleasure it had been to be consulted on something “really” Kunwinjku and close to his personal life, rather than being involved in yet another political or administrative discussion leading to the capture of his signature.

5.3 PARAMETERS AND FRAMEWORK FOR PRESENTING THE FINDINGS

5.3.1 Data Chunks in Text
Since this study is grounded research, I am concerned to maintain transparency as the links between raw data, presentation, analysis and theorisation. I was concerned to remain grounded at each point in Kunwinjku data both as a methodological device, and because of my strong commitment to providing my informants with a voice. I have done this in combining presentation and analysis in a particular way, using large chunks of material from the interviews, sometimes citing several interviews together, and providing both commentary and interpretation only as a rather thin broth around this good meat. In each chapter, I have moved towards theorisation in stages, after a presentation of the Kunwinjku data.

5.3.2 Terminology and Chapter Headings
The organisation of the sections brings together both the range of Kunwinjku concerns and the need to relate these views to areas within the existing western English discourse of pedagogy, such as the psychology of learning, issues of curriculum and teaching methodology. In each case, I introduce the section with some discussion as to the “fit” of Kunwinjku data within each general heading. For example, I present “Law” as roughly, or heuristically, equivalent to the content of a Kunwinjku curriculum. These headings, and in fact all usage of western, English based pedagogic terminology, should be viewed as heuristic or organisational only, pending a discussion in the concluding chapter about the universality of pedagogic theory.

5.4 PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWEES AND THEIR TEXTS

5.4.1 The range of the unique perspectives brought to each interview
The interviews agree to a surprising degree about a number of issues despite the differences between their authors in age, gender and background. For example almost all interviewees mentioned their childhood experiences of out of school learning, and all spoke about some of the current problems they see facing their community. However, each interview was also unique, focusing on issues of interest
to the speaker, reflecting individual experiences and concerns and thereby complementing the data taken as a whole from all interviews.

The following profile of each interviewee is provided in terms of age, gender, experience, relationship with myself and their approach to the interview. I have tried to summarise the main themes of each interviewee and note any sense in which their contribution was distinct from other interviewees.

5.4.2 De-Identified Profile of Each Interviewee.

AN (male, 45) AN and I worked together at school on occasions between 1977-1979 in the bilingual educational programme, where AN taught in both English and Kunwinjku. We have attended professional workshops together, gone hunting together and known each other socially since this period. AN attended Kunbarllanjnja school, Kormilda college and BIITE and has had a number of periods of employment at the school since 1979 as well as in the community council office. He told me he was motivated to do this interview because of his election in 1999 as chairman of the Kunbarllanjnja School council. His children and grandchildren live in the community and have usually attended school regularly.

I had approached the Kunwinjku woman who is deputy principal of the school with the suggestion that she ask the newly elected school councillors to consider taking part in my interviews. She thought this was a good idea and later reported the council had been strongly supportive. AN approached me himself a day or two later asking to do the interview. He obviously enjoyed the interview and wanted to do more. AN had opinions on both Kunwinjku and Balanda pedagogic systems and spoke about the nature of the teacher – student relationship and some aspects of teaching method.

BG (Female, 35) BG has four children and is literate in both English and Kunwinjku, having attended school in Kunbarllanjnja during the era of the bilingual programme. BG experienced both Kunwinjku and Balanda education systems. She is regarded by her community as one of its most competent English speakers, and after finishing year 10 at Darwin High School held several jobs in the community council office. She had a particular interest in the relationship between teachers and children, especially the self-awareness of the learner in analysing the teacher, and also discussed issues of race, identity and intelligence.

DM (female, 45) was married to a “promised” husband before puberty and raised without Balanda schooling. She is regarded by her peers as highly
authoritative about language and traditional stories, and has had experience working with me in language and cultural research and in Bible translation. DM recalled in detail her childhood experiences of learning both within the family and in ceremonial contexts, and the social and economic life of her community in the 1950s and 1960s. She had a particular interest in the teaching of language skills within families, including her own six children, and has commented on gender issues within the ceremonial context.

ED (female, 30) was the only interviewee with tertiary education (She has a Batchelor of Education.) ED spoke with humour, passion and clarity about the issues confronting her as an indigenous teacher at executive level, especially the relationship between the school and its community, and issues of bicultural method and curriculum. ED expressed a deep concern about social and moral change in the community. She has worked as teaching assistant, classroom teacher and in executive roles in the Oenpelli school.

EM (female, 70) was the oldest woman interviewed, and was one of the interviewees who initiated the interview process ahead of any invitation from me. She has provided detailed memories of the missionary era in education, illuminating the relationships between Kunwinjku adults and children in this period. EM has three children and a number of grand- and great-grandchildren. She and her sister have set up and managed a remote out-station. She is regarded as a considerable raconteur and a strong community leader in both the church and the wider Kunwinjku community.

GN (female 45) focused on her childhood learning experiences within the family. She commented on the relationship between teacher and learner, based on her interactions as a parent and grandmother in both ceremonial and school based contexts. GN has been both member and president of the local government council in the community, and is often asked by other Kunwinjku people for advice in handling aspects of the Balanda world.

GW (male 35) is strikingly frank about his role as both parent and ceremonial teacher, and provides insights into the pedagogy of Ceremony and the significance of sociolect learning. He has been the principle organiser in recent attempts to re-establish the Yaburlurrwa Ceremony in Kunwinjku lands. He exhibited a high degree of agency in the interview process, requiring appropriate protocols be negotiated for discussion of ceremonial issues.
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JB (male 60) has had a major role in local council governance and was on the school council when interviewed. Despite poor health, was happy to be interviewed and spoke from his experiences on the school council and as a grandparent.

JC (females, 35 and 45) were interviewed jointly, spoke as members of the school staff with experience in providing Kunwinjku curriculum and pastoral support within the school. Both have experience in teaching Kunwinjku literacy. One of these women, JU, requested a separate interview for herself, based on the questions I had on hand to use in the process. [JC: 3] JU had noticed my copy of these questions, and having quizzed me about their function asked to take a copy home to prepare for the subsequent interview.

JD (male, 65) spoke as a respected community elder who has participated actively in local government council and the school council. He grew up without school based learning and has a special interest in the role of mothers as teachers of both morals and language, and of the issues of governance and politics that impinge on school based education. He has been critical of the present local government structure and the role of traditional owners. He has three adult children each with a family. He is one of the few senior men who refuses to drink alcohol, and is described by other community members as a man with strong views but gentle disposition. He requested a second interview on his own initiative, which followed to a remarkable extent the agenda he had revealed in his first seven months earlier.

JM (male 25) has four children and a community reputation as a good father, probably as least partly due to the fact that he doesn’t drink alcohol. JM’s interview is structurally interesting, with a cyclic return to his major themes: an intergenerational concern in teaching and learning, the inclusion of the Balanda world in a Kunwinjku curriculum, and maintaining the integrity of his hearth family’s pedagogy while equipping his children for the realities of life in the presence of the Balanda world.

JN (male 60) is a senior traditional owner and has a long history of involvement in local government and land council governance. He has also worked as school teacher. He has a large family including many grandchildren currently attending school. His interview is a highly cohesive and detailed text, indicating well thought out positions on a range of pedagogic issues. He proposed some theoretical models for understanding the process of teaching and learning, both
socially and psychologically, and advocated the foundational role of the family in a child’s education and the formation of his identity.

JU (female 45) grew up with little access to school based education, but spoke from her adult experiences in counselling and tutoring children within the school, and liaising with parents on behalf of the school. She has had wide experience as a teacher of literacy in her own language, and speaks with the authority of a senior traditional owner. JU has critically described changes in the role of parenting in her community. (See note above about JU’s initiative in requesting this interview during her shared interview with JC.)

MM (male 80) spoke as the oldest interviewee and most senior traditional owner, from his experiences as a ceremonial learner and teacher, and head of a large extended family. His two interviews (the second done at his request) could be described as a treatise on the Kunwinjku law. He also focused on the motivational process in teaching and learning Law, its moral component, gender issues, and on the pedagogy and value of sociolect mastery. MM taught me bark painting and hunting skills over the five years we shared houses both in Oenpelli and MM’s out-station. Both of his interviews are highly cohesive and articulate, reflecting a practised oratory and involving in both cases a mental audience of the young men of the community. MM was born in 1922 on Goulburn Island to a Kunwinjku father and a Maung mother. He went to school on Goulburn Island as a bilingual child speaking Maung and Kunwinjku, and moved to Oenpelli as a young adult in approximately 1946, where he married a Kunwinjku woman and had twelve children. MM draws on 70 years of memories of education in both in school and exclusively Aboriginal contexts.

NN (female 60) remembers her first contact with Balanda as a child and spoke from her experiences as a learner and teacher in non-school contexts about teaching and learning basketry, language and other out-of-school curriculum items. She is often called upon as a senior woman to teach basketry and other traditional skills within the school too, and is regarded by the community as an expert on language and traditional folkways. She has four daughters and is the principle carer for many of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. NN worked with me in language research generally and in the school’s bilingual programme where she specialised in telling children stories in Kunwinjku, including a range of English language
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children’s stories she translated at an appropriate level for each class. She has talked about the process of transgenerational teaching and issues of teaching method.

PS (married couple both 35) were interviewed jointly. PS spoke on their experiences as childhood learners both in and out of the school system, and as parents of children growing up with access to schooling. I have worked closely with P in researching Kunwinjku traditional narratives and ceremonial beliefs and practices, developing adult training schemes and in Bible translation. P and S both have experience of Christian theological study and have lived for periods in other indigenous language communities in Arnhem Land, as well as in Darwin. They have commented on the incorporation of Balanda learning into the Kunwinjku curriculum and on issues of identity.

RN (women, both 40) were interviewed jointly and spoke as grandmothers of young children who both have additional responsibilities for the children of their younger siblings. Both had limited school based learning and both remember, and continue to apply, a pedagogy utilising the large corpus of stories particular to their families. They provide an insight into the concerns and roles of senior women within a family about the educational careers of their children. N is highly skilled in Kunwinjku literacy.

TN (male, 70) set up a his own remote out-station (homeland community) and constructed his own school building there. He has sometimes temporarily cared for Kunwinjku young people with social problems referred to him through the court system or privately. He has strongly insisted on school based learning for his own six children, but has remained most of this life at outstations so he can provide a Kunwinjku curriculum to them as well. He had a wide experience working with Balanda in the cattle industry. He remembered a range of ceremonial learning experiences and has commented on the rationale for some aspects of ceremonial pedagogy.

The interviews vary in text type and in the ratio of informant speech to inputs from the researcher. Some interviews reflect a strongly articulated, organised viewpoint that lent itself to uninterrupted presentation, for example those of JN, MM, ED and GW. Others had a good deal of material but supplied their information in response to questions rather than in longer sections of monologue. The interviews all use a number of common Kunwinjku discourse tactics, such as code switching and rhetorical devices (including for example, lists, analogies and rhetorical questions).
These features are discussed briefly in the appendix, together with some discussion of text typology and discourse features applying to the interviews.

5.5 PRELIMINARY SYNTHESIS OF KUNWINJU VIEWPOINTS

5.5.1 Structure of this Synthesis

This subsection has two functions. Firstly to present a brief description (rather than an analysis) of the combined viewpoints of all interviews as a preliminary to detailed presentation and analysis. Secondly to provide an overview of the structure in which the findings will discussed.

I have described the various unique perspectives that were brought to the interviews. However, the interviews agree with each other in significant ways, allowing and demanding some general statements that represent the corpus taken as a whole. There are eight common areas of content to be reflected in the structuring of our discussion. Only in a couple of cases was any one of these broad topics omitted in any particular interview, so these topics represent a strong commonality of interest. Of course within each of these topics there was a variety of opinion and detail, with distinct viewpoints reflecting the range of informant interests. There was, surprisingly, only a limited amount of disagreement between interviews on shared topics.

The following broad topical areas are often intertwined in the texts, so that some issues will be considered at several points in the overall discussion. For example, issues of gender emerge in discussions about learning in the family, ceremonial pedagogy and schooling. Balanda and the school are global concerns throughout all the texts and need to be discussed as sub-themes within most other topics as well.

5.5.2 Broad Areas of Interest Shared Across all Interview Texts

[1] Interviewees have recalled their childhood experiences of teaching and learning in a remembered “golden age” of pedagogy (5.6 below). Its principle feature was the way almost all teaching and learning was organised and carried out as part of broader kinship roles and responsibilities, and was embedded in the relational matrix of family. The intimate nature of this pedagogy is associated with certain methodologies and content.

[2] The interviews reflect a general Kunwinjku interest in their ancestors, both living and dead, and their comments provide a complex picture of the way Kunwinjku people view their Old People as the source and authority for all contemporary
pedagogy. The imminent death of the last of the Old People is viewed with profound concern.

[3] All interviewees discussed pedagogy in ceremonial contexts. Their views range from detailed descriptions to remembered involvement and speculation about the nature of ceremonies and their role in the construction of both gender and adulthood. Their comments provoke discussion about the relationship between the pedagogy of the home, the Old People and of ceremonial teaching.

The Old People and the pedagogy of ceremonies are covered in chapters 7 and 8. I will suggest these two topics are at the heart of Kunwinjku thinking about sources and authorization in their pedagogy.

[4] The Law was a topic of considerable importance. It can be described as the curriculum for ceremonial teaching, and even as a blueprint for an effective and morally upright Kunwinjku life. Law will be discussed as chapter 9 under the general heading of “The Law as the Kunwinjku Curriculum”.

[5] Kunwinjku people have a general interest in the mental and social processes of learning, with several interviewees suggesting models describing the motivation and learning mechanism in children’s thinking, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 10. Some brought their experiences of schooling to this, but others reflected a well thought out layman’s understanding. Their consolidated viewpoints suggest a strong preference for a highly explicit and collaborative pedagogic partnerships between teachers and learners, perhaps reflecting their own childhood experiences.

[6] Kunwinjku people have firm ideas about what constitutes a good teacher and good teaching. I brought to the interviews some explicit questions about these topics because of the frequency of comment in daily Kunwinjku discourse about children and the school. Several interviewees had detailed ideas on the methodology of teaching, and I have brought these together with the implications of their views on the mental world of the child in chapter ten.

[7] All interviewees spoke about unwanted changes in the Kunwinjku community since their childhoods. To some extent this concern may be an artefact of the way the interviews were set up, but the level of detail and the volume of their comments points to a generally shared perception of a contemporary crisis in Kunwinjku society and therefore its pedagogy. They were driven by a concern about educational failure in both Kunwinjku and Balanda contexts, including poor attendance at both school and ceremonial venues, and often express their concerns in terms of a moral
collapse, or a failure of parenting. The interviews contain critical comment on the way schooling operates, as well as some criticism of their own community. Their views on school and its pedagogy are discussed in some detail in chapter 13.

[8] The presence of the Balanda world and the school system it provides are factors that pervade all contemporary Kunwinjku thinking about pedagogy. In fact, the Balanda presence is a pervasive theme in Kunwinjku discourse generally. It will emerge in each subsequent chapter, reflecting the way interviewees brought this topic into discussion over the whole range of their comments on pedagogy.

5.6 A GOLDEN AGE OF PEDAGOGY REMEMBERED

5.6.1 Reporting Memories

Kunwinjku people remember their childhood learning experiences with some nostalgia, particularly from the standpoint of the unwelcome changes to their society implied or discussed in most interviews. Interviewees mainly spoke about out of school learning as children, though all except two attended school as infants. When school is remembered, it is in warm terms. School had not displaced the pedagogy of home and family. Interviewee’s ages mean that these memories range from childhood in the 1940s (EM) to the 1970s (JM) with most in the 1950s and 1960s. Some interviewees are too young to remember mission-controlled rationing of the kind referred to by JD and DM.

All interviews described a non-scholastic education as though it were a thing of the past, now displaced by new circumstances. I have tended therefore to use the past tense except when I can call on my own recent observations about the currency of some practices. The question of how much of the pedagogic praxis they have described is still current is in fact the subject of daily Kunwinjku conversation.

The remembered pattern of strong family teaching in a stable larger society continued well after government agencies had replaced missionaries in most settings. The kind of teaching and learning at the family hearth they describe was still evident as recently as 1977 when I moved into the community, with story telling, traditional singing and shared mealtimes among adults and children observable as the daily pattern in most families. This is no longer the case, despite these strong and attractive memories.
5.6.2 General Features of the Remembered Pedagogy

There was a close association between adults and children in food gathering where the role of teacher and learner were integral to the shared activity. The learning experience was an enjoyable part of childhood family life:

We would wait at the camp. They would come back with stuff for us, and we would take some for our mothers and fathers, all that meat. And there were lilies: Ngalbangardi was always teaching us, that lady L___. We would be gathering lily stems, wading in the water, and we would collect the lily roots, and mussels. And fish, if he caught any in his net, that old man Nakamarrang. We took some string with us to where we camped, so we could also, um, tie the fish ready to carry. He used to get a lot of fish, and we would give half to another group of people. Yes, they'd be looking out for fish so we would give some to them that we'd taken there ourselves. We would take it and roast that fish. [DM: 31]

AN takes this idea further, and characterises episodes of childhood food gathering with adult family members as analogous to school.

Yes, I've talked about that, now I'll talk about school in a different way. The old people used to teach us, and they would also give them food - it was good food too. Food like cheeky yams, long yams, blackberries - something like grapes, sometimes plums, green plums and black plums. That's what The Old People used to give them. Sometimes they used to go and get animals; for example goanna or bandicoot. Or they would go to the river for fish, like barramundi, catfish, nailfish - all kinds. They used to trap them. [AN: 5]

Other Kunwinjku people have applied this analogy in similar ways, and to a wide range of activities, especially JN and MM. (See further discussion in more detail at 7.3.2, 8.2.3 and 9.7.4). The association between bounty and pedagogy in hearth family relationships is deep, with pedagogy embedded in a secure and providing environment. This poses the question: if this fundamental activity of life is thought of as analogous to school, does this imply that non-Kunwinjku schooling is recognised in a reciprocal way, as being of fundamental importance? If so, why do so many Kunwinjku parents fail to send their children to school? These questions must intrude here because they were raised by every interviewee and constitute one of the issues under constant discussion in Kunwinjku society and therefore one of the background issues for my commentary. I will bring this data together for discussion at 13.3.3.
Growing up is remembered in terms of enjoyable learning experiences and happy family life. The Kunwinjku society of those childhoods, taken as a whole, is also remembered very positively:

5.6.2.1 Remembered Abundance and Familial Care
Despite periods of food shortage and rationing in the mission era, DM (10) remembers the assured abundant food available in her childhood during the late 1950s, perhaps unconsciously contrasting this with the constant begging for food by both adults and children experienced in present day Kunwinjku life:

And we used to eat that wonderful food. They would get fresh vegetables. In the afternoons they would get them all, and bring a container of fresh vegetables. This was at the shop, where they had containers of them, a wheelbarrow or a bucket. A whatsit? A big dish. And in the afternoons when they finished all their jobs, our mothers and fathers would go there and get potatoes, watermelon, pumpkin and tomatoes. We would take that home and they would cook it for us and we would eat it. And they killed buffalo for fresh meat. We would go and get meat and vegetables every day. Yes, and they would get milk in billy cans, they would get fresh milk and bring that home. Yes. [DM: 10]

5.6.2.2 Remembered Resilience and Familial Care
Older people associate the missionary era with a level of resilience among people, and with children attending school as well as receiving systematic attention and teaching from their families:

When I came here, I hadn't already got a wife where I was before. I had no wife, so I was still single when I turned up in Kunbarllanjnja and started work. When I came here I got a job, because, you know, when you got a job, you could get food. They got money and bought it. That was how it was. If I'd stayed here without a job, I would have been hungry. It was a tough system. The government hadn't made any Law to help at that stage. Child Endowment, they hadn't legislated for that, or school allowance for kids, or pension, U.B., none of that. They've only done that recently. It was a lot tougher. If those people back then went short of food, they would have to go and gather bush honey. [Bush tucker?] Yes, bush tucker they would look for, and they would eat that and bring some back for the weekend. If they went for a holiday they would come back and get a job. Those kids used to go to school, and also go camping. They would take the kids camping from school. They went to Kunnanj
and the Big Waterfall. They would go along and stay there, for weekend camping. [JD2: 23]

Interviewees respect the toughness of adults in their remembered past, whether exhibited by missionaries [EM: 12] or Kunwinjku elders, implying what they perceive as a decline in the present generation:

*Nowadays there are some people who are too scared: they're scared of leeches, so they don't go out poking around for long necked turtles or looking for eggs. They're scared by leeches and they're scared of snakes, and whatever. In the old days that wasn't what happened, adults just went out and into the wet and collected food. But they are frightened of crocodiles now. They just get scared, so they won't go out into the wet. [Is that right?] No way. That's it. Um, Okay to leave it there?* [GN: 4]

5.6.2.3 Adult child collegiality

Children experienced a continuous learning environment provided by constant association with adults in the real life tasks of the family:

*A child maybe would have gone along and sat and watched what they did, so that's what they learnt, it's what they grew up with. "Is that okay?" "Yes." And they in turn would go along and do it all. That's what they used to do. And then their children, when they grew up and had their own, the grandchildren of the earlier generation, well they would teach them too. And we women did exactly the same sort of thing. We continue to teach.* [GN: 4]

5.6.2.4 Pedagogy was participatory: embedded in the daily praxis of family life

The continuous learning environment of family life utilised a range of methods appropriate to the content and purpose of the instruction in real life settings. Most interviewees mentioned incidentally a range of instructional methods that were part of normal adult – child relationships. (This necessitates a major discussion in chapters ten). AN spoke in a general way about his parental role as a teacher, passing on both content and method in a transgenerational pattern discussed in more detail at 6.3.4 and 7.2.4.

*Yes, we would teach the kids - we would take them fishing, and we would teach them sometimes as we went along, or their mother would take them collecting things like maybe waterlily stems, that kind of thing. I used to do that, teaching them so they would know our way of doing things. I would show them things*
and tell them stories about it. That's how I was brought up, with them telling me stories about grown-up things. [AN: 23]

5.6.2.5 Remembered Kunwinjku Sociality

ED says an intense “togetherness” is a core characteristic of Kunwinjku life [ED: 35]. Memories of childhood are associated with a kind of community cohesion beyond the extended family, often involving workload shared between adults and children beyond the family boundaries, for example when the community was engaged in building roads and airstrips [DM: 2-4], and in purely Kunwinjku contexts such as preparing and catering for a large Ceremony. Productive work was part of life for both adults and children. The introduction of the cash economy and the nexus between jobs and cash was established well within living memory of older Kunwinjku adults but did not immediately displace the strong community sense.

In the old days they didn't get child endowment for them - our (exc) mothers. Our mothers didn't get child endowment for us, not back then. They just worked. They worked and without pay. It was only later on they got paid. The missionaries organised employment. And they used to teach us Aboriginal people jobs, whatever, and then later on they organised for pay. So that's what I did, I got a job and then a was getting paid. Before that, it was just rations. When we went to school - they used to come, the adults who were working, bringing billy cans from home, or a bag, full of flour, rice or wheat. We had a grinding machine here and all of us bigger young blokes used to help with that machine. And, oh, we used to just share in everything. We used to look after dairy cows. We would share the milk and they used to give it to the children especially, but adults, and Balanda too, we all used to drink milk. And cattle. Those bullocks were here before the abattoirs. Some people had them at their camps. And some used to take us hunting a long way off. We would go out hunting. [JN: 73]

The remembered pedagogy was experienced within this essential involvement between adults and children in common participation in essential tasks, implying the kind of mutuality and complementarity of roles between adult and child, teacher and learner, that will be suggested by much of the data to follow and which contrasts with the social and familial fragmentation of the contemporary life spoken of in some interviews, to be discussed in chapters thirteen and fourteen.
5.6.2.6 Kunwinjku Society and Therefore its Pedagogy Have Both Been Adversely Impacted by Changes Imposed on the Community

The impact of the Balanda world was initially moderated by the relative miscibility in lifestyle, morality and commitment to work between the Kunwinjku of that era and the earliest missionaries, and by the geographical isolation of the community and its apparent lack of economic significance. Inevitably, changes were forced by the outside world, and this pressure is still developing and is the constant subject of Kunwinjku discussion.

JD and JN have both implied the provision of welfare, along with the greater complexity of life, has eroded not only the self-reliance of the previous generations, but also the motivation for children to attend school.

- Some kids attend school and others don't. But in the past, they wanted to go, and in the past they used to go to school here, when there were lots of missionaries living here. Nobody got any pension. Older people, like us, didn't get pensions. Those people back then never got that. Nothing. The government didn't organise any money for them. And children's payments, child endowment, they never used to have that to start with. Those mothers and fathers just had to work all the time. The Law was tough back then. They would buy food, sugar, just enough for their children, for use over the weekends. They didn't take food from each other. No, there was just enough to go round. Then after the weekend they would go to work again. And they wanted those jobs, those parents, they would be working. The Law was hard back then. They didn't get child endowment. Nothing. The government gave them nothing. No U.B., nothing. Back then The Law was harsh, and the government didn't make any Laws on their behalf. Whereas now they've made those Laws, and that's why the kids just hang around the place. They just get some money, some of them, the money they're giving them without any conditions. The kids don't go to school. That's what Ngalkamarrang (the school principal) was talking about. [JD2: 4]

- In our case, what happened in the old days to us, to me was that my elders used to teach me because we didn't have, they didn't have a lot of things people have now, like television. Ah, nowadays we have Toyotas, private Toyotas, we have all our associations, whatsaname businesses, lots of businesses, lots of money, grog, shops, whereas before it was a hard time, and we would go to school every morning and work helping our parents afternoons. We worked in the food
garden, growing pumpkin, watermelon, all sorts of food, corn. Nowadays we have the supermarket. The supermarket is all right, but we don't hunt and we don't have jobs. But it's all new what we have now, so education now is different. It's a new situation. English speakers might say, "They are in a different land now." A different place so to speak. Different for them and us. We used to go hunting every day for food in the bush, because there was no food here, the Balanda had just enough to give those Aboriginal people who were working. So it was very different then. And stories, we had lots of stories, Aboriginal stories, our own stories we were told as children. I see that this is not happening now. I'm talking about kids growing up without any fundamental Law.[JN: 53-54]

- But there was no money. To start with they didn't have money for them from Child Endowment for kids to go to school. No. They hadn't started it. And no pension either. They hadn't organised that. No unemployment benefit. Nothing. The government was very strict back them. Only later on did the government arrange to give that child money, pension and unemployment, single money (supporting mother's benefit). All that was only recently created. Back earlier it was bad. The government was very tough and didn't fix it. People just had jobs and that was all. Nowadays the mothers and fathers just stay at home, and if the children don't want to go to school they still get the child endowment, the mothers. There are a lot of kids, I see them in the Arrkuluk area, kids who are not attending school. I don't know why the mothers and fathers don't send them. They don't have clue. [JD2: 30]

Adult unemployment is paralleled by poor school attendance among children. It is arguable that Kunwinjku lost its work ethic after Balanda contact. The link between school (and ceremonial) attendance and social fragmentation and especially adult employment and children’s learning will be discussed further at 13.4.

5.6.2.7 The remembered pedagogy is normative now
The comments above by JN and JD suggest the remembered pedagogy is still considered the desirable or normative pedagogy despite their awareness of having suffered such profound change within their society. This view is supported by the fact that some adults now make a conscious attempts to recapture the manners and self-sufficiency of the remembered past. In chapter 13 I will discuss some of the proposals made by interviewees about recovering control over their pedagogy. ED for example, urges a return to the manners and sharing protocols of the past. She
implies that she is remedially teaching now what families once taught as matter of course:

*Mm. Yes. That's what happens with us, like for example if we kill something, or someone's got something, whatever way this happens, we would then give some away. We used to give some to other people. We give it to them. But if not, the other person wouldn't fuss. He wouldn't complain or do what we see happening now when someone comes: "Knock Knock!" he says, "Give me some food! Give me some meat!" In the old days, no one did that. People would just wait patiently until someone came and gave them something: "Here!" It might have been the base of the tail or a foreleg, each part was significant. For example that's what happens with fish. Fish have lots of parts, so which part do you take if you caught it, or what bit does he get if he caught it? Whatever, you then give some to them. They used to give it to them. That the thing we are telling them, we're telling the children.* [ED: 99]

5.7 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO OTHER CHAPTERS

The interview texts taken together reveal a distributed but generally understood and applied Kunwinjku model of teaching and learning. I will present it in its most abstracted form here as an orientation to the remaining chapters. Its two fundamentals are relationality and transgenerationality. I will describe the way Kunwinjku people think of pedagogy as a function of relationship: so that human interaction is the explanatory and normative element in pedagogy. In the next chapter I describe the intense pedagogy embedded in the hearth family life. Perhaps the most powerful and pervasive element of this intimate universe of pedagogy is the prominence these texts give to intergenerational relationships, extending back to, and ultimately depending upon, the “Old People” who are the subject of chapter seven.
Chapter Five A Kunwinjku Pedagogy
CHAPTER SIX
HEARTH FAMILY PEDAGOGY
6.1 PEDAGOGY IN THE HEARTH FAMILY

6.1.1 Hearth Family Terminology
The remembered pedagogy of family life was based on the availability of adults with a commitment to the child and daily association with him or her. Terminology is important in presenting and discussing this remembered pedagogy. Its locus was the family, but “family” is too indefinite for our purposes, and “nuclear” and “core” family both suggest groups that are smaller than the relational range talked about in these interviews. “Clan” on the other hand, despite matching a major structural idea in Kunwinjku life (kunmokurrkurr), is too broad, since a clan usually encompasses several extended families who would usually not have shared the one location. “Band” is too focused on shared economic activities to be useful here. “Extended family” is accurate in terms of the range of relationships involved, but doesn’t necessarily include the daily or very regular proximity of kin reflected in the data.

I will use “hearth family” to suggest this propinquity - a relational and physical closeness providing the stable relational matrix which is the pedagogic domain. I will reflect, throughout this thesis, the Kunwinjku regard for the hearth family as the most significant social group, claiming their greatest personal allegiance, and will seek to protect its integrity and defer to its authority in every context. Incidentally, most families still prefer, when they cook at home, to build a fire outside the house, whether or not they have an electric stove (as most do). The idea of family contact around the hearth is part of all adult Kunwinjku memories. The Kunwinjku term “namud” is usually applied to this loosely defined hearth family grouping and includes relatives of any kind who are regarded intimately because of present or past sharing in daily family life. Brothers- and sisters-in-Law can greet each other as ngarrkunakko, which is literally “you and I are associated with the (one) fire” or “we both come from the one fire”. Keen (1994, p. 186) also uses “hearth”, but to distinguish between female and male spheres of life, a distinction that I do not have in mind here.

6.1.2 Family Kinship Structure and the Roles of Teacher and Learner
The interviews provide a rich description of teaching in the hearth family, always paying attention to who did the teaching in what contexts, and sometimes describing the routines and methods involved. It will be necessary to disentangle these strands
from time to time for discussion purposes, though as in all pedagogy several things
are going on at the same time, and this is reflected in the descriptions.

It may be universal that childhood is often remembered in terms of having
been a learner, whether in school, home or other family contexts. In the Kunwinjku
childhood of these interviews the dominant memory of learning is within a higher
order relationship than that of teacher-student. The role of teacher was part of the
role of a grandmother, mother, father or other kin. A family’s adults acted as teachers
across all the contexts of daily life. Pedagogy was embedded in these relationships
and expressed as part of the roles automatically associated with those relationships.
Adults in general cared for, or at least looked out for, children in a general way, even
beyond their family boundaries [ED: 3]. Individuals will remember with particular
fondness or otherwise certain relationships as being more significant than others, and
most interviewees singled out particular family members as teachers of particular
content in particular situations, but there is across the interviews a significant
agreement about which roles are associated with which kinship relationships. This
suggests the framework I’ve adopted here, assembling citations in terms of these
kinship roles in which teaching took place.

6.1.3 Women as Teachers in the Hearth Family

Although the role of carer and teacher is shared across the family, in practice women
tend to dominate in these roles at every stage of child rearing in Kunwinjku society.
It is rare for an individual woman to be solely responsible for a child. Childless
siblings, or unmarried young women, will often move in with a family, helping to
care for babies and toddlers. Although wet nursing is only rarely practised, there is
almost always a group of women accessible to any child younger than around four
years.

6.1.3.1 Mothers

In everyday Kunwinjku discussion, mothers are often blamed for a child’s
shortcomings, including educational failure. The perceived culpability of mothers is,
however, an index of their dominant role in the child’s life up to and through
puberty, and in some families, into adult life, including a powerful pedagogic role.

JD makes a litany of maternal failure, implying the significant and possibly
unique role mothers once had or should have, in a child’s learning and moral
development:
• Some of them are big kids. Little kids and big kids, about so big [[indicates about 10-12 year old height]]. I don't' know how they can just hide, their mother should be been telling them what to do. They should say to them, "Don't do that! You go to school!" They just let them. They just, they just teach them to play cards with them. Sometimes they'll get involved in the kids' fights. They'll argue. They take up the kids' fights and make it worse for them. This is all wrong. What they don't say is, "All right, that's enough. You're ignorant through not going to school." Nothing like that. They just leave it up to them. [JD: 53]

• …but mothers fail, they don't look after them and send them to school the right way, to make them attend. Those are bad mothers. Some of them go to the club or they just play cards. They don't think about anything else. [JD: 48]

RN [131] also complains about the impact of mothers’ gambling on school attendance. JN [15 and 28] and ED [9] both claim that many young women are not growing up well prepared for motherhood. This claims are part of a general self-criticism of Kunwinjku society that will be discussed in section 13.3.2

Both JN [20-22, 56] and JD reflect in their criticisms of mothers in other families the powerful pedagogic role their own mothers played in their lives:

I only paid attention to my mother. Yes. Sometimes they used to sing them with magic. But I got through it. I kept an eye on myself so to speak. I was thinking. I kept watching them and I didn't just go along with them. Because my mother and her mother both told me, "Don't just follow some man who's very dangerous. Sometimes if you follow him you'll make a mistake, and he'll kill you." They told me that. That's why I was thinking, because I had that in my mind. I put it there. So I didn't follow along with those other different people. I only took real notice of my mother. So I went on and became an adult, and still my mother used to give me advice. She had said, "Don't just follow the majority of people, or the young blokes. Leave it. Just stay where you're at." [JD: 27]

Mothers had the key role in teaching language skills and the disciplines of social interaction associated with them (see section 9.3.5):

Yes. They should learn it, because, for example, the mothers, when we used to be camped here a long ago, you know what I mean? Well, those mothers straightened them out them out, and that's how they could teach them Kundemboy. They could teach them Kundembuy and also Kunbalak they could teach them. [JD: 17]
Chapter Six Hearth Family Pedagogy

Invariably in contemporary Kunwinjku life a small child is surrounded by women or girls who are often heard coaxing even the youngest child to imitate their speech, either individual words or phrases.

Mothers had a significant role in ceremonial pedagogy, with considerable say over whether or not to send a son [RN: 172]. The complex relationship between mother and son in ceremonial pedagogy is discussed further at 8.2.2 and 8.3.2.

RN discussed a woman’s calculations about her child’s educational readiness and maturation and the kind of syllabus to be presented to her children. RN’s comments reflect her role as a kind of educational broker for her children, grandchildren and her younger sisters’ children:

When they're older we (inc) teach them (Aboriginal things), when they're becoming adults. They want (people) to teach them but they'll get too scared when they're only small, maybe 12, 13, 14, 15 or maybe 16. With my kids, I want them to keep going [to school] so they will really learn Balanda things, and then later our Aboriginal things, so ours would be after (school). They would forget it if they did it first then went through and were taught the Balanda side. [RN: 173]

JM also implies part of his role as a father is acting as an educational broker for his children, making decisions about the content and timing of what is learned and when. See for example JM 7, 9-10, and 39.

6.1.3.2 Mother’s Mothers [Kakkak]

A woman and her daughter’s children refer to each other as Kakkak. This term also applies between the woman’s brother and her grandchildren, but this relationship is not highlighted in the interviews. The kakkak grandmother relationship usually involves a child from birth, intertwined with the child’s experience of the mother. Occasionally a grandmother will wet nurse her maternal grandchildren. Middle aged Kunwinjku people, born before the medicalisation of childbirth, often talk with special fondness about their Kakkak as the one who cut their umbilical cord. Often the mother’s mother has prime responsibility for the care of a child, particularly where the mother is very young or incapacitated or overloaded as a caregiver.

A child’s Kakkak continues to have a significant teaching role throughout childhood. They are remembered as having taught “the Law” [MM2: 31]. PS confirm the daily observable evidence that Kakkaks are the ones who instruct in the practicalities of hunting and cooking [PS: 62-64]. Often a child’s Kakkak is the most
likely to comfort him after an accident or in other distress. GW remembers his Kakkak as the source of his education throughout his upbringing:

*My father taught me too. The adults used to hand us over to The Old People who would teach us: my mother's mother, Kakkak, Ngalbangardi, she was Ngalwurrik clan, well, she taught me ideas [kunmayali]. She was an elder, and in fact she gave me a lot knowledge, she kept on giving me an education [nganwong kunmayli kunwern]. Actually, I could lose it eventually, but it will keep going [GW: 2]*

Her relationship with GW was so central an attachment that he was unable to cope with boarding school in Darwin:

*I went there [to Kormilda college]. When I first went, the first time I went, the very first, well it was the very first time I went. I didn't want to because of my mother and my mother's mother - she was the main one that Kakkak. [GW: 47]*

Kakkak and other older adults told stories as part of the daily patterning of children’s lives:

*We used to sit around and listen to that story. That's how we learnt it. My Kakkak, way back then, my Kakkak, used to say to me, "Come here and sit down, and I'll tell you a story." Or my mother, or her grandmother. They used to say, "Come and sit down. Come here kids, come here and sit down." This was me and my brother, my older brother - I was smaller. They would tell stories. We didn't tape record them. They would just tell stories, and we would get drowsy listening to those stories. And we would go to sleep. [JD: 4]*

Like all Kunwinjku adults, Kakkak and mother would utilise direct instruction in field tasks as well as stories in their methodological repertoire. Kakkak and mother often work as a team in managing small children, and in providing a pedagogic strand to each event:

*Sometimes they went after buffalo or they hunted kangaroo. That was when I was still fairly young, so, in the meantime, I would go with my mother and grandmother [Kakkak] to get pandanus leaves. Sometimes they used to go after yams. I used to watch them digging up yams and they would tell me the names: "These are mankodbe....." [JN: 20]*

Kakkak taught older children the social protocols of food distribution:

*It was just the same with your Ngalkurrrng - it was her sister I call Kakkak - she used to say the same things to me - she would be giving me that same Law. So I*
wouldn’t just go for myself when I went fishing. I used to spear a big fish, maybe barramundi or whatever, and I would take it home. I would take it home, and not eat it out in the bush. [MM2: 34]

NN explicitly teaches her Kakkak students to plan their own future roles as teachers of the next generation:

*So I’ve told them, "This I'm telling you is what you do when you grow up and have your own children. You teach them, and your daughters' children, your Kakkak. So watch and then teach those children so they’ll know in their turn."

I teach them so they do know. [NN: 11]*

6.1.3.3 Mother’s Oldest Sister [Morlah]

*I'm talking about the lady I called Morlah, my mother's sister. She was the eldest Ngalkangila. I used to listen to her. [JN: 10]*

One of the first relationships children develop beyond their mother and maternal grandmother is with the mother’s eldest sister, usually an actual rather than a classificatory, sibling. Both she and the child refer to each other as Morlah - one of the earliest terms of address taught to infants. The eldest among sibling mothers will often act as an additional caregiver to her sisters’ children as needed, sometimes wet nursing or even adopting a child if required. A child’s Morlah is sometimes a generation older than her younger siblings, but in any case, because of her seniority, is often viewed as particularly authoritative about issues of child rearing and knowledge of stories and life skills. R (interviewed with N) described a number of aspects of her involvement as educational broker and teacher of her younger sisters’ children: as story teller [RN: 77-79]; in making decisions about the children’s’ readiness for ceremonial attendance [RN: 169-172] and intervening in the children’s problems at school [RN: 40-46].

*Morlah also shared with the mother in deciding a child’s readiness for ceremonial enrolment:

*Yes. I sent one. My boy and I went, we went together, then after that I stayed behind. You know that one I call Morlah? He went, and all us women went together. Then after that it was just up to them and they went themselves. Those two went and so in the end they completed all the ceremonies. [GN: 27]*

6.1.4 Fathers and Father’s Father [Mawah]

The relationship between children and their fathers is dominated by the father’s personal authority and his role in the pedagogy of identity. Both fathers and mothers
share teaching roles in the practical field survival skills of food and shelter, and in a
general supervisory role in their children’s education, as well as each providing a
limited range of teaching that is gender specific. Just as mothers and their mothers
are particularly associated with a moral and language curriculum, fathers and their
fathers are associated particularly with instruction in the Law and the child’s
relationship with clan lands. The father-child relationship has an extension beyond
siblings or even the children of the father’s brothers: Kunwinjku people who call the
same man father regardless of biological descent, because of the complex
outworking of kinship and intermarriage realities, will call each other *kukkudji*
meaning “of one body” or “a single unit” expressing a kind of adoptive sibling status
involving a concern for each other parallel to actual siblings. This is a very strong
and self-aware association in Kunwinjku life. Thus two people can be described as
*benengabhardkukkudj* - “calling the same man father” - despite them not being
siblings or even directly descended from one man. This association underlines the
potency of “father” in general Kunwinjku thinking. The father’s father, *Mawah*, has
a significance built on this, evidenced by the use of *Mawahmawah* to as the general
term for ancestors or forebears, literally, our “patriarchs”.

Anyone called *Ngabba* [father] or *Mawah* [father’s father] is generally thought
of not only as a potential teacher but as an educational broker. Fathers from time to
time reflect on this role:

*So that's why we are looking hard at education, focusing on this important area
of what goes into a kid's mind. The big kids, who go to Kormilda for instance,
or after Kormilda when they come back. That's the time we have to get that
education into their minds. Maybe then or earlier, before they go to Kormilda College. So then what is in our minds we can put into their minds as we speak
to them, putting it into their thinking, their minds, their wills, their hearts. So a child will become useful and work for us. And he can go whichever way he likes. And I can teach him ceremonially over the years here. So he'll know about Balanda business, and about his own black culture, his country, his home, the ceremonies of country he'll look after. Then Aboriginal people will be able to look after themselves as they become adults among us. [JN: 57]*

A father may consciously pass on both the method and content he experienced as a
child [AN: 2]. JM describes his strategy as a father who deliberately organises for
his own father, his children’s *Mawah*, to teach them moral behaviour through stories:
But those kids of mine are all going. They like school. They really like it very much. They want to learn Balanda stuff, but then still come back, and that old man, their Mawah still talks to them and tells them stories about Aboriginal things about our [inc] Aboriginal culture. He's their Mawah and they still come back after school and we [exc] go and we take the kids to that old man, and he tells them stories. So when those kids grow up they probably won't drink, or sniff petrol or smoke grass, no way. They won't do that, never. These kids of mine. I don't know about other kids. But mine are well behaved. I only have to tell them something once, and they just obey me, and they don't answer me back. Okay. [JM: 18]

It is interesting that JM exercises this educational management role working within time parameters fixed by the provision of mainstream schooling. His concern for his children’s moral development is echoed by other men who seek to provide explicit moral teaching to their children, and their sons’ children. This moral curriculum is located in the older generation of the family:

They would say to me, "Don't go and steal from people. Don't go and steal things. They belong to someone." Or "What are you doing touching things?" "When you go ahead and grow up, don't go chasing after things. That means you will break the Law." Those Mawah of mine used to say that. "When you go hunting for fish or any animals, bring it all back to the camp, don't hide it for yourself, even if you are hungry. Even so, bring it back to camp. You eat it in camp where they can see." That's the sort of Law those Mawah used to tell me about. That's what we used to do. [MM2: 28]

MM described how fine-grained the role of educational manager could by, telling how his Mawah monitored his learning systematically:

Those Mawah would explain things to me. They would say, "Well? Have you understood this?" They used to ask me that. Those Mawah would ask me when they had told me things, they would ask, "Did you get that?" "Yes," I would say, "I understand. I got it." I would stay there in the morning and afternoon, and he would ask me questions and explain to me everything. He would say, "Do you understand?" "Yes, I understand, that stuff you talked about yesterday. Yes." "Oh, I see. Good. You understand." "Yes," I would say, "I got that meaning. I understand what it means." I would do that. [MM2: 48]

JN similarly described his father’s constant attention to this teaching:
We would be moving around a fair bit, but he used to take me and teach me at the same time, so I was always making progress, and growing up that way so I understood those places. That’s what I did, he used to teach me himself what he wanted to. [JN: 12]

Here the father’s concern was to maintain the momentum of learning, but also with the goal of the teaching - equipping his son with appropriate knowledge of country.

Fathers and their fathers are expected to teach the child his or her associations with land. Children enter their father’s clan and land affiliation at birth, and a person’s clan name is a strong part of lifelong identity and, along with skin group, is unchangeable for life. Although people are always aware of, and highly value, their association with their mother’s country (karrardwarrekenh) or Kakkak’s country, the dominant political association is with the father’s clan and therefore the father’s land.

Mawah is considered a significant teacher of the Law [MM2: 31] and about country and clan identity:

For example, with a "T.O.", that is a traditional owner as the Balanda say, now in his country, when a child is born, the eldest child or another one, or lots of them., when their father is the traditional owner, he has those kids and the eldest kid, well that eldest child will become the traditional owner, his son. His name is already on that country, that clan. That country is his, and he has that clan membership. For example, in my case, that Namanilakarr was my father, and his father, Mawah I called him, was Namanilakarr, a Nabangardi man called Manbiyarra and so just the same, my father was Namanilakarr. So our country belonging to the three of us, Nabangardi, myself and Nangarridj, is Manilakarr country. [JN: 16]

6.1.5 The Family as a Network of Teachers

Virtually every family member has a potential teaching role in regard to those younger. It is an everyday observation that even younger children, say of five or six, will have care of a baby for brief periods and will usually make an effort to have the child speak. Older children, up to puberty, will increasingly have care of, and a teaching role with, younger children. In the classroom Kunwinjku children will notoriously help each other – a more experienced child demonstrating or even taking over a task for another who is having difficulties. This peer mentoring often exasperates teachers, both Bininj and Balanda, but is simply a transference to the classroom domain of a normal pattern in the home. The family can be thought of as a
complex web of continuous teaching relationships where most formal teaching is
carried out by adults, but older siblings also have a role, perhaps imitative of the
adult-child teaching they have grown up with around them. (Kunwinjku social
maturity is at least partly evidenced by the acquisition of teaching roles – an issue
that will be part of my discussion of psychological issues in contemporary
Kunwinjku life 14.2.)

Some interviewees have listed a range of kin they experienced as their
teachers, echoing similar listings or recitations heard in everyday Kunwinjku
discourse about family membership. Taken together they include virtually every
family relationship one or more generations older than the speaker:

- ...in the old days we were taught about spears by our fathers and grandfathers,
or our uncles would teach us about it. [GW: 21]
- That's what we used to sit around and listen to, that story. That's how we learnt
it. My Kakkak, way back then, my Kakkak, used to say to me, "Come here and sit
down, and I'll tell you a story." Or my mother, or her grandmother [Doydoy].
They used to say, "Come and sit down. Come here kids, come here and sit down."
[JD: 4]
- Nakurrng, your Ngalkurrng's brother - his sister I called Kakkak. And my
mother, your Makkah. I still keep his words, even though he has died [MM2: 38]
- So how did they teach us, those people, our Makkah, Kakkak and Mawah who
used to take us hunting? It was so we could learn more and more, yes. [DM: 23]
- Later they will talk to you about that Law I am explaining. I myself know about it.
My father told me. My mother's father told me. My mother's uncle told me. My
great grandparents told me. You call them "Doydoyh" but we [exc] say
"Ngulubulu" There are the two words. For you, it's "Doydoyh" as you say in the
west, but for us down here it's "Wulubulu". This is when we are speaking about
our Kangkinjhkangkinj. [MM: 13]
- In the past they didn't just stay put, and neither did they do those [bad] things.
The mothers used to take them along. In fact fathers, mother's mothers, mother's
fathers. [RN: 5]
- In fact, that Law explains things to you in the same way as Aboriginal people
explain things, your father, mother, grandfather, grandparents or those you call
your great-grandparents. I call all that the Law. [MM: 2]
Even in adult life certain relational dyads are likely to involve teaching and learning roles between adults. I have observed a strong senior woman teaching young men in their late teens and twenties how to cut up and distribute in the socially appropriate way the meat from a kangaroo. She was my father’s sister [Berluh] and often instructed me in aspects of language, as she did her own adult children. In public settings, such as a funeral or other large assembly, charismatic elders of either gender will act in instructional, if not directive, ways, telling people generally what is the correct process required in the situation, based on their own earlier learning from previous generations.

**6.1.6 Hearth Family Pedagogy and Adoption**

Adoptive parents have a well defined role in Kunwinjku life, and are highly regarded when they successfully raise an adopted child. There is no hard and fast rule as to who can adopt a child, and in fact a young child from a dysfunctional family will sometimes simply move in with a sympathetic adult as though the child were the one doing the adopting. If the adoptive relationship continues, the adult is said to “grow the child up” (kabidjordmiwe). People will sometimes speak with affection of someone who raised them in this way (kandjordmiweng – “he/she raised me”) and this will invariably mean they felt they had been properly taught, that is, taught as though by the birth parents in terms of content and effectiveness.

**6.1.7 Gender and Pedagogy in the Hearth Family and Beyond.**

Living at a remote outstation with a large Kunwinjku family for four years I observed fathers teaching both sons and daughters a range of field and domestic skills, especially fishing and cooking. Activities like digging up yams, making tea, gathering bush honey and cleaning up were always group activities with men, women, boys and girls together. As the boys grew through puberty they would spend more time with the men than the women family members, but there was a lot of overlap between genders even into adulthood. However, there were gender specific domains: making and handling of weapons and consequently hunting and preparation of food animals, was almost always a male activity. Interviewees have described the way this gender separation operated in pedagogic episodes:

- *Sometimes if they were stalking an animal, the young men would follow along after them. Not the young women [RN: 4]*
- *Now, what will I talk about? In the olden days when they taught them, they used to take them a long way out in the bush. They used to teach them how to look for*
animals, and how to dig up food. The old people used to teach the young women to get bush potatoes, yams and cheeky yams. There were lots of foods, for example, lily roots and lily stems. They would collect them as they were shown, and cook them. The men used to teach hunting, when they went after kangaroos, or how to track buffalo. They used to teach them men's things. [BG: 2-3]

- We young women had our own, yes. We would go after long necked turtle. They would teach us about yams, and underwater yams. They would show us the cheeky yams. The old ladies used to take us, just us young women. They took us separately - the men went on theirs too. [DM: 35]

Outside the ceremonial context, single sex settings seem to have been conventional, with no secrecy involved. GN, a woman, obviously knows precisely what went on:

*And the men used to teach the teenage boys how to stalk. This is back when they speared things, but also now, doing whatsaname, killing the animals with a rifle. But they still have to stalk the animal, I mean they creep up on it. All sorts of things they used to teach them so they would know how to prepare a kangaroo for cooking. They used to roast them in the fire, and they would, whatsit, teach them sometimes how to cut it up to roast it properly in the ashes. That's the sort of things we used to do all the time. And whenever they made fishing spears, they would teach them: "This is what you do." [GN: 3]*

Age was a factor in the role of gender within hearth pedagogy, even in non-sacred contexts, with men taking over a young boy as he became old enough to learn hunting skills, so there is an association between gender and curriculum content:

*As we went along hunting, they used to teach me. Sometimes I would follow along behind [my mother] Ngalkangila. My father, Dad would say to me, "You go with Mum. I'll go this way." Sometimes they went after buffalo or they hunted kangaroo. That was when I was still fairly young, so, in the meantime, I would go with my mother and grandmother [Kakkak] to get pandanus leaves. Sometimes they used to go after yams. I used to watch them digging up yams and they would tell me the names...My father on his part taught me about animals as I was growing up [JN: 20-21]*

Despite the general male inheritance line for clan and land, and some informally gendered teaching domains, fathers and their fathers taught girls about their associations with land too:
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Our father taught me what we know, or his father, our Mawah we called him, that was about our [exc] country, yes that was about our country. [Your father's father?] Yes our fathers' fathers used to tell us. He told our father, our father used to tell us. [NN: 84]

GN reported how her husband trained her daughter for self-sufficiency in food gathering, implying that gender roles, at least in the informal setting of family life, could be flexible:

I've been thinking just about that girl of ours (inc, our daughter. She's got it. She hunts. She get animals. She cooks it herself. She spears fish, she's like a man. And she learnt it by watching what her father did when he was making fishing spears or whatever else he was doing. Then she would always do it. She was the only one who would help us (2) when we went hunting. Some kids are like that. [GN: 25]

General family intimacy allowed a high degree of cross-generational mutuality in the construction of gender. Ceremonial pedagogy provided a formalisation of constructed gender and will be discussed in section 8.7.2. The intimacy of the hearth family meant that gender separation must have been slightly against the grain of daily life, and therefore presumably purposive, although no one has suggested a rationale. Memories of these episodes building gender sociality are associated mostly with enjoyment:

When we were children, as young girls, we didn't mix with young boys. They would go off and stay somewhere, just themselves. Our grandmothers and mothers stayed there with us. We didn't live with those young boys. Men, the young men lived separately themselves. They adults used to supervise them too, and look after them. [NN: 86]

A number of other issues relating to gender will arise as part of other topics yet to be discussed:

- The relative importance of gender as a factor within a general model of how pedagogic dyads are organised (See 6.1.7 below).
- Gender considerations in the pedagogy of arts and crafts (See 12.5 etc.)
- Gender roles and domains in ceremonial contexts (See 8.7 etc.)
Gender distinctions and the impact of the Balanda world, from the dormitory system to enforced gender mixing in recent school history at the school (see 13.2.3).

6.1.8 The Nature of the Pedagogic Relationship between Adults and Children

Two simultaneous patterns emerge from and interpret the child’s experience of this mass of pedagogic relationships within the family. Firstly, out of the myriad pedagogic interactions in the hearth family, some were particularly remembered by both adult and child. Secondly, adults are remembered as having taken a kind of general responsibility for teaching children, regardless of the particular dyadic or even familial relationship with the child involved:

In the old days they used to help each other, back then. The old people would get together to take the kids, helping each other, so that those children would grow up in such a way that The Old People would be able to say, "Ah, I taught that child." And that child could turn around and say, "She's the one who used to teach me before, when I was little." [ED: 3]

ED ascribes to the grown child a grateful memory of having been taught well, implying a specially remembered pedagogic relationship. JN has also described this sense of gratitude towards a teacher [JN: 30]. Children often request teaching from adults and appear to have a clear agenda and strong views about how teaching should proceed. Most interviewees in fact discussed at least some aspects of the child’s thought processes in learning contexts, some in considerable detail, warranting a separate discussion of the psychology of learning and of child development issues in chapter 10.4.

Gender is certainly not the dominant factor, even though it is a strong one, in deciding who teaches who what, how, where and why. There is some evidence that who did the teaching was not absolutely important, and depended on who was available and interested. It is possible that pedagogic associations: with specific kin categories - Morlah, Mawah and so forth - simply reflect an underlying preference for the oldest, appropriately gendered family member available. In this case age is the significant organising principle, and the older the person the more likely their views are to be valued as the content of instruction, an idea that emerges strongly in our discussion of the Old People in the next chapter.

6.1.9 The Hearth family and Ceremonies.
There are three important issues linking the pedagogies of the hearth family and the ceremonies which will be fully explored in section 8.3.

- Ceremonies are highly gendered social contexts, so that ceremonial pedagogy gives gender a greater prominence than in the daily hearth family life;
- The vast majority of those who teach a particular child in ceremonies are related to the child and may well have been his or her teachers in the hearth context;
- Ceremonial pedagogy recognises the pre-eminence and foundational nature of hearth family learning, depending upon its preparation of the child for Ceremony, and viewing it a pre-requisite to learning ceremonial Law.

6.1.10 Pre-eminence of Hearth Family Pedagogy

JN has argued in detail the priority or foundational nature of hearth pedagogy. Pedagogy structured by the hearth family allowed the specific knowledge, the security and the stability needed for the child’s self-construction:

- This is how it is. As I went through life growing up to adulthood, it would have been pointless if the elders in my family hadn't told me stories. I probably wouldn't know anything. I'd be just going along without anything in my head. In other words, in ignorance. But as it is now, well, they made me so that I do have an adult's education. For example my mother's father, I called Mamam, used to tell me stories. They used to tell me stories every night until I went to sleep. Some of those stories were short, and some long. They were about djang, about what happened to people who did the wrong thing with those Djang. Some were about animals who were actually people. Some were about evil beings, like Namorrorddo. There were a lot of them: Mimih, Marlwa. They told me about all of them. When the sun would set, they used to tell me stories until I went to sleep. I would sleep and next morning when I would get up, they would tell me things. [JN: 19]

- And his whatsit, clan, well he learns that at home. If you're from here for example, you're Manilakarr. "As you grow up you think of yourself as Namanilakarr." Or "You're Djok clan, and as you grow up think of yourself as Nadjok, because I'm your father." You teach it in that way. When you have a son or daughter, Ngaldjok or Nadjok. And there's all the others stuff - the whole lot, that the child should learn at home. Not school, home. In the home. Or out bush.
My father, Nangarridj, taught me as he was hunting, and so did all the other men I followed as we went hunting, as I grew up. [JN: 41]

No matter how willing other adults may have been as teachers, their teaching may conflict with the curriculum of the hearth family, causing some stresses and undermining JN’s idea of a base from which the child can develop:

*And that is the fundamental Law [or basics of the Law], that's what the fundamental Law is. That is what they passed on to us - when we were small. We all lived there in the one place, and grew up in the one camp. It was only later we went away from there. So we become adults and we have that fundamental Law. That's why we can then leave and go off to distant places - the "wider world" as Balanda say, far away. It was maybe, as the Balanda would say, we went "exploring", to find out whatever for ourselves. We try to find out for ourselves what other people are thinking.  [JN: 17-18]*

JD implies not only the value of continuity in the hearth family learning environment, but a certain attractiveness to children:

*My kids, two boys and two girls - they don't go to other places to live, because they learnt as children, they learnt from me, from their mother and father, they just stay here. They don't want to adapt and stay when they go anywhere else [JD: 11]*

6.2 SUMMARY OF PEDAGOGY IN THE HEARTH FAMILY

6.2.1 A Hearth Family Curriculum in Outline

The hearth family taught “the Aboriginal people’s Law” The content of hearth family learning constituted a corpus of material to be passed on down the generations:

*They used to teach them. They taught them so they would know, and then when they grew up, they would teach their own children - their sons and their grandsons, their daughters' children and their sons’ children. They used to teach them Law - the Aboriginal peoples' Law.  [BG:5]*

I will argue in section 9.1 that Kunwinjku people have in mind a clear curriculum, and that the term “Law” subsumes the many detailed lists of specific learnings discussed in the interviews. The hearth family was the venue for learning an extraordinarily comprehensive education implied in the specific examples given in the interviews:

- moral behaviour, including strategies to avoid conflict [MM: 21; MM2: 28; RN: 79]
bark painting and rock art [MM2: 43-44; GW: 6; RN: 51]
building shade shelters [GW: 6]
clan and family history and affiliations with country [JN: 41; NN: 84]
gathering bush honey [MM2: 44, 46]
gathering turtles and food from vines [GN: 2; RN: 77]
hunting skills, for example, tracking animals [RN: 2]
identifying and using plants as food [RN: 86]
kinship terminology [JN: 40; MM: 44]
language skills and explicit social rules for language usage [JN: 13]
Law and respect for Law [BG: 5; MM2: 28]
making and using fishing spears [MM2: 45]
making baskets and dilly bags [NN: 9, 118-120; RN: 2; GN: 46; GW: 7]
making fires and cooking [GW: 6; GN: 3]
manners in dealing with adults [JM: 18]
preparatory training for ceremonies [JN: 57; MM2: 27-29]
protocols for sharing food [MM2: 46]
sexual morality [RN: 79-80]
stories [JN: 19; RN: 6; AN: 23]
totemic associations [JN: 41]

Some families regard English language and dealing with Balanda as core skills to be developed within the family [PS: 80 – 81; JM: 2]

6.2.2 Features of the Hearth Family as Pedagogic Venue

Kunwinjku people are faced daily by unwanted changes in their life as a community, and this is a major topic in their everyday conversation. The collapse of the fondly remembered hearth pedagogy is a theme initiated and explored by each interviewee. Their childhood pedagogy was allowed and protected by social and economic parameters that no longer prevail.

[1] There was a strong linkage between continuous stable relational contact and the teaching methodologies enabled and possibly demanded by that intimacy between teacher and learner. In describing their remembered childhood learning experiences, teaching and learning methods are always bound up with the particular people involved, as if the methodologies are attributes and outworking of the nature of those particular relationships, or perhaps of intimate relationships in general.
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[2] There was a high degree of family cohesion. Adults pro-actively managed the learning process and the child’s timetable, acting as “hands on” pedagogic administrators: This enforced a timetable structure, allowing informal contact time for incidental learning within the family, and allowed time for more formal explicit instruction of more often narrative (story based) pedagogy.

When I was small, I didn't go anywhere, to other places, to friends, like kids do now. We used to play with each other. We used to just play but we all lived separately. I mean I would play during the day time, then when it became late afternoon, they would say to us, "That's enough you kids. Come and have a sleep. We're going to sleep." So we would split up and I would go home. If we didn't finish that game, well it was too bad. They would say to me, "It's dark. That's enough." Then that was the time they would tell me stories. [JN: 8-10]

[3] There was a high level of shared activity between adults and children entailing a high degree of adult-child companionship and communication. This enabled a participatory learning with explicit teaching, within shared, real-life tasks. Family togetherness was marked by adults administering and providing continuous teaching:

- That was when I was still fairly young, so, in the meantime, I would go with my mother and grandmother [Kakkak] to get pandanus leaves. Sometimes they used to go after yams. I used to watch them digging up yams and they would tell me the names: "These are mankodbe." "This one is mankongkong." "This one is mankurrkkeb." "This sort is karrbarrda." "This one is mankinjdjek, kamarn, morlkalk, mandem..." Mandem, there are all different kinds of mandem, different shapes. And mankodjbang. All the foods, barrdjunga, manbardmo, djilihdjili. This is our Aboriginal food we've always had from earlier times there in the bush. They taught me about that. And the food growing on trees: mandudjmarr, mandjulkurmarlba, manmorlak, manmobbarn, djalamarddowk. All those, all that food of ours. they used to teach me all that so I know them all. [JN: 20]

- Yes. In the old days when The Old People used to do things, we would watch what they did including whenever they went hunting or gathering food, and they used to teach us. For example when they were cooking. We would go together gathering food, and sometimes they would show us the vines. We would collect food and carry it along, and we used to ask them, "Can we eat this sort raw?" "No," they would say, or sometimes they would say, "Don't eat that sort, don't eat that one." We would go along and they would find a place to camp, make a fire
and they would cook. They would show us long-necked turtles, goanna, all kinds of things. Whatever it was, maybe djanay. Whatever they decided to eat [from the turtles] whether it was pulling out the intestines or opening up it’s throat, they would talk about it. "When we do this, we pull the insides of the throat out."

When they removed the guts, they would show us what they were doing as they roasted it, cooked it one side then turning it over to cook the other side. And they taught us why they used to slice along the backs of goanna or any kind of djanay, and about other things too. They would do it all, cutting the animal in half, we would have expected it to stay as one body, but they would halve it. Cutting right down the middle. [GN: 2]

Participatory learning in collaborative real-life work with adults is a source of remembered pride. There is an implied attraction or motivation for children in tasks with self-evident and immediately practical goals:

Yes. We used to just go along and not disregard their directions when they used to say, "Let's go." Then we would sometimes go to the landing back then - on foot because there were no cars then. We would go on foot, and we would always follow their directions closely. I'm talking about Nakangila, Ngalgarridj, they would tell us to come to them. And that was that, we just followed them along in a group, those Ngalbulanj girls, and Nabulanj boys, our family. We just went along. We would be going along and we wouldn't hold them up because we were carrying animals on our shoulders. We just carried them along on our shoulders. [RN: 84]

[4] The generations were acutely aware of each other in kin and pedagogic terms. Hearth family stability provided close daily contact between generations, allowing teachers and learners to be aware of the transgenerational authority of what was taught, and developing a powerful intimacy between teachers and learners which could support effective mentoring and informal assessment:

A child maybe would have gone along and sat and watched what they did, so that's what they learnt, it's what they grew up with. "Is that okay?" "Yes." And they in turn would go along and do it all. That's what they used to do. And then their children, when they grew up and had their own, the grandchildren of the earlier generation, well they would teach them too. [GN: 4]

Children had continuous access to older adults who could embed story telling in a range of collaborative activities. The intimacy of the story teller-listener relationship
stamps the content of stories with a transgenerational authority and the impetus to ensure their transmission:

- Back then they also used to take them along and tell them stories, we would, they would look after them, the kids were in our care, and I mean wherever we were, out in the bush, I mean The Old People used to tell them stories, and in the same way we used to tell our own children. They [my parents] would tell them stories, Nabangardi and Ngalkamarrang. [RN: 6]

- Yes, we would teach the kids - we would take them fishing, and we would teach them sometimes as we went along, or their mother would take them collecting things like maybe waterlily stems, that kind of thing. I used to do that, teaching them so they would know our way of doing things. I would show them things and tell them stories about it. That's how I was brought up, with them telling me stories about grown-up things. [AN: 23]

[5] The family-centred timetable allowed learning by observation of adults and gradual approximation to a task. There was a security that the inevitable learning would occur in open ended time, ensuring continuity of transgenerational teaching:

My mother and her mother used to teach me. I used to watch what they did when they made things - when they made baskets and mats. I would sit and I would watch them as they told me what they were doing. And also dilly bags, they used to make. And other the different old people too, we used to sit and watch them. That's what I did, and then I used to make things myself as I got bigger. I watched them as they made things, and another woman I would watch making dilly bags, as I sat there. I would watch that woman. Then as I went along and got bigger, and I would watch how they did it, and then do it myself. That's how I made things. [NN: 9]

[6] Families may have planned their movements through their country to account for pedagogic goals. R (interviewed with N) spoke about her concern to cover a complex curriculum, with a syllabus based on environmental domains and seasonal changes over the year. This necessitated the availability of appropriate teachers and travel to appropriate sites. R speaks in the present tense, as someone highly proactive about education. The implication is that her family has relationships with other tribal groups and lands, a situation that applies to most Kunwinjku families now, so that this sort of concern is probably shared by people in other families. It is interesting to compare this with JN’s assertion [JN: 41, above] that children need the rootedness of
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growing up in one family environment. He may not have intended this to focus on place so much as what could be a hearth family that moved between what R thinks of as specific learning environments:

Yes. We teach them for example in the dry season when we take them to get long necked turtle, or sometimes fish, and what else? We take them down to the coast, collecting clams; they, we show them vines, fish to spear - that's with the young men - and turtle eggs, they, they dig up Sea Turtle [eggs]. When we go down to the coast. And here, inland, we come back here so they can kill, for instance, kangaroo or emu. Then for example, they can teach the young men what to do when you cook an animal, perhaps an emu or a kangaroo. That's what we do with my D___. We do that to teach him, his mother's father teaches him, that old man Namurnidjhubk. But when we go down to Wadjbi, it's that man who raised M___ who shows him things, I mean about the sea. He shows him fish that are no good, and the right ones to spear. So we show him both areas, land and sea. And he’ll catch file snakes alive, that boy...there, at Wak. That child was just going on collecting and filled a dilly bag right to the top...So, that's what we are teaching our [inc] children. This is at home, I mean on the weekends. On Saturdays and Sundays. We [inc] teach them. We go hunting so they can do whatever they should to cook and cut up [the animals]. [RN: 77]

6.3 TENTATIVE THEORISATION OF KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY

I have presented evidence that Kunwinjku people have well thought out ideas about pedagogy. Before moving into more detailed discussion of particular aspects of that pedagogy, I will provide an outline of what I think are its major elements. This sketch theory can be re-examined and tested as its details are explored in subsequent chapters.

6.3.1 Pedagogy is a Function of Relationship.

This principle seems to organise all other Kunwinjku propositions about pedagogy. Each of the interviews quoted in this chapter associates pedagogy with relationality, based upon experienced intimacies of hearth family life.

6.3.2 Teachers are Authorised Through Relationships.

Hearth family pedagogy involves the child in an expanding circle of kin relationships, each dyad of which has a pedagogic potential. Adults can focus on teaching within a more general relationship, building on their accepted authority and the child’s perception of their trustworthiness. The discussion below on the “Old
People” will flesh out this principle. From a child’s viewpoint, teachers are not merely people you know: they are Mawah, Kakkak, Morlah, Karrang, Makkah, Berluh, and so forth. I have discussed the role of formal teacher in some Kunwinjku contexts in section 8.6.4.

6.3.3 Teaching methods are a Function of Relationship.

This proposition will interact with data in chapter 10 about the psychology of learning, since method reflects universals of communication and mentation even though these are always realised in essentially dyadic processes – the interaction of minds between a teacher and a learner. Hearth pedagogy is carried out through four broad methodologies, each used in ways appropriate to venue, content and the relationship between teacher and learner. (This model will be developed more fully in chapters ten to twelve). Each of these broad tactics realises a specific aspect of interpersonal dynamics,

- Stories are the most intimate methodology, set in an unhurried episode of sharing across generations with a grandmother or grandfather or other person associated in the child’s mind with caring and nurturing generally.
- Direct instruction whether about morals or the identity of plants and birds is a constant of Kunwinjku life and augments the demonstration and praxis entailed in scaffolded experience. (I will later argue that direct instruction also realises the explicitness Kunwinjku people value highly as a method in pedagogy. See section 11.2.6). Relationally, this methodology reflects mutuality, both parties accepting each other’s engagement and negotiation in the process of teaching and learning.
- In later sections I will argue the importance for Kunwinjku people of a relationship that tolerates and enjoys mutual questioning. Children and adults question each other as a matter of course in daily life and employ a wide range of linguistic tactics in this process. In the pedagogic domain, learners expect to be answered, and adults need to ask questions to assess the effectiveness of their teaching. Questioning can be seen as an interpersonal skill and allows mutual access to each other’s thinking and signals mutual respect.
- Scaffolded experiences of hunting, fishing, ceremonial participation, interacting with strangers, preparing food or bark painting constitute a major venue for hearth pedagogy. The activity is always purposeful and with practical and
immediate outcomes. Above all, it involves a relationship of trust and frequent association between teacher as mentor and manager and learner as apprentice.

6.3.4 **Pedagogy is Transgenerational in Process and Content.**
Kunwinjku people regard their older generation and its predecessors as the authority behind what is learned. This is an extension of the pedagogic relationality of the teacher and learner of the present tense, reflecting a generally accepted obligation that each generation will become teachers of the next. Kunwinjku people are self-consciously aware of a burden to teach the younger generation the body of knowledge passed down to them from previous generations. This awareness has become more acute in recent years as transgenerational continuity is threatened in ways discussed in every interview.

6.3.5 **Curriculum is Authorised Through Relationships.**
Truth is ultimately relational since it is universally transmitted between people and accepted on the authority of the person speaking. The small universe of Kunwinjku experience, and its non-literary transmission of curriculum, may increase the authority perceived to reside in the person of its teachers. The impact on this intimate epistemology when knowledge or truth claims enter from outside the Kunwinjku system is discussed in section 9.4.2. Only teachers can authorise a changed curriculum, since curriculum too is contingent upon relationship.

6.3.6 **The Adult Child Relationship is Characterized by a Kind of Pedagogic Symbiosis.**
In moving from childhood to maturity, it is expected that the Kunwinjku individual will have the responsibility, ability and opportunity to teach younger individuals. Adult roles automatically entail teaching children. Children are expected to be learners.

6.4 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO OTHER CHAPTERS
Kunwinjku people have articulated significant viewpoints on pedagogy based on a remembered and normative experience of childhood pedagogy with its roots in the hearth family life. Their views are complex and comprehensive. I will discuss them in more detail in the broad sections of ceremonial pedagogy (chapter eight), issues of curriculum (chapter nine), the psychology of teaching and learning (chapter ten), issues of methodology in teaching and learning (chapter eleven), and responding to the *Balanda* world, in particular its impact on pedagogy within and outside the school (chapters thirteen and fourteen).
Before moving to these topics I need to allow the interviewees to shape this presentation by discussing one of the topics not only spoken of in detail by nearly every interviewee but discussed very frequently in everyday Kunwinjku life – the “Old People”.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE OLD PEOPLE
CHAPTER 7. THE OLD PEOPLE AND LEARNING TO BE KUNWINJKU

7.1 THE OLD PEOPLE AS SOURCE AND AUTHORITY IN PEDAGOGY

7.1.1 Talking About the Old People

Kunwinjku people grew up within a complex matrix of relationships, in each of which pedagogy was a core element. Reflecting upon, and summarising their personal educational histories Kunwinjku people usually refer to the generation that taught them as the Old People. Often this was the generation of the speaker’s grandparents, but the term has much broader scope. The Old People are a topic of considerable interest in Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse.

Old People (kohbahkohbanj) refers, when used in an unmarked way, to the older generation of living family members: grandparents and great-grandparents or older adult family members: [JN: 48; GW: 4]. In other contexts Old People seems to mean the adults who were living when the speaker was a child, but who are now deceased [EM: 36, 41, 71], or those who were the speaker’s elders during childhood, whether alive or not [JC: 15]. The term for elders, or adults generally, dabborrabolk, is occasionally used interchangeably with kohbahkohbanj, and my translation has tried to reflect each particular interviewee’s usage.

Those elders don’t refer to themselves as Old People regardless of their age, but they do use kohbahkohbanj in talking about family members they remember from their own childhood as their elders. Thus the scope of the term extends back in time, opening the possibility of thinking of Old People as simultaneously those intimately connected with the speaker, but also those associated with the collective authority of past generations. In some interviews the distinction between Old People and members of the first Kunwinjku generation (nayuhyungkiih) is blurred, so that Old People includes the first generation of Kunwinjku as well as those between the speaker now and those nayuhyungkiih. The three common adverbs locating action in the past, kunkare, korrokko and boyehboyen, can each be translated in some contexts as “long ago”, “in earlier times”, “back then” and so forth despite their other more precise collocations. Each carries a potential range of reference extending from the recent past back to the era defined by the presence of the first of the Old People. This indefiniteness contributes to the mythopoeic feel in any discourse about nayuhyungkiih and kohbahkohbanj.
7.1.2 The Old People and the Hearth Family

The Old People were part of the hearth family and to some extent their roles and practice as teachers has been described above. Nevertheless, Kunwinjku people regard the Old People as distinctive within family life, and indeed, as a key sub group of their society generally. Their role was central to the family’s child rearing processes. Old People provided a spiritual and moral framework for children, from ceremonial blessings in the hearth context [ED: 6-7] to more formal moral teaching in ceremonial contexts [ED: 5]. They provided for cohesion across the extended family and were consciously committed to the role of teaching throughout the childhood of their charges [ED: 2-4]. Parents would consign children to be taught by the Old People (generally the grandparents):

Okay. In the past, in The Old People's time, as I grew up my mother taught me. My father taught me too. The adults used to hand us over to The Old People who would teach us: my mother's mother, Kakkak, Ngalbangardi, she was Ngalwurrik clan, well, she taught me ideas. She was an elder, and in fact she gave me a lot knowledge, she kept on giving me an education. Actually, I could lose it eventually, but it will keep going for a long time, so we can really know those ideas like The Old People did while they were still alive. Some of them are still alive, but now the white man's world has arrived in a big way. [GW: 2]

7.1.3 “The Old People taught us.”

Carroll (1995) titled his 1995 thesis on Kunwinjku Verbal Art The Old People Taught Us, taking the phrase from his Kunwinjku informants. I have also heard this expression used by Kunwinjku people in a number of contexts. It is almost a short pedagogic credal statement, reflecting the continuing importance of the Old People in contemporary thinking.

The Old People were the family’s teachers, but their role and status were more extensive even than this. The Old People were teachers par excellence. They taught the survival skills. [RN: 84-86] They taught the ceremonies [AN: 2] They taught the moral code [JD: 3] They taught language skills [NN: 81-82]. They taught about, and through, the diurnal praxis of real life, initiating and scaffolding pedagogic experiences with a mix of direct instruction and demonstration, mutual questioning, and hands-on learning. Kunwinjku people often remember and list both the methodology and content of these experiences:
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Yes, well. Well they used to take us hunting, we would go with the old People (kohbahkohbanj). We would go hunting and they would say the names of the animals for us. And we would watch them making fish traps, and they would say to us, "Okay. Let's go. We'll get some fish. We'll catch them." We should go and we would wait for them and watch them getting fish and as they put them out they would say their names for us: "This is a nail fish, this is a saratoga, baby bream, bream, baby nail fish, and this is kalarlbba." "What do we call this one?" We didn't know. And we would have a good look at whatever animal or fish they were catching, whatever. And we would ask them, "What's this called?" we would ask.[DM: 20]

And they would name them for us. They would tell us the names of the foods, the sort that grew on trees, and the sort that was under the ground, like long yams, cheeky yams and bush potatoes. They would show us the vines. "This is the long yam. And this one has the cheeky yams. This one has the bush potatoes." They showed us the underwater yams. They would tell us the names of things and at the same time, point out the vines to us, as we looked at the vines. "This one. Come and have a look at this vine. This is what the vine from this food looks like," they would say, "So if you dig down under, you'll see it and you can pull it up for yourself." They told us that. We would dig and bring up that food. We used to go and they would teach us about bush honey. "Look there and you'll see the bees flying where there is honey." Then they would chop into the fallen log, get the comb and put the honey in a container. [DM: 21]

Yes. In the old days when The Old People used to do things, we would watch what they did including whenever they went hunting or gathering food, and they used to teach us. For example when they were cooking. We would go together gathering food, and sometimes they would show us the vines. We would collect food and carry it along, and we used to ask them, "Can we eat this sort raw?" "No," they would say, or sometimes they would say, "Don't eat that sort, don't eat that one." We would go along and they find a place to camp, make a fire and they would cook. They would show us long necked turtles, goanna, all kinds of things. Whatever it was, maybe djanay. Whatever they decided to eat (from the turtles) whether it was pulling out the intestines or opening up it’s throat, they would talk about it. "When we do this, we pull the insides of the throat out." When they removed the guts, they would show us what they were doing teach them as they
made things. Back then the old ladies taught us how to make baskets, proper nets and fish traps. They used to make things and we would watch how they did it. Those old people would teach us and we would sit and watch how they did it. They would explain to us - what sort of string they used to get, from that manbudbud tree, and the banyan trees. In those days we didn't have nets, they used to make string traps to catch fish. [BG:6]

7.2 THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OLD PEOPLE

7.2.1 The Old People in Pedagogic relationships: A Methodology of Mutuality

Children responded willingly to the practical involvement and practice a focused attention as the necessary compliment to the real-life but structured demonstration: I used to watch what how they did things when they would follow a vine along, for example, looking for long yams, cheeky yams, or maybe where there was water with food plants. And also when we used to go hunting for long necked turtles, goanna, bandicoot or ant eater, well it was those old people - I used to watch what they did. They'd look for the little air holes in the mud, or they'd be looking overhead for where a goanna had climbed a tree. And sometimes they would be looking out on the plain, and I would look wherever they were looking. And with the stories, the stories, came from them too. [JN: 41]

The eclectic nature of the Old People’s pedagogy reflected the complexity and range of their curriculum. As well as direct instruction and field experience, the Old People utilised an extensive repertoire of stories, both adult stories and children’s’ stories, linked to the ideational and moral curriculum of their family, and its particular history. Stories are particularly associated in Kunwinjku thinking with the Old People’s significant role in transmitting family history and moral code, but also with the remembered personal relationships between the Old People and their charges. I have discussed Kunwinjku narrative as a teaching method in chapter 12. There is still a strong interest in this traditional corpus of the Old Peoples’ stories. R now passes on stories from previous generations as part of her structured attempt to provide moral training for her younger sister’s children. [RN: 79-80]. The Old Peoples’ stories were identified with the moral law, and were enjoyed enough to be requested by children:

Yes. The old people told us about it. In the afternoons, for example, we would come back from hunting, we'd be tired, and so we'd say to them, "Tell us a story so we can go to sleep." They would tell us stories, and they would say to
us, sometimes they would say to us, "You pay attention when we tell you this so you will know it." The old people used to tell us stories, and they would say, "This is the really important Law (mankarre mandulmu)." [DM: 36-37]

There is a strong sense of intimacy in these descriptions of how the Old People carried out their teaching role. Their teaching was part of a warmly remembered caring relationship:

...before we used to make drinks sweet with bush honey. Those are all the things The Old People gave us, in the past. And they used to take the children with them and show them, for instance, how to dig yams, including cheeky yams. That kind of thing those old people used to give them, those people in the old days. So when we were growing up it was like we used to go to school. That school had the real Law. They used to teach us how to go fishing, to make fishing spears, shovel nosed spears for hunting and spearing kangaroo, and the djalakirradj spear was for fishing. [AN: 6]

This relationship between the non-adjacent generations in the family was often one of mutual care:

We would sleep until early morning, then in the morning they would say, "We're going hunting. You'll be okay here. Keep an eye on The Old People and they'll keep an eye on you." "Yes, all right. We'll be okay to stay here." [JD: 5]

I have observed Kunwinjku children in these mutual roles both in Oenpelli community and when living at outstations. They are sometimes deeply solicitous towards their elderly relatives, and reciprocally, it is typically a grandmother or often a great grandmother who organises breakfast, and any required teaching commentary with it, for the very children who rise at about the same time as the oldest adults.

The mutually caring nature these cross generational relationships, where the oldest family members cared for the youngest, and their transcendent authority, allowed the Old People to go beyond the normal parameters of gender in their instruction. They seem to have reserved the right to teach across genders, either because they represented or taught the Law as a higher domain than that of gender or perhaps to fill an obvious gap in the child’s learning [MM2: 58]

Despite their capacity for toughness (see 7.2.2 below) the Old People are usually remembered more in terms of their personal approachability. Their teaching praxis is remembered as pastorally sensitive, with a concern to make explicit both the rationale for harsh requirements and the teacher’s personal support in the process:
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When those old people used to teach us back then, they used to help us. They would help us, they used to say, "This, this and this are restricted things. You don't touch them, you don't handle them, you don't eat that. You'll have to wait till we come back again later and tell you when its the right time, and then you can eat those items. You observe this ceremonial restriction, and that's good. Good. Whenever you go to that Ceremony place."  [PS: 42]

Between 1977 and 1979 I took part as an adult participant in Kunabibi, Mardayin and Wubarr ceremonies. I witnessed a number of occasions when ceremonial teachers took pains to ensure their students were coping with the high level of fear those same teachers had produced by some of their activities and instruction. Following the haranguing of a group of young men at Kunabibi Ceremony, for example, I heard two of the older men speaking one-to-one with some obviously distressed teenage boys, assuring them that they would (ultimately) be safe despite what was about to happen to them.

The pedagogy of the Old People was generally both pastorally supportive and explicit as to desired learning outcomes and their benefit to the learner. This was practice in the field, where “hands-on” learning was the general approach to mastering skills, invariably with an accompanying direct instruction as to the moral and social rationale for learning those skills:

So how did they teach us, those people, our Makkah, Kakkak and Mawah who used to take us hunting? It was so we could learn more and more, yes. Ngalwamud, my own father's mother, she's died now, but I used to follow her from birth...Well, she was the one. We would go along together and she would teach me and explain things to me all the time. We would go collecting file snakes. "You grab them as I show you so when you grow up you'll know how to gather things for yourself - animals or plant food. And you won't have to go to another man and hang around begging, or have other women giving you things. If you know how to collect things, you'll have plenty to eat. If you go begging they won't give you anything, they'll refuse you and there'll be no food. So you've got to learn for yourself how to collect things so you'll have plenty to eat. “ [DM: 23]

Explicit teaching and demonstration were embedded in a directed but pastorally supportive relationship:
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So we would collect file snakes, wading in the water. We were scared. They used to hold our hands, Ngalbangardi, Nakamarrang, so...[[Laughs.]] We would be collecting the file snakes with them holding our hands. "It's all right. You grab them so you'll know how, so you'll learn," they said. We gathered them and we would watch them when they got the file snakes and bit their heads to cut through the back of their necks. But when we did it we were scared [[Laughs]]. Maybe it would bite us in the mouth! Yes. We did that. Yes. They taught us and we went to the paperbark trees and stripped the bark because we got so many file snakes. They said to us, "Let's go. Now, where's the paperbark you've prepared?" We got the bark, and collected all the file snakes. We tossed them into the earth oven with some rocks. We had dug it to roast all that food. We got the firewood, waited, opened the oven and then roasted (the file snakes). [DM:24]

7.2.2 The Old People in Pedagogic Relationships: Strictness within Mutuality

The Old People did not merely teach or pass on a moral code to the next generations, but were regarded as moral exemplars. They practice and taught strict behavioural rules. For example they are the ones who mandated the strict avoidance behaviours within specific kin relationships [AN: 8-12]. In the ceremonial context Old People mandated the severe food restrictions imposed on novitiates and their mothers (see 8.7.3). More significantly, they were held to be the definitive moral exemplars for subsequent generations. For example, they modelled the ethic of sharing and refraining from begging [ED: 102] and the use of socially correct language behaviour [GW: 9]. They exemplified polite interaction and obedient behaviour towards adults either in teacher-student interaction or in regard to respect for adult property [JU: 114].

Even the teaching methods of the Old People are explicitly preferred as models. GW described his approach to instructing ceremonial novitiates as derived from the Old People:

You know what happens now if a child goes to school. He goes there and the teacher says, "This book, look at this book. And we write this like this. We write like this, look. Look at this as you and I are talking, we'll stay together, do you understand? We'll go through it twice." This is like...what do you Balanda call this? You (pl) say, "Repeat". Know what I mean? Yes! That's right. Yes. "You repeat just what I say." "I'll say it, then you say it." Just like The Old People...
used to do. They used to talk back and forth among themselves. That's just what happened with my father Nabulanj. He spoke, then I would speak. [GW: 34]

GW describes here a key strategy in Kunwinjku pedagogy, requiring structured imitation and approximation within the relational security of a core family relationship. Conversational performance is taught through a species of conversational methodology.

7.2.3 The Old People as the Source of Ceremonies.

The term Old People subsumes all those who taught in the ceremonial context [GW: 62] They combined performance and teaching roles [TN: 2]. The specialist ceremonial teachers were equated with the Old People:

SE: And during ceremonies, when they used to really teach you about Aboriginal...[Yes.] The ones in charge of the ceremonies, were there people there, did they have jobs that were like a teacher? DM: Yes. They did that, some of them. They were old people (kohbahkohbanj), The Old People (dabborrabolk) who did. They taught us. They used to teach them, so... [DM: 40-41]

In the ceremonial context there was a well reasoned fear of the Old People who not only taught but enforced the requirements of the Law. Their pedagogy took on a sharper edge:

Yes. They used to go crook at them. They would rouse on them. Those people back then, you know, they were very tough those old people. They would tell them if anyone plays around with that Mardayin or Kunabibi, if anyone treats the place disrespectfully, they would kill him. They would spear him in a secret way. This happened at a very early age for that man, that child, that young man - he would have died because he did the wrong things in the Ceremony by treating it with contempt. SE: That was very hard. [It was very hard back then.] SE Did they say to you, for example, "Hurry up and learn this!"? [Yes.] SE: They pushed you along? JD: Yes. "Do it this way. And don't change it. It's you that has to change. So you know this Ceremony, this Mardayin we're teaching you. Well, if you muck around with it, we'll probably kill you." That's what they told us. They frightened us. Well we thought, "Yes. Maybe if I treat this wrongly, or I go and do something wrong, maybe those elders will see me, and kill me." That's what I had in my mind. That's what I was thinking. So for my part, I used to be careful. Whenever I would go along with the elders, or
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just with the young men, we wouldn't try to make each other do anything wrong. Because I was thinking about that word I had from them. So I went along carefully, and that was fine. If those others wanted to get each other into trouble, that was their business. Because I realised the Law was very strict, that Law was very hard. It was the Old Peoples’ Law. [JD2: 49-52]

The taught generation understood its obligation not merely to respect the Old People as ceremonial teachers and trustees, but to learn effectively from them and to apply the learning, in order to live well and morally:

You young men if you don't understand properly, you must really get hold of that Law. So you will know it. Don't just go a little way with it, that's the wrong thing. You should start with the Aboriginal way, our way first. Start there, with what we do. Learn, so you will know. Don't get muddled up in your thinking and get wrong ideas. What I've told you about, what I've said about Ceremony - Yabburlurrwa, Kunabibi, Lorrkon, Mardayin, Wubarr, these are business, Law. These are our Aboriginal ceremonies. We have that Law. It's what our old people had and taught us. They gave it to us, so we must hold on to it just the same way. What I mean precisely is, whenever we talk about Aboriginal (Law), it teaches you, maybe it's the Kunabibi that teaches you, well that Law will take you the straight way. That business is the Law, and that Law still exists. [MM2: 13]

MM may imply here that the Old People also uniquely assure the formation of the Aboriginality in the learner’s self-construction.

There was a strong ethic of obedience towards the Old People and it is difficult to say whether their personal authority was reified as the Law, or their role as the Law’s custodians and teachers authorised them as its teachers:

But some of them listen and are obedient, they say, "Ah, those old people have told me, so I'll just do that. I won't just play games and I won't treat what they say with contempt. Or maybe they'll be angry with me, or say to me, 'Don't go being silly, and treating the Law as a joke.' " [BG: 41]

Both the Ceremony and the Law are sometimes personified as teachers [MM2: 13 above], preventing any sharp distinction between the pedagogic authority of the Old People and the content of their instruction (the Law) or the ceremonial venue for their teaching:
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…the Law of those senior people, the Mardayin and Wubarr Law. Those are the ones that keep you going straight, that teach you. Those are the ones that teach you...Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrhkon, Kunabibi, those are the ones that teach you, that give you direction so you (s) go straight. [MM: 28]

The ceremonies were created by the Old People [GW: 66], specifically the first Kunwinjku generation, the nayuhyungkih:

The Ceremony itself has taught us from before. The old people had a long time ago - those first people, we (inc) don't really know, but they created it earlier. And we (inc) continue to follow it wherever. There's a lot of other men too, your sons that you've come up with to the Ceremony. - and his son will go up and so on. It just keeps going, it goes on and goes on. Until we die maybe. I don't know. [GW: 27 and see GW: 66]

The immense authority of the Old People as ceremonial teachers was derived from their association with the Law and the earliest ancestors, and by their integral role in its ceremonial transmission. However, there were two additional foundations for their potency as teachers. Firstly, the cooperation of novitiates in ceremonial disciplines may have been in response to the awesome authority of the Old People, but there may also have depended on a kind of transgenerational mutuality or empathy. The Old People certainly demonstrated pastoral awareness, and younger participants viewed the Old People as real individuals who had anticipated and felt the discipline they now imposed.

Secondly, the role of parents as younger adults, in submitting their children to the Old People, was a crucial authorisation, an extension of the hearth family matrix to include these designated teachers, some of whom would have been from beyond the child’s previous relational experience:

Actually, The Old People were themselves under that restriction in the same way. A woman, for instance one's mother, she is under that restriction in the same way, she won’t eat or touch whatever those things are. And that means she doesn't disregard that teaching, but she hangs on to that teaching strongly. So she'll say to us, "This is what you do, my child." She'll say, "Be very careful lest you become a bad person. That would cause pain to you and me both. We would ruin things for ourselves. We would lose the righteousness which is in that sacred teaching so we can possess the truth. But if you keep on going right through to the end, and those old people come back, who were with you at the
start, and they see you there, they'll say, “Now its okay for you to eat and
handle those restricted things. It's okay.” So then you help other people in their
turn as they come along. [PS: 43]

7.2.4 The Transgenerational Pedagogy of the Old People.
The Old People presented themselves as transgenerational conduits of a Law and
morality originating beyond themselves but contiguous with themselves and
authorising their teaching. What they taught came from earlier generations of Old
People:

That's what your Mawahs used to tell me. I know it, so now, later, that's what I
talk about it. I'm not just inventing this now, no. I'm not just thinking of it now,
this Law. Not at all. With me, this Law was earlier on given to me by my
Mawahs, this that I'm talking about now in accordance with what they used to
explain to me. That's what they explained to me and I've still got it. I've just
hung on to what they said, those Mawahs. I didn't write down what they said on
paper - but I wrote their words in my head, whatever they told me. I put their
words here. [[Points to own head.]] Your Makkah, my mother and that
Nakurrng, your Nakurrng - I still have all their words. They've died all those
old people, but I still have their words now. That Law they gave me, I haven't
let it drop. No. I have that Law. That's what they gave me and I haven't lost that
Law, certainly not. [MM2:64]

The association between the Old People and the Law is almost absolute: their words
constitute Law; they are its source and its teachers. the Law transcends the
generations whose function is to transmit rather than modify or replace it, but in
doing this, the teachers derive the authority of what is taught. For Old People, their
virtue as teachers was to transmit faithfully the words received from those they
themselves regarded as the Old People. There is an ethic of oral memory involved in
this regard for the Old Peoples’ words [MM2: 64 above], which seems to be a matter
of pride for many Kunwinjku people, despite its obvious fragility should a generation
avoid its responsibility to transmit it.

In addition to his self-aware role as teacher, MM claims an exemplic role as a
Law learner, cementing the association of authority between the previous Old People
and his own teaching. The process is one of pedagogic authority being received
along with the curriculum content:
When I speak like that, for myself, I'm not getting something new, but I'm getting the old thing (kunkare) for myself. I get it just like Mawah and Nakurrrng, Makka, Ngalkurrrng (his sister), that eldest Mawah - and the youngest - they all used to tell me about the Law. And I wouldn't get up and go. Never. I would just sit there until they used to say, "Okay, that's it. I've finished. So now you go to sleep." Then I would sleep. That's what I used to do. Now, later, I'm talking myself, explaining that Law. I'm not learning it nowadays, but to start with, at the start, they used to just explain to us, those old people, Mawah, Nakurrrng, that old lady, (your) Makkah - my mother that Makkah, and that sister of that Nakurrrng (you call "Ke Nakurrrng", and I called "Kakkak"). That brother and Doydoy, my nephews, those I call Mamam. Makkah, who was the aunty of my mother, used to teach me too. [MM2: 31]

A young father, JM, has a well developed model of the transgenerational process to which he is committed:

Well, the kids, our kids, we should teach them well. I mean about both Balanda and Aboriginal things, so they can go on and grow up and not forget. So they'll know. Just as the elders (dabborrabbolk) taught us before. And those children will then become the teachers in their turn. Of our culture. What The Old People (kohbahkohbanj) taught us, and we in turn have taught the children. [JM: 2]

Adults generally were active in their automatic role as teachers, and routinely initiated teaching activities: [JN: 20; DM: 20; MM2: 30]. Today’s Old People, the adults of remembered childhood, would assume responsibility in teaching contexts even for children not normally their own immediate responsibility [ED: 2]. In this remembered era, Old People as a mass had a constant and imminent teaching role for children in their purview:

My mother and her mother used to teach me. I used to watch what they did when they made things - when they made baskets and mats. I would sit and I would watch them as they told me what they were doing. And also dilly bags, they used to make. And others, the other old people too, we used to sit and watch them. That's what I did, and then I used to make things myself as I got bigger. I watched them as they made things, and another woman I would watch making dilly bags, as I sat there. I would watch that woman. Then as I went along and got bigger, and I would watch how they did it, and then do it myself.
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That's how I made things. So now I'm teaching these kids, this later generation who are growing up now. I tell them, "Don't do it this way, just make it properly. Like I'm doing it. Watch what I'm doing." And those kids I'm teaching, some of them don't know, some of them do know. Some of them are growing up into women, young women, older women and they'll know how we make things, what we know. [NN: 9]

The relationship between Old People and the taught generation is one of mutual commitment to the transmission of an independent body of knowledge and moral teaching. There was a pedagogic demand as well as supply. Those taught take some pride in their achievement in accurately retaining and applying what was taught:

- Yes, you explain it to them, the concept, "Listen now! Listen to this idea so you can understand it and do it." That's what happened to me those old people (dabborrabolk) used to tell me, and so I know it, and I still have that knowledge from my teachers. [AN: 93]

- We didn't fight. We would just stop and think. That was it. Some kids used to get angry and fight, but some of us were good and we didn't start fights. We didn't tease because we kept to what those old people told us. Because The Old People told us about what was good and that's how we thought. That's what I wanted to say about that. [JD: 5]

The Old People, reciprocally, could take pleasure in the outcomes of effective teaching, met by a sense of gratitude in the student:

In the old days (korrokko) they used to help each other, back then. The old people would get together to take the kids, helping each other, so that those children would grow up in such a way that The Old People would be able to say, "Ah, I taught that child." And that child could turn around and say, "She's the one who used to teach me before, when I was little." [ED: 3]

7.2.5 Old People and “the Law” as Curriculum

There is a close association between Old People as identifiable individuals of the previous generations, and Old People as a generalised group both sourcing and teaching the Law. I will argue at 9.1 that Law can be understood as the thing that enables and is realised by someone living as an ideal Kunwinjku person. The Old People are the final arbiters of what this identity involves:

I worked in the office as a secretary. I didn't want to go back to Kormilda (boarding school in Darwin), so I just remained here. A few of us just stayed
back here. Some of them went to year 10 and then finished: Ngalngarridj who is at Kudjekbinj and Ngalngarridj Ngalmok. But then half way through year ten they both stopped. Then they came back here and got jobs. But it was good that we went to school. We saw how to live in the city, what life is like living in the city. Yes. It's as if we can say, "Ah, so we know that's what it's all about living in the big city. However, we're back living here at our place, so we concentrate on here where we are." And they teach us the Law and what it tells us is the right to do, in accordance with what those old people say. We understand the meaning of that Law. [BG: 25]

The Old People not only defined and passed to later generations the Kunwinjku life curriculum, but were themselves one of its topics. Learning about the Old People, and learning the correct attitude toward them, was core curriculum:

- In my case, for example, I think about those old people, my father, my grandmother, my mother's older sister, my aunty - they raised me. I still think about them, and now I'm teaching my children, daughters and sons, as I raise them I'm telling them what their forebears were like, who they refer to as Mawahmawah. They call the women that too. I tell them what kind of people our family are like, my father and his siblings, my father and aunty. That's part of the fundamental Law. [JN: 48]

- Also, when you encounter the old men, don't take them lightly - never, because they are your supervisors, they teach you about the business, they initiate you." [AN: 27]

- We used to tell them stories, from the olden days, what The Old People used to do back then. There were no buildings here, when Balanda came with their yiwarrudj (Law). We went and taught those young boys and they grew up. They grew up and some of them I see them today working, some just staying at home and some involved in ceremonies, Mardayin, Lorrkkon, Wubarr, Kunabibi, Yabburlurrwa. The old people taught us those ceremonies back then. [AN: 2]

7.3 THE OLD PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY

7.3.1 The Old People Criticised?
Kunwinjku people are becoming increasingly concerned at what they observe as the educational failure of their children in all contexts. It is an index of the degree of pressure on Kunwinjku society that some of those now grandparents are prepared to
blame others of their generation – people viewed by today’s children and young adults as the Old People:

Even among our own (Aboriginal) teachers, even though at the moment things are not good, we still want to teach kids the Law. It's a bit too difficult. I mean they're not picking it up. Maybe we're not always giving it to them, so we need to ask ourselves about this. We should ask each other and talk it over, about what we should do. How do we teach the children Aboriginal things, and educate them, so they'll have the ability to think from when they are quite small. I say this because I've noticed men and women from the earlier generation, my generation, some of us grew up and went along on the same level, but some didn't...they didn't really...because they weren't interested when we used to go to school. So we became distinct from each other, and when we left school for jobs, that was it. Only some of us got jobs, the ones who had the education. Some of us grew up, they grew up differently from us, without ever asking questions.. [JN: 50]

JU (herself a grandmother) explicitly claims the immediately prior generation have failed in their educational tasks with consequent ignorance of traditional stories and even good manners, as evidenced among school aged children:

Yes, and also, there's that, um, two weeks ago or it may have only been last week, anyway, two weeks ago I went (to school) to help those young teenage boys. The senior boys class. And I watched them, those kids, those young boys, and they don't know those stories. So, really those old people still with us now haven't passed on that future to them, in order that they could know about it or write about it, so they maybe know only a little bit. Some of them know about djang, I mean what to do about those dreaming stories. So, then, I went and helped them with that, and then, whatsit, I noticed they were finding difficulties with English. So, yes, it's very different. What I mean is, previously we were going well, and we even coped with Balanda too. For example we had good manners, that sort of thing, so we would ask people for permission, we would knock on doors, we did some of those things. So we also spoke English. [JU: 66]

GW (69) claims the older adults have abandoned the teaching of the Law, and ED reports on how some of the Old People have resigned their roles:
So we don't keep trying hard to follow that Law The Old People spoke of in earlier times. And then, when we go and ask them, some of them say, "That's finished. Back off. I don't want to be asked." They will say that. And so they don't say, "Yes, that's it. Just wait. You take the kids, so maybe we can all teach them together." Some of them reckon they are too tired. I don't know about this present time. [ED: 11]

What is behind this collapse of will and practice among the older generation, people who received intact the transgenerational teaching and ideology of those they now call the Old People, and whose example they have been exhorted to follow? Why are adult Kunwinjku people now prepared to criticise the present or most recent generation of the Old People, despite their extraordinary status as teachers and authorities in life?

7.3.2 The Old People Displaced?

For many Kunwinjku, the expression Old People means the generation in adulthood at the time of the first Balanda incursion [DM: 12; EM: 2; JD: 2-3; NN: 5]. Although the Balanda intrusion was slow and in stages, and the lifestyle and Law of the first permanent Balanda, the missionaries, were relatively miscible with Kunwinjku thinking, the initial impact on a lifestyle and morality of self-sufficiency, within a closed relational system, was enormous. The newcomers appeared both as objects of fear and yet offering significant beneficial resources. Some degree of accommodation seemed the attractive response, though it has now become the only rational response to the global and irresistible nature of the incursion. The impact on the self-construction of the Old People as teachers and providers was significant and complex and began an accelerating and deepening displacement of their role and self-valuation.

AN (5) associates Old People with the abundant provision of food of all kinds, so the “school” provided by their instruction was attractive for both ideational and physical reasons:

Yes, I've talked about that, now I'll talk about school in a different way. The old people used to teach us, and they would also give them food - it was good food too. Food like cheeky yams, long yams, blackberries - something like grapes, sometimes plums, green plums and black plums. That's what The Old People used to give them. Sometimes they used to go and get animals; for example
goanna or bandicoot. Or they would go to the river for fish, like barramundi, catfish, nailfish - all kinds. They used to trap them. [AN: 5]

AN and others think of aspects of Kunwinjku education as analogous to school, borrowing from what has become the dominant provider of organised teaching. The Balanda arrival began early to displace the Old People across almost all their roles. Their provision of “school”, a systematic and well managed education, was eroded by school based education which took over the daily timetable and challenged the existing curriculum. Their ability to provide generally for their “students” was dramatically displaced by the largesse of the missionaries. (I have described the global nature of the scholarisation of learning under the Balanda and Kunwinjku responses to this is discussed in detail in chapter thirteen). The Old People recognised early that their role was being threatened. Some rationalised the use of schooling as a substitute for the economic education they had previously provided:

What The Old People used to say to us is, "You go to school. We didn't go ourselves. We were born in the bush and just grew up our own way. We want you younger generation to go and learn so you can write for us, and speak English. You can interpret for us when we don't understand." That's what they told us. [DM: 61]

It is legitimate to speculate on the impact this sense of neediness had on the Old People, perhaps leading to self-disqualification in some areas of life, in particular a self-limitation as teachers, given their need to depend on school children for this kind of “help”.

In a sense, a new curriculum of survival skills was demanded and supplied by the political reality of the Balanda world, so that English language skills became as valuable as hunting skills may have once been. The need to master English and its universe of operations is so self-evident that Kunwinjku people almost all support some or other model of “two way” education aimed at providing this English instruction. Balanda learning is now assumed part of the transgenerational process [JM: 2]. (The notion of “two ways” or “both ways” education is more fully discussed at 9.7.3 where I will argue that Kunwinjku advocacy of two ways education is in fact primarily intended as a mechanism to protect the Kunwinjku curriculum and its teachers from further displacement.)

The recognition and admission of a Balanda component to the curriculum constituted a significant change in the transgenerational model – the corpus.
transmitted was opened to authoritative material not sourced from the Old People. The Balanda world implicitly began to share and to challenge the Old People’s authority. There was an alternative “school”. The role of “teacher” was no longer exclusively theirs. So began the process of declining self-esteem and self-reliance Kunwinjku people lament today, and the corresponding loss of heart by, and respect for, the Old People. The impact of the Balanda was multiform and Kunwinjku people have reflected on it, and discussed it explicitly.

[1] The technology of the Old People was displaced by new building techniques [JD2: 27] and by rifles [GW: 21]. In fundamental matters of self-reliance the Old People were confronted with the inexhaustible and implacable bounty of the Balanda:

- Yes. The old people back at the beginning, well, they didn't have anything in the way of Balanda things, particularly not food. They only had Aboriginal stuff - yams, bush honey, cheeky yams, they used to dig them out of the dirt and share it out to both the kids and the adults (dabborrabolk). They used to go fishing and hunting. In the wet season they collected bush honey. They would collect it and put it in dilly bags, that bush honey. They would take it along with them in the dilly bag, and by the end of the wet they would probably have nearly run out. And when the dry season came they would be doing the same thing, looking for food. That's what The Old People did here in the past, before white people came. They were just here themselves. Later on the Balanda came and they taught them about white peoples' food. So they ate white people's food. The Balanda introduced it to them so the adults stopped eating our own food, instead, white peoples' food. That happened when the Balanda arrived here. Actually, to begin with, when the Balanda first came, the people were frightened of them. Some of them didn't know about Balandas. Those first Balanda used to teach them, that old (missionary) who built the first house. [NN: 4]

- They used to eat that food. They used to go to the shop, and (Balanda) would give them clothes. Clothing. They would give them clothes. They didn't wear clothes before that. They would make grass skirts from long grass, something like this, they would wrap it around themselves. They would use mankurladj vines to wrap around themselves, both men and women. And they tied it around the children. That's what they would do, the people here. Later on, when those two (missionaries) came and set up this place, then they gave them clothes. So they
just stopped using those clothes made from grass. They were given real clothes by those two Balanda who came. Those two old people who first set up this place here. [NN: 5]

[2] Not only did Old People lose their unique role as providers, but their capacity to operate as teachers was eroded by the pressures on the management of time, created by the Balanda world. There was a general and widening displacement of the patterns of life:

In our case, what happened in the old days to us, to me was that my elders used to teach me because we didn't have, they didn't have a lot of things people have now, like television. Ah, nowadays we have Toyotas, private Toyotas, we have all our associations, whatsaname businesses, lots of businesses, lots of money, grog, shops, whereas before it was a hard time, and we would go to school every morning and work helping our parents afternoons. We worked in the food garden, growing pumpkin, watermelon, all sorts of food, corn. Nowadays we have the supermarket. The supermarket is all right, but we don't hunt and we don't have jobs. But it’s all new what we have now, so education now is different. It's a new situation. English speakers might say, "They are in a different land now." A different place so to speak. Different for them and us. We used to go hunting every day for food in the bush, because there was no food here, the Balanda had just enough to give those Aboriginal people who were working. [JN: 53]

Many people remember the afternoons and bedtimes of their childhood as venues for rich interaction with the Old People – a time for stories and hearth family fellowship: [DM: 37; AN: 3; RN: 91; JN: 8]. The lifestyle of Kunwinjku communities since the opening of the Club means families are now fragmented during this time slot. The massive availability of electronic media diminishes the entertainment value of the stories. Old People have lost their prime teaching slot outside school hours, and their students are distracted. The resultant breaking of the transgenerational pattern is recognised and lamented:

Back then they also used to take them along and tell them stories, we would, they would look after them, the kids were in our care, and I mean wherever we were, out in the bush, I mean The Old People used to tell them stories, and in the same way we used to tell our own children. They (my parents) would tell them stories, Nabangardi and Ngalkamarrang. It was about giving them ideas,
but, no, the kids would disregard what they explained to them. They were trying to give them ideas, to teach them. Now in fact, it's all come back to us here now. They've forgotten what they were told, what was explained to them. So consequently those children have just gone off on their own different way. They haven't thought about what they were taught, unlike what we did when we were children and they would teach us, and we really hung on to what they taught us. We didn't just dismiss it like they do now when we explain things to them, the kids. They just disregard what we say. They don't do what we say. [RN: 6]

7.3.3 Threats to the Epistemological Authority of the Old People.

As the Old People die out as a generation, and the realisation grows that the transgenerational link to them is collapsing, discussion about them may be edging towards the mythopoeic. The association between Old People and the Law, and the origins of Ceremony is eclipsed by JD’s theologisation about their epistemological role, passing knowledge from God to subsequent generations:

Now, this is right back a long time ago before Balanda, before those old people saw any Balanda, this was back at the beginning. Father God made all the country. And the animals, and he created us (inc) people. He created Balanda. Balanda. It was him alone. The very first ones, those ancient people, they called him Namumuyak. Namumuyak taught the ancients, and he's the one we call Father, who created the whole world and gave them wisdom. Wisdom he used to teach them, and they kept on applying that wisdom. They talked about it and made the moral code. So they just kept discussing and discussing, talking about all the things, whatever, God had taught them. They talked about that. So then they finished doing that process, forming their wisdom, those old people. They didn't think in terms of printing, not like now, where the young people can read books Balanda style. Not them. They couldn't read, those old people. So their ideas were what God gave them. That's what they used to talk about. They used to say, "In the beginning, Namumuyak gave us (exc) wisdom, so that's what we follow. So that's what we're telling you now, you younger generation." That's what they used to tell us. That's what they told them sometimes. So that's what we understood, what they understood and what they used to do, both men and women. They followed what The Old People had talked about. [JD: 2-3 and see JD: 9]
This picture of the faithful transgenerational handing on of initial revelation is remarkably similar to the theological role of transgenerational pedagogy described in the Judaeo-Christian scripture, for example in Psalm 78 and Second Timothy. Both these texts arise in social groups preferring hearth based, non-literate transmission of crucially valued Law and tradition. Other Kunwinjku people have speculated about the possibility of a divine origin to transgenerational knowledge:

SE: In the past, did adults teach children to sing, did they teach them songs?
[R:: Singing?] Yes. R: Yes. In the past they would come and do that [SE: Aboriginal?] Yes, Aboriginal. How did God teach them so they then taught us?
[RN: 186-187]

ED has thought through an accommodation between Christian and Kunwinjku views of “first people” which compliments JD’s views:

What I mean is, because I really believe this is the truth, no matter what we...no matter what race, different colour we are, but I believe that our Father God, I say he came and put Adam and Eve there. So every time you ask the older people, "All right then, who was there and made the earth?" "The first people. We don't really know." And I say, "So where did the first people come from?" "No idea. We hadn't developed then. It was just them." Meaning the first people, as we call them. Then that makes me think about Adam and Eve, that business, that kind of Christian story where Adam and Eve were the first people. Well to me, in some ways, God reveals himself in different ways to different cultures. That's what I strongly believe. [ED: 118]

JD’s model of the divine origin of the Old People’s knowledge complements the many Kunwinjku stories that portray Mimih spirits as having taught the first Kunwinjku generation (nayuhyungkih). Many Kunwinjku people accept both these models of the ultimate sources of knowledge. The common ground between the two ideas is highly significant, since it provides such powerful authorisation, in either case, for the Old People and the revelation from whichever non-human origin, which was passed down faithfully from them and constituted not only the Law, but moral goodness:

What they told us was entirely good. They didn't tell us wrong things. They didn't want anything evil. They rejected it. They wanted only the good. Only good, very good Law was what they talked about with their children back at the beginning, teaching them, and so also teaching us. [JD: 3]
This high view of the role of the first people and the Old People who have handed on their original deposit allows present day Old People to assert that their teaching is “the truth”:

You (s) should go a long way, further on, through the black (Law), and (don't) drop it. A child, a young man, a young woman, it's the same for all, when we talk to you, you must learn whatever we (exc) talk about. When we do that, we (exc) talk about the truth (kunwoybuk), that includes when I myself explain the truth to you. That's why when I talk you listen...you should understand whatever it is, when Nabulanj comes and tells you about it. This is the one thing, the message I am leaving for you. [MM: 12]

Taken together, these grounds for associating Old People with absolute authority meant contact with the Balanda world would necessarily force both the Old People and Kunwinjku people generally to accommodate this high view to invading realities, both ideational and technical.

Kunwinjku thinking has been forced to wrestle with the process of ideational assimilation. the Law introduced by the first missionaries was analogous to Kunwinjku Law. The Kunwinjku Law was analogous to the Ten Commandments [ED: 5; JN: 9]. This apparent miscibility might have led to some assimilation between missionaries and the Old People, some blurring of distinctions between the two. Certainly there was also the potential for each of the two entities to borrow authority from each other. The complex relationship between Balanda and Kunwinjku notions and practice of power and governance are discussed in chapters 2, 13 and 14. What was unavoidable was the intrusion of real new power into the Kunwinjku domain, inevitably challenging in some way the epistemological monopoly of the Old People and implicitly that of all Kunwinjku, with a corresponding loss of epistemological self-esteem and self-sufficiency.

The displacement of the epistemological authority of the Old People by the competing power of the Balanda, by schooling and the emergence of new survival skills and technology, left a gap that could not be filled by simply embracing the impersonal incoming world. The ideational universe rooted in the faithfully transmitted teaching of the Old People was taught and learnt in trusted, intimate relationships, relationships experienced and hitherto imaginable only in terms of the Kunwinjku social universe. No such trust existed towards Balanda sources of knowledge, and construction of what would be radically new relationships would not
be possible in the absence of the Old People who alone may have authorised those new pedagogic relationships.

7.3.4 The Loss of the Old People
Kunwinjku self-image is often consciously under review – an inevitability given the constancy and pressure of change in their lives. Often this forced revisiting of identity is spoken of in terms of the present generation’s imminent discontinuity with the Old People. There is a strong sense of alarm in these interviews as Kunwinjku people realise that their links with the Old People, however this term is conceived, are rapidly collapsing. Effective language pedagogy has already suffered [JD: 17]. Middle aged people can speak of the Old People almost as celebrities they had actually seen in the past, implying their scarcity as much as their status:

That was while The Old People were still all here. [SE: You knew them?] Yes, there were a lot of older people around then. When we were growing up we knew them. [PS: 15]

EM, a woman in her seventies, urges the recording of their names. (EM’s interview attracted an extremely interactive audience of middle-aged women whose stated motive was to hear her talk about members of the generation of adults when she had been a child.)

This is what I'll talk about. [Yes]. When the missionaries first came they built dormitories. They were for the young women and they young men. The first missionary, who came, when I was a little girl, was Reverend Dyer. Mr Dyer was a minister, and he and Mrs Dyer came. At that time we were living at Arrkuluk, where the Tamarind Tree is (now). All the other people who were living there have since passed away. I'll talk about them so you can write this down on paper, is that okay? Get a pen and write their names. Some of these people have passed away, those old people who were the first mob to live in the dormitories. This was when Mr Dyer was here, they were living there: you write these names down. [EM: 2]

There may be an association between male authority generally and that of the Old People, since despite the fact that there are women still living who would qualify on grounds of age and having seen the arrival of the Balanda, they are not considered part of the remnant. In fact, there may be only one male representative of the Old People still with us:
Nowadays I just don't see this happen at school, as I used to see it before. There are some Aboriginal people, elders, now, who are interested in teaching. Like what used to happen when we (exc) went to school. They used to come and teach us the dances, so we could dance. And the women used to come and teach them their stuff, how to collect pandanus and make dilly bags. And it was the same with us. Those people who taught us, well, they are all gone, finished. Now there is only that Nabangardi, Mandjurlngunj clan. The adults see him there now and they ask him about the teachings, or about The Old People - where they came from. Or where their grandparents came from - their Doydoy (Mother's mother's mother), or their Mamam (mother's father). [GW: 7]

But now, I don't know. New things are coming, and our culture is changing for the worse. Because we haven't got those old people - they've died and there are not many left. Only, for example, Nabangardi, our father. That's all, just him. He's got the knowledge of that business. [AN: 28]

7.3.5 Recovering the Old People?
The man nominated by both GW and AN is another interviewee, MM, who does in fact describe himself as the only survivor of his generation:

_The young men who were the same age as me, who used to be together, a lot of us, right here in Kunbarllanjnja - they've all vanished. I'm the only one left now, here in Kunbarllanjnja. Me. Wait on, I'm thinking whether there is anyone the same (age) as me here at Kunbarllanjnja...No, they've vanished, all of them. That (much younger) man, Jacob, who was here with Isaiah Namulidjbud, they've been here for might be three or four years, those two. They're still alive. They had the Law. But those who were young men with me who saw them, well, they have vanished, all of them. The Nakamarrang men, those Nangarridj subsection men, they have disappeared, all those who were the same age as me. So I'm the only one left they can look to about this._ [MM: 33]

Despite, or perhaps because of, his age, MM is sharply aware of the crisis in pedagogy in Kunwinjku society and urges radical thinking about it. It is MM’s vision that the transgenerational deposit can still be preserved and passed on by a radical appropriation of the invading technology:

_That's what I have talked about and those two will explain, committing themselves to that message, those children of mine. They (2) will write it too, so that you will listen to them, so listen to anything those two children of mine_
say. The one named A___, he is the younger brother and maybe he will be the one to tell you, or that older brother, Steve will explain it to you. So then you listen to this Law I am talking about, so that you will be able to understand anything, so you will get it and really know it, really understand the Law. [MM: 13 and see MM: 37]

MM recognises the potential of *Balanda* literacy and is self-consciously appropriating it as a new teaching method to compensate for the collapse of oral pedagogy. This technological solution should even be applied to the maintenance of Kunwinjku language skills:

> A child who just goes along without those ideas, the result will be he will break in and go and steal things. He smashes, and he then goes and steals, he steals anything. He acts against the Law. He doesn't know anything, nothing. Without any use, he just goes along. He knows about school when he goes, but he doesn't know any concepts, either non-Aboriginal matters or Aboriginal matters, nothing. A useless person, he drifts along. If we first of all, we blacks, remind them about our language, then the child will know. He will get understanding about *Balanda* and about black (Law). So he will understand how to live the right way. He will go to school, so he will know that, and he will come back (to the Aboriginal context) and he will know that. But what's happening now is this: he goes to school, comes back and just forgets. Why has that child not already learned to address father, son, mother, little boy, little girl? He can't address them. Mother's father - he can't address him. Mother's uncle, nothing. Without any purpose he just goes around the place. That's it - that's the thing you (2) should explain, so you (2) write it and teach all of it to the children. He will go straight then in whatever he does. [MM: 44, and see MM: 26 and MM: 40]

In a sense MM and others are fighting to reclaim their share of teaching time, and access to their students. I will discuss attempts by Kunwinjku people to appropriate the resources of the school to exploit the few remaining Old People as teachers or pedagogic authorities at 13.5.

7.4 CONCLUSION: RECONSTRUCTING A KUNWINJKU SELF

In a sense, the way Kunwinjku people talk about the “Old People” suggests they see in them rather than themselves the custodians and authentic practitioners of a Kunwinjku identity. Their demise is iconic of the threatened loss of that identity
across the Kunwinjku society. As the Old People have diminished in power and in numbers, Kunwinjku people have been increasingly dependent upon them as a trusted foundation when every other aspect of their lives has been in enforced and uncontrollable change. The global extent of this invasion of the Kunwinjku self is discussed in chapter fourteen.

The Old People provided powerful memories of security and bounty, of discipline and social cohesion. The remembered kindness and authority of grandparents reifies into an irrecoverable past glory. Their loss means anomie and, as their numbers decrease, feelings of panic and of inadequacy grow in their descendants. I think this increasingly urgent grief is the basis for some of the passion about cultural continuity so easily manipulated by academics and commercial interests in art and tourism. The willingness of Kunwinjku and other Aboriginal groups in a similar position of relational dispossession to appropriate English terms and even the historical records of the invaders, allows them to reconstruct or to assert the content of culture which was not passed directly to them, but which they can associate in their thinking with the Old People, that is, with their own unique roots. This in turn may provide some comfort faced with the replacement of their Old People by the only other group with absolute power – the Balanda.

Kunwinjku people were taught by their Old People, particularly in the hearth family, but their authority and teachings are also deeply associated with Ceremony, which is discussed as a pedagogic domain in the following chapter.
CHAPTER EIGHT
CEREMONY AS PEDAGOGY
8.1 CEREMONY IS PEDAGOGY

8.1.1 A Life of Ceremonial Learning

Kunwinjku people associate the pedagogic and social functions of Ceremony. Their broad statements describe Ceremony collectively as the culmination of, and graduation from, hearth pedagogy. Ceremony provides the formal mechanism and the occasion for the recognition of graduates, that is, members of a younger generation well socialised to enter Kunwinjku adult life:

*A young man has some education, and we should have forced him to learn some hard stuff, so he'll have the right ideas. So then later, there's the Wubarr Ceremony, and as they all apply what they've learnt at the ceremonies - Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrhkon, Kunabibi, and then more recently, Yabburlurrrwa. That is what it's about. This is the thing that makes a man or a woman, changes a woman, so she is transformed, or a man is transformed. That's what they do. So it makes the woman a real woman as she works through it and sees it. And for the man, that's what it does, it makes him a real man, that sacred Ceremony of ours. Mardayin, and so on, Wubarr. So that gives us our thinking. It gives us our wisdom so we become real men. As a real man you have wisdom and you can speak well, you can speak wisely. You don't just go on always talking about any old thing. So that's what you should become. Then people will leave it with you. At some time other people might teach so you'll have a second lot of knowledge. They'll see you've got good thinking and they'll say, "Okay, he's a real man. He's educated, he's independent." They'll be watching over your shoulder from a distance, to see if you're okay, they'll keep an eye on you. [JN: 15]*

These statements address the implicit questions shaping discussion throughout this chapter: what is the role of Ceremony in Kunwinjku pedagogy? How do the pedagogies of hearth family and Ceremony work together in socialisation, and toward what end?

8.1.2 Ceremony From a Pedagogic Viewpoint.

Experiences of ceremonial participation have the attributes of a distinct domain in Kunwinjku experiences of pedagogy. Discourse about Ceremony, as well as specific ceremonial procedures, constitute significant semantic fields in Kunwinjku
Chapter Eight Ceremony as Pedagogy

discourse. I have included some Kunwinjku terminology during the discussion. I have often used Ceremony without the article, reflecting Kunwinjku usage, where the experience and participation in a variety of ceremonies are collectively considered as “Ceremony”. The fact that some ceremonies have died out and others have emerged in Kunwinjku experience suggests Ceremony as a singular domain where the transgenerational teaching of the Law is supremely concentrated and recognised regardless of the specific ritual components utilised because they are available.

Ceremony includes a range of formally distinct events in Kunwinjku life, most of which occur in the hearth family and wider public domains. Some are relatively small-scale rituals associated with rites of passage celebrations, such as menarche or funerals whose participants are all drawn from the family’s extended network. Larger scale ceremonies depend on a wider range of participants, including those from other language groups, and are predominantly sacred and or secret, for example Kunabibi or Wubarr. Kunwinjku people regarded the latter kind of Ceremony as a highly significant but subordinate part of ceremonial and pedagogic experiences in life generally. The large-scale events depend for their effectiveness on foundational training in Law, morals, language and social skills taught in the hearth family domain. “Ceremony” always implies a higher degree of formally structured pedagogy than is characteristic of hearth family learning.

Ceremonial pedagogy is significantly more formal than that of the hearth family, reflecting three broad factors:

- The function of Ceremony in formalising educational attainment.
- Teaching in ceremonies faces pragmatic pressures, especially that of limited time, created by the need to co-ordinate and provide logistic support and food for numbers of people temporarily devoted to the ceremonial process.
- In terms of the Kunwinjku relational universe, the distinctiveness of Ceremony is its role in the balance of relational tensions between men and women, between the older men and all others and especially between the hearth family and broader Kunwinjku society. At the individual level, the way a Kunwinjku young adult receives and then surrenders the right to act unilaterally in choosing relational allegiance. These relationships are discussed formally in ceremonial contexts, and their formal shapes are cemented in ceremonial teaching. In other
words, the liminality or dynamic instability of the situation of the young men invokes a protective formality from their mentors.

8.1.3 Limits to a Purely Pedagogic View of Ceremony.
Given the approach agreed upon between researcher and Kunwinjku informants, it may not be surprising that their discussions of Ceremony present this context as one predominantly about pedagogy, or where pedagogical concerns are of primary significance. Whether or not this emphasis is entirely an artefact of the interview process, the interviews almost all spoke about ceremonial issues, and they present strong evidence as to its pedagogic nature. I have argued in chapter five that childhood pedagogy is inextricably part of hearth family life—a function of family relationships. It is analogously impossible to disentangle pedagogy from other aspects of Kunwinjku ceremonial life. Nevertheless the following discussion must be limited to theorisation about Ceremony only in terms of Kunwinjku data, disallowing wider interaction with theories as to the functions of initiation and socialisation events generally, although I have made some references to other research where this has provided useful triangulation. The data presented here is complex, suggesting some Kunwinjku theorisation about Ceremony, and I have intruded some of my own speculation about the social processes behind Ceremony and its pedagogy in Kunwinjku life. At the end of the chapter I will revise the tentative theorisation presented at 6.3 and try to account for Ceremony and the Law in a general theory of Kunwinjku pedagogy.

Kunwinjku people think of the major ceremonies in Kunwinjku life primarily or at least substantially, as teaching venues or teaching events. They are certainly events where pedagogy is a major focus and where the content of that pedagogy is intended to impact the learner’s life very deeply:

• All right. This is about the original Law we Aboriginal people are taught by the previous generation. They teach this to us throughout childhood. They tell us when to go to Wubarr, Mardayin; they take you to Kunabibi, when they take you to Lorrkkon, Murdduh - Yaburlurrwa. They're the ones. They're all the ceremonies. That's where they instructed us. Where they taught us the Law. They teach a child, a young man - a novitiate. They teach him the Law, so he will learn our Aboriginal Law. We learn the Law, the real Law. Maybe, up to that point, he has been just going along without being serious, but then he learns the real Law.
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That "business" - our Aboriginal business, is not done in public. It means the same as "Law"; in fact it possesses the Law.[MM2: 2]

- Yes, they taught me and I learnt. Then the Yabburlurrwa they taught me that too. They taught me and I learnt it. And also Kunabibi. They taught me that so I learnt it too. [JD2: 16]

Ceremony has several attributes of any pedagogic system: curriculum, teaching methodologies, teachers - or at least those in teaching roles, and a process of assessment. Kunwinjku people sometimes analogize ceremony as “school”, and like the secular school its success depends on prior foundational learning, attendance and the motivation of its “students”.

There is some linguistic evidence that Ceremony is frequently thought of as a primarily pedagogic experience (although this should be compared with other linguistic data, at 8.2.2 below, that realises the special nature of the ceremonial venue). Participation in a Ceremony is often spoken of using the normal Kunwinjku verbs associated with teaching and learning in the hearth family or any public environment, without any connotation of receiving a mystical revelation or entering a particular ideational realm. One is taught or shown a Ceremony, or items within a Ceremony, and one responds with attention and participation as directed:

- We watched what they did. Whatever, what they were doing, as they did this or that. And they talked about it too. When they would finish what they had been doing, whatever it was, one of them would explain. ...We would do that, and then in turn he would explain whatever. I used to think, "Ah, that's what I'll do." I understood why they were doing it. I would say, "Please teach me!" So then I would find out, so I know. [JD2: 22]

- Yes. They used to teach us things, like, "That's nadjamun, don't eat that", "Don't touch that thing, it's nadjamun." Or, "When you go into the Ceremony, to see things, that's 'business', as they say in English." "Don't play around with women. Just control yourself." "Also, when you encounter the old men, don't take them lightly - never, because they are your supervisors, they teach you about the business, they initiate you." [AN: 27]

- Yes, they taught me. I would be watching what they did. And they would say, "Why don't you try." So I tried it and did it right, that procedure. But that Langkurr, was too far away, so I didn't try it... But I was taught Kunabibi.
...Right here, in the south end. I saw that Kunabibi here. But that Ceremony. I didn't really get involved with it, you know? They instructed me, they said to me, "Don't just go along...this business we've taught you, means you should just stay in one place. ... When we'd seen that Kunabibi, they withheld things from us. They wouldn't give us things at that stage. ... And then Yaburlurrwa they taught us that too. I saw that Yaburlurrwa. [JD: 23]

- My father taught me the Kunabibi. It was the first Ceremony. Then later on, later, I watched the Yabburlurrwa and the elders took me through that. They taught me about it. GW: 3-4]

- When they taught me at the Ceremony, I didn't do anything except, I just watched them. That was all. And, they really did say to me there, "You should do this. Watch those other ladies as they do it, and you do the same thing."...And then when they would explain the Law, like rules and Laws, well, I learned all that and I kept on following it. I kept on with what the ceremonies, the Laws and rules mean. That's all. [JU: 50]

8.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF CEREMONY IN KUNWINJKU LIFE

8.2.1 Terminology and Discourse about Ceremony

As they grow up, Kunwinjku children are taught the linguistic protocols framing what can be discussed in public including strict expectations about references to Ceremony. Kunwinjku ceremonial terminology reflects a complex experience broadly divisible into public versus restricted domains. Kunkamak is a broad term for any formal gathering of people for a formal event. Most of these are public and open to discussion by children: The first ceremonial or ritual term young children use is mulil. In unmarked adult Kunwinjku this means a public family celebration, a feast or party. Children extend this, reflecting a connotation of abundance, converting the noun to adjective, to mean “a lot of” something, for example, mulil djurra – a lot of books. In earlier Kunwinjku experience a sudden supply of food may well have been the only necessary justification for a feast. Mulil often refers to the feasting associated with Mamurrung (see below) or other public events.

8.2.2 Relational Terminology Associated with Ceremony

A young man’s participation in Ceremony involved major realignments in his relationships, particularly with women in his family, reflecting the significance of Ceremony in the construction of Kunwinjku gender and identity. To some extent the
special kinship terms used also located these young men in a pedagogic process. Each Ceremony had particular terms.

For example, from the start of his participation in either Kunabibi or Yabburlurrwa, young men are referred to and addressed as Kurlawuddu by their mothers and sisters who will use this word instead of names or other titles until, at least in some families, the men have completed a second or third Ceremony, or as is most usual in the present day, have married. As the young men progress through the available ceremonies they may be more specifically addressed and referred to as Layhkurrrngu and Limbidj (or Nakomdudj) during their Mardayin and Wubarr participations respectively. Children of say 12 are expected to know and use these terms appropriately. In section 8.2.4 below I will discuss this anticipated progression through the various ceremonies.

Kunwinjku speakers utilise formal euphemism in a number of contexts, including the ceremonial. Through puberty and as young adults, Kunwinjku people build up a specialised lexicon enabling public discourse about ceremonies whether public or restricted, giving weight to both the alterity and seriousness of the subject. Djamun can be translated as “sacred”, and is associated with the power to enforce a moral code or the Law. This can be applied to ceremonial places (kubolkdjamun) of even concepts or procedures (kundjamun or mandjamun). Kunwinjku also nowadays use djamun as the noun for “police”, conceding them the socio-legal authority associated with Ceremony.

Examples of specialised lexicon reflect the ceremonial domain’s separation from daily normalcy: people don’t simply “go to”, or attend or “do” ceremonies. Participants are said to have “gone up into” (bidbom) a Ceremony, and their fathers may say they have sent or taken them “up” (bidbuyhweng); ceremonies are located karrkad – “up there”, “at the high place”; people “enter” or “go inside” Ceremony (ngimeng). One doesn’t simply finish or complete a Ceremony: a specific verb, wadmeng, is preferred.

8.2.3 Pedagogic Terminology and Analogies with “School”

Some of the ceremonially specific lexicon reflects a pedagogic focus. The usual verb to teach (bukkang or bukkabukkang) is replaced, without changing the meaning, by kombom in discussing Mardayin and Wubarr ceremonies (and see discussion below on komkerrnge). Learning or teaching in Ceremony sometimes uses special terms based on mankarre – the Law, reflecting the strong association between Ceremony
and Law discussed in detail at 9.1 and 9.2. For example karrebukkang – “taught the Law” replaces the unmarked bukkabukkang - “taught”. AN (25) describes how his children learnt or participated in Ceremony: benekarrekang – literally, “they (2) took the Law”. Similarly, a man who has seen two ceremonies is nakarrebokenh- literally “a man with two Laws”. This extends to nakarrewern – (literally, “a man with many Laws”) - someone who has seen many ceremonies.

The English word “business” has been used for generations by Kunwinjku people to refer to Ceremony, probably borrowed from whichever Balanda first encountered the practice and provided this term. The pedagogic function of Ceremony is revealed indirectly by Kunwinjku usage of the English word “school”. Kunwinjku manage their experience of the Balanda world by frequent discussion of analogous features (and see 9.7.3) and issues of hierarchy. “School” is applied analogously to a range of learning processes in Kunwinjku life. Ceremony is “like school” on a number of grounds. Pre-eminently, it is a venue for teaching:

- *That's the thing that schools us. English says "school". We teach you when you watch Kunabibi. That's what happens, we take you and we teach you at the Ceremony as we do all those many different things.* [MM: 34]

- *Well those ceremonies are just like school. It's like school when we explain things to them, or they teach us so we know what to do now. But those older ceremonies are just like school. And that one too, that Kunabibi is the same, it's like school too. We teach the young men. The women on their part teach each other what to do. And that too, in the same way, is just like school.* [TN: 3-4]

MM extends this thinking to compare ceremonial teachers, or perhaps ceremonies as personified teachers, with school teachers:

*So you kids, you young men, you listen to that Law. Listen to that Law so you'll know it. They'll teach you the Law. They're the ones I've named - those ceremonies: Kunabibi, Mardayin, Wubarr, Lorrkkon, Yaburlurruwa - that business holds the Law so you (s) can know it. That's the same as when, you know, Balanda says "teaching", or "teacher". He comes and teaches you and you (pl) write things - so then you know how to write. So you learn. You can go ahead like an adult, a grown man. A child learns the Law at school, then he goes to high school and learns the more important Law.* [MM2: 3]

RN(4) hints that the point of comparison is in the significant devotion of a long block of time to Ceremony, paralleling the large time demands of school.
ED compares ceremonial learning of the Law with another aspect of her childhood experience of the Balanda world mediated through the missionaries - the learning the Ten Commandments, suggesting an analogous significance or status, or perhaps of moral content and behavioural intention:

“They used to teach them, for example, that Duwa (moiety) stuff which was like teaching them the Ten Commandments - it's the same as that kind of Law. They used to teach the young men so they came out of it they wouldn't just muck around any more or not take things seriously." [ED: 5]

8.2.4 Variability in Kunwinjku Ceremonial Experience

Interviews reveal a range of experiences of Ceremony. Some informants had attended several different ceremonies [JD: 21; MM: 20-22] where others, particularly younger people, have only been involved in one [PS: 40]. At the time of his interview, GW was engaged in a strategic project to import and establish the Yabburlurarwa in Kunwinjku country. TN participated in all the major ceremonies as a younger man but has never sponsored one at his outstation [TN: 9].

Kunwinjku individuals (and their families) often reveal a strong preference for certain ceremonies and rituals over others. (See notes at 8.2.5 below on Kunabibi). Even within the extended family the choice of ritual procedure is contested. For example, during the last decade there has been sometimes very heated discussions in planning funerals regarding what kinds of rituals should be performed and by whom. Some families disallow bungkul, manyardi or mandurle (public but religious performances of traditional songs and dances), preferring newly developed Christian rituals. Other families will accept and organise both. (This picture becomes more complicated when Balanda people take a role in planning and funding Kunwinjku events, sometimes insisting on the exclusion or inclusion of procedures reflecting their own ideational positions, as was the case at Bill Neidji’s funeral at Cannon Hill in 2002.)

Clans or individuals associate themselves with particular ceremonies as patrons or owners or performers. The expression of this preference, combined with the high level of tactical planning and organisation required, means that ceremonies are held only when circumstances allow and people are available. In practice this means that Kunwinjku people had uneven access to ceremonies. Overall these factors operated to provide a range of ceremonies, either in Kunwinjku country, or in adjacent language groups which people could choose to attend. So some families
articulated strong views on the order in which their young should experience ceremonies. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s I noticed a general agreement among people at Oenpelli: Kunabibi should be the first Ceremony experienced, then Mardayin and then Wubarr. The Berndts provide useful triangulation here from their fieldwork up to the late 1960s. They have charted and described the network of ceremonial experiences expected to constitute a young man’s “career” through a sequence of ceremonies, up to his graduation, which would allow him to marry (Berndt, 1970, pp. 126-128). I will discuss at 8.9 below the way in which time pressures acted against this kind of pedagogic syllabus or pathway. Certainly the sequence had changed even by the late 1970s due to earlier marriage ages for men, and by the general disruption by Balanda pressures. (See my notes on Kunabibi in the following list.)

8.2.5 A Very Short Catalogue of Ceremonial Experiences

Kunwinjku people experience many ceremonial events and processes, from large scale ceremonies where Aboriginal, but non-Kunwinjku, experts and other participants may be involved and there is intense pedagogic activity, to much more intimate, family rituals, such as the blessing of children where pedagogy is simply a necessary strand of the activity. Funerals and reconciliation procedures are at an intermediate level of social complexity and do not automatically involve formal pedagogic functions, though adults are often involved at these events in providing commentary and explanation to children. The following is a list of those ceremonial events or processes discussed by informants. Where different spellings and even pronunciations have emerged, these variations are noted.

I have mostly limited my commentary to issues of pedagogy unless other sources have provided useful triangulation. I have omitted a few because I haven’t seen these and informants didn’t mention them (Karrbarrda for example). The following list (in alphabetical order) contains both sacred/restricted events and those that occur in the hearth family domain. Most of these processes or events have been experienced by the majority of middle aged Kunwinjku people, or in the cases noted, have been described to them by their elders. I have noted my own involvement in some.

Burangkal
MM was “taught” this Ceremony but says it is now extinct [MM: 2, 4].

Djarnbinj (Body Painting)
Body painting in one or another form, was a feature of some ceremonies, and was sometimes used metonymically for ceremonial experience [MM: 32]. In the Mardayin, the required body decoration (rarrk) is applied (rarrkweng) with explicit instruction given to the novitiate about its function [TN: 31]. This act could be described as a relational sacrament where the physical act of painting effects status transformation, and reflects personal promotion by the mentoring elders. In the Kunabibi this body painting is a personal relational act, so that a failure to respond rightly to ceremonial learning is a personal as much as a procedural offence, as MM complains:

_We come (to the Kunabibi) and body paint you (ngundidjarnbinjbun). Then in a few days time, you forget it!_ [MM: 32]

The designs were applied under the general supervision of knowledgeable people, but only put onto the body by someone in the highly specified ware relationship with the novitiate [JU: 56]. This act is both formal and intimate, with a great deal of care and discussion around the process, usually with the recipient lying on his back. My own experience of being painted (for the Wubarr Ceremony) was very moving, especially the concern shown to ensure my comfort, and about the precision and correctness of the facial decoration required. GN implies the body painting as a highly visible public signal of progress through a ceremonial process – in this case [GN: 19] the end of the body painted phase allows the relaxation of food taboos.

**Kunabibi**

Before the Balanda impact, it is possible that ceremonies may well have been the most significant external influence on the Kunwinjku universe of ideas. The Kunabibi has been a relatively recent arrival in the Kunwinjku domain, and there is still some resentment about its impact [TN: 9] despite the Berndts’ statement that “its importance is not questioned” (1970, p.139). They also conceded however, (p. 128) that the Kunabibi “remains peripheral to (Kunwinjku) religious orientation”. MM in fact criticised it as redundant:

_Lorrkkon. To start with I saw that Wubarr. Then later Mardayin, then later on Lorrkkon. Those were the ones. Now these ones, Kunabibi, Yabburlurrwa, they've only arrived recently. Kunabibi arrived in 1955 -that one has only come recently. From different places in the south they brought it as the Law. But it (the Law) was already here: Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrkon_[MM2:20]
MM provides a clue here as to the relationship between the Law and particular ceremonies, implying that the Law cannot be simply located in particular ceremonies. Rather, individual families used their preferred ceremonial venues to teach the Law. MM’s father, and father’s father advised him to focus on the Wubarr, rather than pay attention to Kunabibi [MM2: 29]. He has often refused to attend the final, public, phase of the Kunabibi Ceremony, but in more recent years he appears to have accepted its role in Kunwinjku life as one of the few remaining venues for teaching young men the Law:

So then it is teaching us guiding us, as for example the Kunabibi Ceremony going on at present. You know all about it, you children, you young men. That's the one. That's the thing by which we constrain you. We do that when you are going wrong. "That's not the right way", but you must live straight. Kunabibi, Mardayin, Wubarr, they are all the same, Lorrkkon, Burangkal. Well, we teach you what is excellent. Don't you go a different way and lose the Law…[MM: 4]

MM’s apparent dissonance about Kunabibi reflects the complicated nature of Kunwinjku allegiance to ceremonies. The fact that certain families prefer certain ceremonies despite general agreement about the intentions of Ceremony as whole across families, suggest Ceremony as a stage in pedagogy, where whichever ceremonial practice was preferred or available would provide a platform. Ceremony was not about Ceremony, so its diversity may not have been reflected multiple curricula so much as the normal variation in human performance, or perhaps the normal heterogeneity in finding particular means to a generally agreed end. In fact family preferences would simply reinforce the power of the hearth family in socialisation by specifying in what way “Ceremony”, rather than a particular Ceremony, would be utilised.

GW (3) confirms the view among Kunwinjku people that by the 1970s Kunabibi was regarded as the first major Ceremony for young adults, who would then in due course proceed to others as they were available to particular families. This sequence may have developed simply because the Kunabibi was held within walking distance of Kunbarllanjnjja and the logistics of recruiting novitiates, especially as this was often done by force, was simpler. By the late 1970s Kunwinjku people associated Kunabibi with sexual misconduct and abuse of women, at least around its periphery, and in the last two decades it has only been held in other locations remote from Kunbarllanjnjja, with corresponding drop in attendance. Berndt
(1951b, pp 204-5) notes missionary opposition to the introduction of this Ceremony, probably based on the perceived association with the sort of sexual abuse that Berndt himself acknowledged as a possibility (1951, p. 210). Regardless of how Kunabibi was perceived, it certainly survived its importation to the Kunwinjku world and is now associated generally with part of the process of learning mandated for young Kunwinjku. AN describes his children’s involvement from a pedagogic viewpoint:

Yes. About ceremonies. I showed them one, sorry, two. They know two ceremonies. Kunabibi - they’ve been trained in that one (kabenekarrekan), and the Yabburlurrwa Ceremony. That's all. The other ones they haven't seen. [AN: 25]

Kunabibi is nowadays generally remembered in pedagogic terms [JD: 23] GW’s experience is typical of the present middle-aged generation of Kunwinjku men:

When I turned thirteen... I went to that, and got that education. That was because they really taught us - my father and his father taught me there. "This business really disciplines you. Don't go and just muck around any more!", they told me. That was at the Kunabibi...That was the one I saw first. [GW:15]

It is the Ceremony most likely to have been attended when, as is the case for many Kunwinjku people, they have only attended one. GN, JN and BG spoke about their attendance at the parallel women’s strand of the Kunabibi [BG: 33; JN: 19-21], but only GN describes any pedagogic detail [GN: 19]. (See discussion of gender in hearth pedagogy at 6.1.6.) I participated as an adult rather than a novitiate, in two of the last Kunabibi ceremonies held adjacent to Oenpelli in 1977 and 1978. Altman (1987, p.210) reported a Kunabibi was held near Oenpelli in 1980.

Kunborlidj / Kunbulidj (Cicatrisation)

The practice of kunborlidj (cicatrisation of the upper arms, abdomen and chest with patterns of long and short cuts) had begun to fall into disuse in Kunbarllanjnja in 1977 when I was cicatrised by the preferred practitioner within the family - my Mamam, my father’s father-in-Law. The process was informal and there was no pedagogic component, although some informal advice was given me. Other men my age had similar experiences of cicatrisation on a voluntary and informal basis around this time. The practice has almost completely ceased in the last twenty years in and around Kunbarllanjnja.
Men older than I am, that is who were born before 1950, are often extensively cicatrised with multiple horizontal cuts over the abdomen and vertically on the upper arms, but it is only occasionally that anyone under fifty is seen with kunburlidj. No one has offered me an explanation of this change in practice. The only clue is that Kunwinjku people regard the practice as more decorative than of formal significance, with some people making an exception to this in regard to the designs of short lines to the chest which were applied in a minor Ceremony whose name no one is now able to supply.

**Kunj Murrng**

TN (7) remembers the *Kunj Murrng* (Literally “Kangaroo Bones”) procedures from his youth, implying some pedagogic content but without giving details. He suggests this Ceremony is extinct. Its procedures are strikingly similar to some of the mortuary processes of the *Lorrhkon*.

**Langkurr**

JD recalls being “taught” this Ceremony:

> Lots of different people taught me. They taught all those different ceremonies they have there in the south. They taught me Langkurr. I saw lots of them. They used to teach me and I would watch them. I watched what they did, that Ceremony. They gave me Langkurr. I did that one. [JD: 21]

**Lanjborl (Circumcision)**

Circumcision is one of the ceremonial episodes in Kunwinjku life profoundly impacted by *Balanda*. The medicalisation of circumcision has involved a shift away from *Bininj* practitioners to hospital-based procedures, usually supervised, and sometimes even organised, by *Balanda* medical staff. Whenever the procedure is offered by a visiting surgeon, there is always a strong interest from young men and mothers with infant sons. In 1980 I was teaching the class of teenage boys at the school when Dr Hargreaves initiated this process for the first time. I visited the hospital after the procedures were done all on one day and found more than a dozen young men lying on blankets and mattresses, some sedated, after the procedure. They had been very enthusiastic to have the procedure done despite widespread complaints from adults older than their parents that the process should not be performed without appropriate songs and teaching. The hospital has hosted less well supported interventions in subsequent years with an older Aboriginal man assisting. At least
one of these episodes was photographed by Balanda staff, and the Aboriginal man was not Kunwinjku.

Within the living memory of older Kunwinjku people the Lanjborl Ceremony was the venue for circumcision, although it had other functions. It is said that typically two men called by the novitiate Nakurrng (mother’s father, or wife’s mother’s brother) would come and take the young man for this Ceremony, closing his eyes as they went. These men were said to be Lanjborl benemarneyonginj - “they were there on the occasion of his circumcision”. There is evidence that Lanjborl had a pedagogic as well as ritual function:

...the young men, for example when they circumcised them, when they made those young men, when they cut them, that was just like school. (Now) the doctor comes and does it, cuts the young man [TN: 5].

Unlike the situation in some other language groups in Aboriginal Australia, there is no inhibition among Kunwinjku adults of either gender in discussing circumcision publicly or using the common terminology: birrilakayenwong: “they circumcised him”, or nalakkayen – “he is circumcised”. Perhaps this publicly acceptable usage, and the ready access Balanda have had to the Ceremony, both reflect its relative unimportance in the pre-contact Kunwinjku ceremonial syllabus. As in the case of the Kunabibi, some Kunwinjku people claim circumcision was a relatively recent import to their society.

Lorrhkon / Lorrikon

TN remembers the rigorous instruction and even dangerous procedures involved in this mortuary rite, and in other ceremonies [TN: 19-23]. Procedural failure in the Lorrhkon was viewed as the cause of sickness [TN: 12]. The Berndts (1970) listed this as one of the major Kunwinjku ceremonies (p.143), and they also imply their own role in trying to revive its performance at nearby Croker Island for the purpose of filming (p.203). They also mention (p.125) its other function as an initiation rite which had fallen into disuse even by the 1950s and imply some criticism of the Oenpelli community for allowing its demise (p. 125).

Manginjdjarrkku

This hearth family Ceremony without male involvement marks menarche, and was still practised in some families as recently as 2004. The young woman at menarche is provided with alternative, specially constructed or at least secluded, accommodation where she lives for several weeks, at least part of each day with some older women
who provide protection and specific teaching. The process climaxes after several weeks, with the girl appearing publicly, dressed in a specially made set of decorations.

The gender separation involved in this procedure is formal but non-sacred and derives from the what is considered the appropriate and usual reticence of well mannered males (nawu birrimenmak) in regard to women’s’ personal matters. Historically this Ceremony may have been a ritualised protective measure in response to the thinking of some Western Arnhem men who associating menarche with sexual availability, as described by Berndt (1976, pp. 49ff). The Berndts discuss the process of ritual behaviour at menarche generally but they don’t name this Ceremony.

Mankindjek (Cheeky Yam)

TN (19) confirms the general view of Kunwinjku people that this now extinct Ceremony was quite dangerous to novitiates. For example, people remember hearing of the way novitiates were kept inside a grass shelter that was set on fire. TN doesn’t give any detail about its pedagogy or make clear whether he participated or is simply passing on what he has been told. R and C Berndt pass on what they imply was information collected in 1914 (R and C Berndt, 1970, pp 132-133) probably because this Ceremony seems to have died out before their field work in the late 1940s (p.125). (It is not impossible that the Ceremony was moved to avoid scrutiny, but this is purely speculative, based on the Kunwinjku perceptions of, and apprehensions about, even well-intended Balanda attention in other spheres).

Mardayin / Marrayin and Marradjirri

Mardayin was last held close to Kunbarllanjnja in the late 1970s when I sat as an observer with the older men who were managing it, and discussing its demise. It still has a significant place in remembered Kunwinjku pedagogy. MM “explained” (marneyolyolmeng) the Mardayin to his two sons [MM2: 89]. He describes it as one of the core ceremonies that “teach” and give direction to young men [MM: 28]. JN links Mardayin with the other major ceremonies as the things that “make a man or woman” [JN: 15]. TN describes Mardayin and Wubarr as “like school” [TN: 3] and refers to the harsh physical punishment associated with the Mardayin’s pedagogy [TN: 31].

The Marradjirri was the process of formal invocation of the Mardayin and involved a complex ceremonial object constructed and sent (sometimes by aircraft)
to another language group, where it was dismantled in a formal way, though in public view, and led to an agreement about staging the Ceremony.

**Mamurrung / Mammarrung and Formal Marriage**

Together with the warming Ceremony (*Wurdyaw birrirungi*, mentioned below) *Mammurrung* was one of the most significant ritual events for young children, although the child would have been too young (typically under five years) to fully appreciate the process. *Mammurrung* was essentially a family celebration in which distant relatives and other people with specialist skills in dancing took part, and marked the survival of the infant by formalising his or her identity, and in the case of females marked the prospect of her being available for preliminary negotiations towards a promised marriage. *Mamurrung* was the most widely known public Ceremony but is being displaced in some families by self-consciously *Balanda* style birthday parties with cakes, candles and presents. Over the last decade, the patterns of marriage have also changed.

Marriages and occasionally arranged divorces are still negotiated, or at least canvassed, by a range of family members in Kunwinjku life. In most families, a girl is promised to a man (*bimarneberrebrom*) often not long after birth, but in the present day will usually become pregnant in her early teens to her own choice of partners. Often this first relationship will not survive, and the girl may then marry someone who had been promised, who will then decide whether to adopt the child. The pattern is in flux however, with separations at any stage of marriage now more common that even a decade ago. Over the last three decades the age difference between men and women at marriage has reduced, reflecting perhaps the loss of a ceremonial career system employing young men, and the weakening of Kunwinjku gerontocratic authority generally. The process is circular, since young men with wives and children are less likely to submerge themselves in a group of young bachelors for protracted ceremonial instruction. These changes reflect some of the continuous flux of adjustment that characterises present day Kunwinjku life, discussed in chapters two and fourteen. There is however some continuity of Kunwinjku social control despite its process of re-construction. Even younger Kunwinjku adults can still describe the preferred kinship pattern for selecting promised wives, and in some families, despite marriage of non-promised partners, in the majority of cases these partners are selected from accepted clan alliances and certainly almost always from the appropriate skin groupings. In a sense, the system
of promising women in marriage has developed into a semi-formal but highly valued process of negotiation, still dependent upon underlying principles of Kunwinjku sociality.

The system where future marriages could be negotiated, and its presently developing system of negotiations, serve the general principle of Kunyurrmî, which can be roughly glossed as “reciprocity”. Kunyurrmî is cited as the motivation for marriage alliances between clans, or parts of the same clan. The term is sometimes used in general Kunwinjku when the concept of mutual benefit or association is in view in other contexts. An extension of the kunyurrmî principle in promised marriage negotiations was that the sharing of marriage partners ought to be between groups with prior grounds for relationship – either an existing marriage or through geography or an economic relationship. It typically involved the family beyond the hearth, but its nature meant that interactions were with a known, distantly related groups. So the circle of Kunwinjku social relationships extended outwards only in managed stages. Along with more formal ceremonies like the Kunabibi, Mammurrung had the potential to bring new participants and therefore knowledge into the Kunwinjku universe.

The complexity of the articulation between Kunwinjku life generally and Ceremony, and between pedagogic and social aspects of socialisation are illustrated here. This process of formalised relationships between families through marriage was carried out outside the zone of formal Ceremony through discussion between elders of both families, who may well have been of the same patri-clan, although in earlier times the marriage would not have proceeded until the man completed the generally expected ceremonial experiences.

Morak

Kunwinjku people regard Morak as the most dangerous of the now extinct ceremonies remembered by their ancestors, for example MM2 (22) says it had died out when he was a child. It was received from the language groups who lived in the Kunbarllanjja area before the Kunwinjku. It was held at Manjdjawardbalamirrya and was associated with the Uningank, Kakudju and Barrkid clans. People say this was very strict, and young men were forced to do some dangerous and painful things. The death penalty was applied to those who didn’t perform properly. TN took part in Morak but withdrew because of pressure of his job in the buffalo industry (TN: 17).
TN described some of the elaborate and dangerous pedagogic process he heard about as a young man:

Now that Morak was very demanding. Yes, Morak was hard. They took the young men into the Ceremony so they could teach them. They used to climb a tree close to the river. Close to it, they used climb it, a lot of them, ten or maybe twenty young men. Then they would chop the tree down under them so they all would fall into the river. They would all be there in the water. It didn't matter if they lived or died. [TN: 18]

Midjdjarn

This Ceremony has a spectacular public component, but was not mentioned in the interviews despite its strong links to JN and his family. It was last seen by Kunwinjku people when it was performed, possibly at the invitation of visiting anthropologists, in Kunbarllanjnja in the late 1970s.

Murdduh

MM saw this Ceremony but gives no detail [MM2: 27]. Some Kunwinjku people equate this with Yaburlurrwa.

Wolngwongkenh (Bu birriwolngwong - “they were ‘smoking’ someone”)

Both water and smoke are used in several ritualistic ways in Kunwinjku life, almost all within the hearth family context, and accompanied by special instructions to the children involved.

Informants didn’t cite mortuary procedures in their discussion of pedagogy, and I discuss them only in a limited way, showing the nature of public ritual experienced in the hearth family environment, even though in the case of interments and mortuary rites generally, people outside the family and even the language group may be involved. Post interment procedures (mardarda) usually involve ritualised “washing” (kabindiwurlebke) of all participants and family members, including children. Participants are wet down (usually with a hose if available) and “smoked” (kabindiwolngwon) by wafting over them thick smoke from smouldering green vegetation in a specially prepared fire. A separate process, accompanied by singing, drone pipe and clapsticks brings the source of smoke into buildings (birrirurrkwolngwong) recently frequented by the deceased. Ceremonially applied markings (usually a horizontal line of mud smeared on by hand) around the outside of buildings and trees and other objects marking a perimeter, delineate other places associated with the deceased and render them re-usable (birribolkwolngwong bu
“They smoked the place to make it ritually safe”). Mortuary procedures are not carried out with any organised teaching component, but because of ideological differences between Christian and non-Christian Kunwinjku, the operations have been widely discussed, along with discussion on the use of flags and other funereal paraphernalia recently imported to Kunwinjku society from Eastern Arnhem Land. Families may differ on the disposal of items owned by the deceased. In any case, some formal viewpoint on the process is taught informally to children within a family. The pedagogy surrounding these events, as in most of everyday life, is located in general adult interaction with children curious to know the what and why or a new and/or frightening activity. More terminology involved in post-mortem rituals has been presented in the glossary.

**Wurdyaw birrirungi (They warmed the child)**

“Warming”, along with the Mamurrung, was one of the two hearth family ceremonies relating to children in infancy, where family elders, the family’s “Old People”, acted to ensure the development of a child’s social and moral attitudes. These “warming” ceremonies were also designed to enhance a child’s teachability or possibly his or her ability to learn:

*SE:* Yes. Do...Why is it that some children learn quickly, and others may take a long time to learn?

*P:* According to our Aboriginal way, it's maybe that they ceremonially warm the child with fire, they warm him with fire, they waft smoke over him, so he'll be all right. For that reason they would know things and learn quickly. Some others, if they don't warm them with the fire, it's as if they haven't any ideas at all. Their mind just works very slowly, and he'll grow up slowly. I mean, you know how they'll look at things, I mean a vehicle or a tape (recorder) or a bicycle, and you know they'll want that, and they'll talk themselves into buying it, but when it breaks they can't fix it. So they have a problem. [PS: 140-141]

ED has described this process in detail. Depending on the age of the child, the Ceremony could be experienced as primarily pedagogic or as a ritual blessing. Both elements were present:

*And there's another interesting thing. When a child was very small or just a baby growing up, The Old People used to get them and take them to where they had a fire, and they would put them there and "smoke" them, and then The Old...*
People would warm the children's hands in the fire and say to them, "We're warming your hands and smoking your hands like this so you won't go looking for things to steal from other people, your mother, your father, your mother's mother, father's mother, father's father, mother's father, your Makkah." And then they would warm the child's mouth, and they would say, "Don't swear at other people anywhere - when there is a group of people there, don't swear at them. And don't gossip about people, for example if they are having an affair. You don't spread stories about a man and woman having an affair."

And sometimes they would then warm their ears. They would smoke their ears saying to them, "You should listen carefully but not hear any bad stories. Just listen to good things. And listen to us and respond when we call out to you." And they would warm the children's chests so they wouldn't cry for their mother and father when they went off a long way hunting - they would just wait for them. So they used to "warm" them like that so the child would be good as he grew up. He wouldn't be crying for his mother and father when they went off on their own, hunting. [ED:6-7]

Wubarr / Ubarr

Wubarr was the pre-eminently significant Ceremony for Kunwinjku, Maung, Kunbarlang and Yiwaddja people, all to the north of Oenpelli, although Berndt (1970, p.128) claims it had been held quite close to Oenpelli. People associated with it describe it as the “mother” (manbadjan) Ceremony, meaning either it is the major Ceremony, or the Ceremony from which other things issue or derive, in this case the Law. MM and TN have both described some aspects of its pedagogy.

MM began a lifelong involvement with Wubarr as a teenager when his father’s fathers sent him [MM2: 29]. His mother’s uncle, Midjawmidjaw, was the last living “boss” of this Ceremony and passed away in 1980. (Wubarr has no specific term for its man in charge, so we had to refer to him as nawu kawohrnan – “the one in charge”). I took part in the last complete Wubarr, held at Wurlwunj outstation in 1978 where I was declared by Midjawmidjaw, and the other men who were in charge under him, to be an adult participant and was therefore able to observe the process of teaching the younger men. TN remembers the event and notes that all the men capable of running this Ceremony have died [TN: 33-34].

Yabburlurrwa / Yaburlurrwa / Djaburlurrwa etc. etc.
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MM experienced this Ceremony away from Kunbarllaninja [MM2: 27]. TN regards *Yaburlurrwa* as a novelty to Kunwinjku area [TN: 16,34]. During the 1990s GW had an entrepreneurial role in attempting to establish the *Yabburlurrwa* in the Kunwinjku community [GW: 25]. Consequently his comments about the methodology and ideology of its pedagogic practice are particularly valuable (see for example 8.3.3 and 8.4.2 below).

8.3 THE HEARTH FAMILY AND CEREMONY

8.3.1 How the Hearth Family Articulates with Ceremonial Pedagogy

The relationship between the pedagogy of the hearth family and the Ceremony is a complex zone of relational tensions, as its novitiate participants assume agency in their alliances with the range of sub groups that constitute Kunwinjku life. There is also an articulation that needs to be made by participants, linking their previous learning with ceremonial content by owning this prior learning of Law and committing to a lifestyle based upon it. Ceremonial experience does not necessarily add much to the content of the Law already learnt, but acts to reinforce, authorise and valorise it, forcing a re-orientation on the part of the learner towards all the content of his prior socialisation.

The content of ceremonial teaching is often spoken of simply as Law (*mankarre*) – subsuming language, moral code, lifestyle skills and ideational knowledge, all of which are continuous strands of learning across home and Ceremony (see 8.1). The hearth family has the strategic role, with its teaching over the years of childhood seen as the essential pre-requisite to effective ceremonial participation. Family members evaluate a child’s readiness for Ceremony and exercise significant control over whether and when the child becomes involved in a particular Ceremony, or any Ceremony, although a child also has considerable power to act unilaterally. During the Ceremony, the hearth family members provide relational scaffolding for their young as participants. Beyond the initial ceremonial experiences, the hearth family has a crucial role in implementing ceremonial restrictions and more broadly by mentoring the young adult into the mature moral behaviours exhorted in Ceremony. Although Ceremony is contingent upon and continuous with hearth pedagogy, it has the crucial additional pedagogic functions of formalising, evaluating and graduating its participants as fully socialised Kunwinjku adults.
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8.3.2 Ceremony Depends on the Hearth Family’s Sending and Supporting Roles.

The interaction between hearth and ceremonial pedagogies makes conscious and powerful demands on the family. Fathers take responsibility to “show” their children Ceremony, to organise their attendance [JD2: 16-18]. Mothers and other relatives are also under considerable pressure to “send” or accompany children to Ceremony. Almost always however, the families make this decision on their own terms. The hearth family determines which ceremonies they will support or avoid. R, for example, plans to send her sisters’ sons, her Morlah, to ceremonies generally, but will not send them to Wubarr [RN: 170].

MM in speaking of his role as teacher to his grandchildren reveals the fundamental role of the hearth family in preparing children for ceremonial participation and supporting them as graduates of Ceremony:

My grandchildren (your nieces and nephews) who I think are going to school a bit, I'm explaining things to them. This was a few days ago. N___ - her, and her sister H___, I was explaining to those two a few days ago. I was explaining to those children, I said to them, "Don't just keep going along (in life). You must listen to this Law here first." And for example, I'm explaining things to your nephew, my grandson, D___. He goes to school and when he comes back I tell him things. "I'm explaining this to you so you will get this Law of ours. You've seen the Kunabibi Ceremony," I said to him, "And we went to that Yabburlurrwa and saw that business. That business will take you the straight way. Not for nothing they teach us that Law, that business. They teach us that business, that Law, and it takes you along properly. How will you go? What's your direction? It will explain what is right. But before that you should get hold of the ordinary everyday things the men explain to you - your father, your mother's father, your mother. What you've talked about at home. So you can then go to the Ceremony and look at it and understand all that Law. Then after that you can go along, you can go along, you can go along with that Balanda (business), and then, in your turn, you will know two ways, you'll get them."

[MM2: 58]

8.3.3 Hearth Family Role in Teaching and Scaffolding Learning at Ceremony

Ceremony was thought of as an extension of the hearth family pedagogy. This connection was partly relational, since, although Ceremony usually meant some
mixing with people outside the Kunwinjku social matrix, most of the teaching was done by people in an existing kinship relationship with the novitiate, often a relative from his or her hearth family:

- *Yabburlurrwa… we teach them and Kunabibi, and also they're teaching some Mardayin. Lorrkkon, only a little while ago they had that, when I was young. My father taught me the Kunabibi. It was the first Ceremony. Then later on, later, I watched the Yabburlurrwa and the elders took me through that. They taught me about it.* [GW: 3]

- *So then what is in our minds we can put into their minds as we speak to them, putting it into their thinking, their minds, their wills, their hearts. So a child will become useful and work for us. And he can go whichever way he likes. And I can teach him ceremonially over the years here. So he'll know about Balanda business, and about his own black culture, his country, his home, the ceremonies of country he'll look after. Then Aboriginal people will be able to look after themselves as they become adults among us....That's how I see things in regard to the Law. I'm thinking about how I was raised by my elders, and how they taught me.* [JN: 57]

Within the complex of Kunwinjku kinship subsystems the *ware* relationship has significance both within and outside ceremonies. The relationship is a special form of the brother-in-Law (*kakkali*) dyad where both men will take care of each other’s personal needs if necessary. For example, a man or woman will have his or her hair cut, or other bodily interventions, only by one of a very small group in this highly specific relationship. In ceremonial contexts, *ware* men will be present to support a novitiate (*bimarnewareyoy* – “he was there as his *ware*”). A ceremonial participant is thereby always surrounded by known and trusted people ameliorating some of the more frightening or uncertain aspects of the experience discussed in 8.7 below.

The hearth family role in enforcing and, on the mother’s part, sharing in, ceremonial food restrictions is fundamental to the possibility of iconic ceremonial discipline producing its designed pedagogic outcomes. See 8.7.3 below.

**8.3.4 The Hearth Family Assesses a Child’s Readiness for Ceremonial Learning.**

Age or developmental readiness of potential candidates is an issue of concern to Kunwinjku parents and ceremonial leaders. The fundamental constraint in readiness is the capacity of the child to move towards adult behaviour [GW: 62]. In other
words, age is not the only issue involved. Nevertheless, some informants associated ceremonial readiness with a chronological age range:

*The time came and I had almost grown up, I was educated (kukmayali). This doesn't happen when you're just a young boy, when they're just starting to be a young men, I mean a very young teenager, what would they say in English? 14 or 15 years old. Sixteen. But Aboriginal people would still call them yawurrinj - that sort of thing, getting closer to being young men. That's what we say. White people would say, "He's becoming an adult." [JN: 14]*

JN implies that the age range is not arbitrary but reflects the expectation that by this age the educational foundations would have been in place. This implies a responsibility on the hearth family to provide this preparation:

*A young man has some education (mayali), and we should have forced him to learn some hard stuff, so he'll have the right ideas. So then later, there's the Wubarr Ceremony, and as they all apply what they've learnt at the ceremonies - Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrrkon, Kunabibi, and then more recently, Yabburlurrwa. [JN:15]*

The concept of readiness for ceremonial experience is canvassed within families who assess this readiness in terms of the child’s educational experience, age and attitudes:

*When they grow up, yes. They can see them. They can see the Kunabibi, Yabburlurrwa, Lorrrkon, Mardayin. When they are becoming fully adult. While they are still small, we (inc) won't send them up. We'll (inc) just let him go along and grow up, become more of an adult, grow some whiskers, then we'll (inc) teach him.. [JM: 39]*

MM describes the explicit process where his family teachers assessed his preparedness for ceremonial learning:

*When I turned fourteen they showed me that Wubarr. They said to me, "Okay, you're ready to go. Go and look at that Wubarr." They spoke about it to me, "Wubarr you must think now. Don't think about the Kunabibi or what it says." They had taught me, "Don't eat that" and "Don't get too close to that thing there" and "Don't cross over that way. It's all the same thing. This is what the Law says." They said to me, "Do you remember what we told you before, what we've taught you?" "Yes," I said, "Why?" "All right then. We're saying you can see the Wubarr." That Wubarr of theirs was the part of the same thing. "This is
what we talked about before, when you were small, and we spoke about it."

[MM2: 29]

Children themselves may have some say over their entry to ceremonies. Some families have allowed children as young as 10 to attend ceremonies and from time to time there have been rumours of pre-teenage boys being actively recruited by ceremonial organisers under pressure because adult men are unwilling to attend (see 8.9.1 below). Most parents are unhappy at this prospect, despite the fact that pre-teen boys are known to be curious about what happens at ceremonies, and listen with interest to what older boys report of their experiences [JM: 38-40, RN: 172 ; JN: 14].

8.3.5 Families as Educational Managers or Brokers

Families may also have viewpoints on how to juxtapose ceremonial and school-based learning. There are two contrasting views: some see the need to postpone ceremonial learning so that it displaces or subsumes previous school based learning [RN: 173]. Others see the need to provide Bininj education as the foundation, so that later Balanda learning will not displace the Bininj foundation. Both viewpoints allow learning of both Balanda and Bininj curricula, but both consciously pursue the survival of Bininj learning against the threat of the Balanda. This is a significant theme in Kunwinjku pedagogic thinking, reflecting a general concern about the ordering as well as the hierarchy of educational experiences, and the way individual readiness influenced the planned sequence of learning.

The relationship between hearth and ceremonial learning is logically ordered, with ceremonial instruction dependent upon prior hearth family learning. Simply, a novitiate entering Ceremony without knowledge of the “Law” built up over his childhood, would be incapable of participation. In MM’s terms, the “outside” (public) Law, the Law meant to be learnt in childhood, is foundational for ceremonial learning. Readiness therefore was not merely in terms of age or development but of progress through a curriculum:

About the Law, well in my case, my father's father, my Mawah, to start with, they didn't teach me the Wubarr. No. They would just explain things to me and teach me, and this went on until I was fifteen years old. I was learning the outside (public) Law, from what they talked about and what they taught me. It was our Law from way back at the beginning, when their first ancestors taught those people and then in my turn my father's fathers taught it to me. [MM2: 27]
In expanding on this, MM quotes his advice to a grandson on the relationship between the content of hearth family and ceremonial teaching of “the Law”. He implies the two are continuous, though the early learning in the family is pre-eminent. His advice here also reflects the kind of motivational role the hearth family had in regard to Ceremony:

"I'm explaining this to you so you will get this Law of ours. You've seen the Kunabibi Ceremony," I said to him, "And we went to that Yabburlurrwa and saw that business. That business will take you the straight way. Not for nothing they teach us that Law, that business. They teach us that business, that Law, and it takes you along properly. How will you go? What's your direction? It will explain what is right. But before that you should get hold of the ordinary everyday things the men explain to you - your father, your mother's father, your mother. What you've talked about at home. So you can then go to the Ceremony and look at it and understand all that Law. [MM2: 58]

8.4 DISCONTINUITIES BETWEEN HEARTH FAMILY AND CEREMONIAL PEDAGOGIES

8.4.1 Moving the Locus of Pedagogy from the Hearth Family to Ceremony

Ceremonial participation can be seen as the culmination of the family’s teaching over the years of infancy and childhood. Ideally, the novitiate enters Ceremony not just knowing the “Law” but highly motivated to co-construct the significant if relatively brief pedagogic relationships needed with his ceremonial teachers. There are however some sharp discontinuities between these two pedagogic domains. The most obvious formal distinction between hearth family and ceremonial pedagogy is the explicit demand made on participants in ceremony to consciously assume adult responsibility [GW: 62]. It is in a sense the final phase of hearth family learning, when the child moves from pedagogic object to self-governing agency. The strong pressure on a ceremonial novitiate to make a personal commitment to the Law and to undertake a kind of supervised probationary behaviour mark Ceremony as a crucial gateway in the Kunwinjku life curriculum.

The experience produces irrevocable changes, reflected in some of the terminology about participation. ED (9) describes young women without ceremonial experience as “raw” (ngalkuk), describing the incompleteness in their education. New initiates to any ceremonies are komkerrnge, literally “new throated” or “freshly swallowed”. Ceremonies in general are mayh, literally, “living thing” or “creature”.

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People will sometimes say the Ceremony has “devoured” the novitiate (*mayh binguneng*—“the Ceremony has eaten him”). Sometimes people will refer to a Ceremony having been completed as *mayh wokdanj* – “the creature has spoken”. The animacy in these expressions is not focused on the identity or nature of the *mayh*, the creature. Rather the image of being devoured or swallowed signals the end of a preparatory lifetime of learning, almost the death of childhood, allowing and also proclaiming the initiation of adult status.

### 8.4.2 Hortatory Modes of Instruction in Ceremony as Relational Pedagogy

The process of ceremonial learning is certainly not passive on the part of the learner, as these terms might suggest. A conscious process of self-construction is involved, and is called for explicitly. Novitiates are exposed to constant exhortations to “get serious” about life and especially the “Law”, the sum of all their learning:

- *When the young men are sent up to the Ceremony, the initiates, do you know what I mean? What happens is, we, we settle them down, because they are old enough, so The Old People will say (to a boy), "Quit playing around. You're a big bloke now. You're no longer a little kid. You've grown up. You go up to the Ceremony. It will 'devour' you and that's the thing that will stop you fooling around." That's to grow them up, so they become adults. The ceremonies, when they send them up to the Ceremony when they send them up to it, it's to make them take things seriously. Early on when they send them up they talk to them and look to see if they are okay, but that is to start with. People have died in it, those old people, they used to fight over it. It was very strict Law. Now they've stopped that, but they want to see more children being born and more families coming into being. That's it.* [GW: 62]

- *You should really believe it. You must say, " Of course, that's it! That's what I will do, that's what I will do, that's what I will do." Don't take it lightly. If you're taking it lightly, you will not really get hold of the Law, no.* [MM: 10]

- *Yes, they teach them. They tell them stories and explain to them, to the ones, as you know, who send their young sons up to the ceremonial area - all the mothers. They say to them things like, "You just sit there. Don't take this lightly." And they tell them what they are going to do. They don't make a mistake in what they are doing. I mean they don't just play around, or mess about. They keep quiet - they tell them strictly to be quiet. They take it seriously and don't muck around. Because they are thinking all this is all serious.* [SE: So what if a young man or
Passionate and public exhortation is an important social device in Kunwinjku life, allowing confrontation or correction, or even blame, in a public setting. The presence of a (usually mute) audience, including the target of the harangue, implicitly sanctions the speaker. In the ceremonial domain this kind of speech act has a directly pedagogic function, but one that is still related to the social mechanisms of this public genre. Typically ceremonial exhortation involves reciting, with some repetition, the moral behaviour or the ideas to which the novitiate is required to show his assent. The most striking feature of exhortation from a pedagogic viewpoint is its recognition of the agency of the one exhorted – he is asked to make a decision because it is his to make, but he is given the grounds to make it, including the possibilities of punitive sanctions. Novitiates are in fact being treated as adults in this process, and their potential to “take or leave” the content of the exhortation is recognised as part of the normal Kunwinjku ethic of contesting or resisting any public display of personal authority. Assent to the moral authority of the Ceremony, and the people it represents, is the desired behavioural outcome. The method is relational since it accords not only a fundamental equality to the novitiate, but allows him to act to preserve and strengthen relational bonds with his teacher. The most important of the grounds urging the novitiate in the exhortation is the nature of that existing relationship between the teacher and learner. In exhortation, the teacher also reveals his own personal agenda, a considerable ground in itself for decision making by the learner. If this is a transaction of power it is interpersonal or relational power, the teacher hoping to build upon years of earlier teaching and learning relationship.

8.4.3 Personalisation and Personification of the Law and Ceremony

Some interviews offered their own behaviour, especially their attitudes, in applying their learning throughout life as exemplific:

- And then when they would explain the Law, like rules and Laws, well, I learned all that and I kept on following it. I kept on with what the ceremonies, the Laws and rules mean. That's all. [JU: 50]

- My father taught me the Kunabibi. It was the first Ceremony. Then later on, later, I watched the Yabburlurrwa and the elders took me through that. They taught me about it. So I got that one and I'm hanging on to it. I've still got it now. I've still
got it now and we (inc) will teach the kids, both sexes, young men and young women. In fact, we're teaching them now so they will have a firm hold of that teaching of ours. They'll really have hold of "hard" Kunwinjku. There's "soft" Kunwinjku but we (inc) speak "hard" Kunwinjku. [GW: 3-4]

Paralleling the notion of Ceremony as *mayh*, a living creature (8.4.1) is the suggestion in some interview texts that the ceremonies (and the Law) may be personified as teachers or guides:

- *I told them, "This is business, and it will lead you the straight way wherever you go." [MM2: 90]*
- *You young men, keep the Law. It's what will teach you. It will teach you and develop you like school. It's our own ceremonial business. That's what will teach you, so you will live the right way. Don't lose the Law. [MM2: 10]*

The association between the ceremonies and the Old People in general may be behind this weak personification, but Ceremony is certainly meant to be associated strongly with the present generation of powerful older men who operate through its mechanism for moral or social constraint. Novitiates respond to them personally during exhortation, so the distinction between person and Ceremony is indistinct:

MM describes the absolute authority of the ceremonial teachers, the senior people, in the operation of Ceremony, implying the benefit to learners in working under their authority:

*In the past what used to happen was when they taught (someone) the Wubarr Ceremony, if someone then went along breaking the Law, they would kill him, he would die. Mardayin - when they taught someone, if he just went along and broke the Law, they would kill him, he would die. Why did they kill him? He was breaking the Law of those senior people, the Mardayin and Wubarr Law. Those are the ones that keep you going straight, that teach you. Those are the ones that teach you...Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrhkon, Kunabibi, those are the ones that teach you, that give you direction so you (s) go straight. You (s) listen to the Law. You (s) think about what (you learn) up at the Ceremony, you young men. You know what we (exc) do at the Kunabibi - they do it for us senior people...Kunabibi, Mardayin, Wubarr, Lorrhkon - we teach each other. Don't you (s) oppose that Law. [MM: 28]*
8.4.4 Motivations for Ceremonial Teaching and Learning

MM’s usage here suggests Ceremony as the culmination of the process of Kunwinjku social reproduction “Kunabibi, Mardayin, Wubarr, Lorrhkon - we teach each other”. In the process learners move into a formal relationship with their teachers in a way suggesting the personal nature of ceremonial pedagogy, but also suggesting a commitment to Kunwinjku society at large, represented in the ceremonial teachers. This sort of model needs more exploration. For example, to what extent could MM’s exhortations be construed as a call to submit to a male gerontocracy? To what extent does it reflect the intense homosociality of Kunwinjku men, or perhaps the tensions within the gender domain nature of Kunwinjku adult life generally, so that the men use Ceremony to pull the younger men away from their female relatives, supporting a self-consciously male domain? Did the now largely abandoned, practices of polygyny by older men motivate a ceremonial structure engaging young men away from young women over a period of years? In any of these cases, a formal pedagogy is the vehicle for the outworking of social power relations, and this needs to be accounted for in any process of theorisation.

MM indicated aspects of power in this relationship (MM: 28, above), whereas others remember their learning experience as apparently neutral recipients. Despite the pressures to make personal commitments to an ideology of life, or to make some gesture of commitment, some at least simply received the Ceremony as a gift, as a block of experience, perhaps with some personal pride in the social value of the experience but without complex introspection. JD reflects the stance many Kunwinjku people seem to take to their ceremonial experience:

*Lots of different people taught me. They taught all those different ceremonies they have there in the south. They taught me Langkurr. I saw lots of them. They used to teach me and I would watch them. I watched what they did, that Ceremony. They gave me Langkurr. I did that one.* [JD: 21]

8.5 LAW AS THE CURRICULUM OF CEREMONY

8.5.1 Ceremonial Content is Contiguous with Hearth Family Curriculum

MM suggested a continuum of content between hearth and ceremonial learning, with the formal Ceremony providing the incentive and opportunity for the novitiate to begin an adult and self-conscious allegiance to the Law he has already learnt:

*That Wubarr of theirs was the part of the same thing. "This is what we talked about before, when you were small, and we spoke about it." "Yes," I said.*
Actually, it was whatever my Mawah, my father's fathers talked about. And I
didn't go away from that, I didn't leave what they talked about. Nor did I laugh
at it or play games with it, nor did I make fun of it. No. That would have been a
bad thing. That would mean I had broken the Law, that I hadn't understood it,
that I probably hadn't grasped it. That would have been a mistake, but I didn't
leave it or let it go, or fail to fully get hold of it. I didn't, as the Balanda say,
misunderstand and mess things up for myself. I wanted to really get hold of it
for myself. [MM2: 29]

8.5.2 An Overview of the Ceremonial Curriculum.

The content of ceremonial teaching is identical to the content of hearth family
teaching. What distinguishes Ceremony in terms of its curriculum is its role in testing
and graduating participants socially. There is general agreement about what
constituted a ceremonial curriculum. Some interviewees discussed isolated topics or
gave short lists whose elements included:

- Protocols defining the nitty gritty of relationships between members of the two
  moieties (Duwa and Yirridjdja): [GN: 19; MM: 6; ED: 5]
- Behaviours appropriate with opposite sex siblings [GN: 19; JM: 42].
- Food restrictions and gender relationships [AN: 27; GN: 19; JD: 23].
- Moral training, particularly exhortations not to steal [JD2: 47] or commit adultery
  [AN: 27; DM: 70; JD: 23]
- Respecting the Old People, particularly the old men [An: 27; BG: 41]
- Exhortations to take the Law, the Ceremony and its teachers seriously in
  Ceremony and beyond it [BG: 39-41; JD: 23].

Some of these items continue the hearth family curriculum (summarised in section
5.3.9), while others are specific to Ceremony as a self-conscious occasion of moral
testing. I will argue in chapter 8 that Kunwinjku people use the word “Law” to
summarise and include all Kunwinjku learning in whatever context. In everyday
Kunwinjku discourse ceremonies are spoken of as the Law, meaning ceremonies are
pre-eminently venues for teaching and choosing to obey the Law, which implies the
role of Ceremony in recapitulating the hearth family curriculum as well as moving
the learner beyond it. MM explicates the link between Ceremony and the Law:

That "business" - our Aboriginal business, is not done in public. It means the
same as "Law": in fact it possesses the Law. [MM2: 2]
8.6 TEACHING METHODOLOGY IN CEREMONIAL CONTEXTS

8.6.1 A Socially Motivated Formalisation of Methodology.

For the most part, teaching methodology in ceremonial contexts was identical to that of the hearth family – as one might expect given the same teachers [MM2: 2-3] and the continuity of content between the two domains. Almost every feature of micro praxis of teaching in Ceremony simply duplicates the kinds of instructional tactics used in the intimate family (6.2). Broadly, instructional tactics are based on the general processes of:

- Observing carefully and copying
- Assessed performance
- Repetition through more precise approximation to mastery.

In chapter eleven I will discuss teaching methodological praxis in some detail, but I will introduce and discuss here some features that have been described in terms of their occurrence in Ceremony.

These discontinuities with the hearth family can be discussed in terms of formality, defined as a high level of shared commitment across a group larger than the hearth family, in fact a group of hearth families, as to the legitimacy of certain processes and outcomes. There are formal expectations within the hearth family of course, meaning that the family, with or without conscious deliberation, will agree on processes and outcomes, but the ceremonial context involves a more broadly and consciously shared acceptance of what will be looked for or tolerated. Importantly, this broader social group allows harsh punitive sanctions to be applied to both teachers and learners, both of whom are liable to be formally assessed in Ceremony.

8.6.2 Formal Accountability in Teaching and Learning

Ceremonies necessitate a more urgent attention to attendance, participation, group instruction and time constraints produced by the need to assemble, feed and train a large group of people, many of whom will be under pressures of their own to return to their home communities. Ceremonies also exhibit a formality in the process of teaching and learning which is a function of its role in marking a public graduation to adulthood, a conscious acceptance of hearth family preparation, and especially a formal recognition of personal culpability and therefore of Kunwinjku social allegiance.

Formality entails socio-legal force. In Ceremony the Law moves from its hearth family locus in authoritative relationships, towards a reified form, where both
sanctions and approval can be originated and be felt independently from hearth family intimacies and alliances. Enforcement can be carried out by people free to do so without damage to the internal cohesion of the hearth family. Formalisation of pedagogy in this sense protects the hearth family, as the social and pedagogic core of Kunwinjku personal allegiance, while allowing the broader society, perhaps best considered as the collectivity of all the hearth families, to protect its legal core, which circuitously authorises the hearth family in its fundamental role.

This socially motivated formalisation of methodology can also be thought of in terms of relational pedagogy. When a child passes through Ceremony to adulthood, the collective relationships of the hearth family no longer immediately authorise or correct teaching and learning. A broader matrix of relationships takes this function, matching the learner’s movement towards a self-consciously constructed and willingly entered adult matrix and adult teaching role of his or her own. This kind of reification, moving the entity “Law” away from its teachers and executors is parallel to the way Kunwinjku people conceive of their Old People as a representative version of themselves, as I have suggested at 7.4.

8.6.3 Mutual Accountability Between Kunwinjku Social Groups
In ceremonial pedagogy, there is an increased awareness of, and likelihood of, public scrutiny and accountability directed towards both learners and teachers. DM describes the way ceremonial teachers may be criticised when their students fail to learn and apply the Law [DM: 72-74]. The performance of both learners and teachers was assessed by people outside their extended families, suggesting the pedagogic role of Ceremony is to represent a general Kunwinjku authorisation of the Law taught in families. The mutual obligations to both teach and learn re-emerge here as in the hearth family context as a core theme in Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse – in Ceremony there is general Kunwinjku agreement or commitment to the continuing transgenerational pedagogy.

From a positive perspective, JN (15) describes a general social approval for someone displaying the fruits of effective education, giving particular satisfaction to his or her teachers. Those who taught in the stricter ceremonial context may have felt some strong tensions between their intimate concerns for a family loved one and the need to impose effective training lest both teacher and learner invoke criticism from a wider social group.
8.6.4 Formalisation of the Role of Teacher

To a large extent, ceremonial participants were taught and accompanied by the same people who have taught them in their hearth families, but in more formal ways and in a more formal setting. The formality was partly a product of the wider range of participation, with both teachers and learners mixing together with others well beyond their hearth family experiences.

Despite an increased pedagogic formality the role of ceremonial teacher is not a permanent or specialist one, though some individuals are identified as people who usually teach in particular contexts. During Ceremony the teacher becomes more self-aware of his or her pedagogic role. Significantly, this is always spoken of as a role shared by a group [MM2: 2-3]. In a sense, it is a whole generation who accept this responsibility to teach

Black people's way also - you go along that way some of the time, and it is teaching you. And that's good. That is the straight way - we guide you children in the right direction, you young men and young women. We teach you the real Law. [MM: 5]

GW (25) described himself as Djungkayinj which he translated as “boss” for the Yaburlurrwa Ceremony but he also associates himself with other senior men as the Ceremony’s teachers [GW: 33]. Similarly, the administrative head in the Mardayin Ceremony, djirrk, was also viewed as only one of its teachers [PS: 124].

In both Kunabibi and Wubarr I observed no clear division of pedagogic tasks between organisers, or ceremonial “bosses”, and the large group of middle aged men who provided most of the teaching. Both groups depended upon each other in the management of things, with a number of individuals taking the role of teacher to explain and direct the various dances and other processes participants either carried out or witnessed. Some dances were complex and only someone with appropriate skill or talent was able to provide these performances, but the teaching about the meanings, and the required behaviours of participants associated with the dances, came from the older men as a group. Perhaps the collective teaching role reflected or protected the authority to teach. MM for example, urges present day young men to learn from, and to obey their ceremonial leaders and to apply their instruction beyond the ceremonial domain. The authority of ceremonial teachers is legally enforceable, in a way analogous to the enforcement of Balanda Law, but apparently this formal
aspect needs to be explicitly taught, and its acceptance exhorted, raising the question of the extent to which perceptions of ceremonial legal power may have changed:

But you Aboriginal people are missing out on our Law, you don't really hold on to it when you hear it. Listen to that Aboriginal man telling you about it, that old man talking about it. Oh, you young men, think about that one who is in charge of business - when we have the Kunabibi, the man in charge of Yirridjdja, and (the man in charge of) Duwa. He's in charge of Yirridjdja; he's in charge of Duwa. Up there, in the restricted area, our Aboriginal business is different. But when you're in public you still don't break (the Law) he teaches you. Don't do that. If you break the Balanda Law, the Balanda will arrest you. He'll send someone working for the police to take you. And that's just like us. We break the Yirridjdja Law, and they grab us - whoever is in charge of the Law for Kunabibi, Yabburlurrwa, Wubarr, Mardayin - they're all the same - Lorrkon. All the same. This is what I was talking about before, when I named those ceremonies. [MM2: 8]

It could be argued that teaching was directed at ensuring the preservation and continuance of the Ceremony, so the process of approximation was a means to this reduplication. Beyond this reduplicative mechanism however was the notion of the authority inherent in transgenerational teaching and the need to pass on, intact, what had been entrusted, so the Ceremony was duplicating not itself but something of a higher order:

- Yes. "Do it this way. And don't change it. It's you that has to change. [JD2: 52].
- When I speak like that, for myself, I'm not getting something new, but I'm getting the old thing for myself. I get it just like Mawah and Nakurrng, Makka, Ngalkurrrng (his sister), that eldest Mawah - and the youngest - they all used to tell me about the Law [MM2: 31]

The ceremonial context conferred upon teachers the role of being tough (nabang) probably allowing older men to feel more comfortable in exhorting and directing young men who were well known or directly related to them:

Whether they roused at them or taught them, that was up to the men. They would give them instructions and then those young boys would come down here. They would tell them, "Don't do this or that. Don't go running around. Just settle down." When they had seen the first Ceremony they would just have
to stay in the camp. Then when the time was finished, they would do that special washing, and they would be finished up at the ceremonial area. [NN: 78]

In relational terms, this cloaking of known individuals with a formalised strictness facilitated the relational transactions involved as a former child learner moved towards his own adult teaching role. In this transformation, the Ceremony functioned to ensure the continuity of the transgenerational pedagogy, authorising both its content and its new generation of teachers.

8.6.5 Formalisation of Pedagogic Expectations and Processes

Unlike the hearth family environment, timetable pressures were a factor in ceremonial teaching, due to co-ordinating with people from distant groups and the pressures of catering daily for large numbers of people who were not available to produce food. (Although the general ownership of, or access to, motor vehicles, the use of light aircraft, and the efficiency of store bought foods all reduced this pressure, I will argue in chapter 14 that other sources of time stress have more recently impacted Ceremony). The Wubarr in which I participated necessitated major blocks of time to be set aside for hunting and trips to distant shops, and to pick up and transport participants to the site. Logistics pressures may be quite severe and may have, in turn, put pressure on pace of learning. These pressure necessitate a kind of formality as expressed in the need to learn and perform relatively quickly.

8.6.5.1. Formalisation of the Instructional Setting

Apart from small groups of children listening to a story teller, the instruction of a large group by a single teacher is rare in hearth family pedagogy but is a necessary feature of Ceremony considering the constraints of time. This teaching context demands a certain level of formality: participants have to co-ordinate their attendance and their focus in time and place, and there is a higher expectation of efficiency in learning. Dances, songs and other procedures required supervised practice, with teachers scaffolding both confidence and performance and simultaneously attending to assessment and correction of individuals.

In Wubarr and Kunabibi this instruction was sometimes given on a one to one basis, to each participant in turn, but in general a group of young men would be listening to one of the older men instructing them as a group. Some group activities, for example those requiring all participants to perform simultaneous dance movements, are taught by a group of older men, each explaining the movements
required to one or two of the novitiates at a time. The same men supervise rehearsals
if these are required, correcting errors in performance, usually in a good natured way.
Songs are typically learned in Ceremony, as in Kunwinjku life generally, by
approximation through repeated practice, learners following either peers with
particular knowledge or a particular senior man who will sit with a group repeating
practice performance towards a standard for formal performance. Moyle (1979,
pp.62-70) has described in some detail the process of learning and rehearsal of
dances and songs in Pintupi Ceremony, which is similar to the events in the
Kunwinjku world leading up to performances in the *Wubarr*. Richard Moyle’s
interest in the pedagogic specifics is a rarity in anthropological description, but given
the focus of his study was on the nature of music in Pintupi society, the social of its
teaching was certainly relevant.

8.6.5.2. Formal Assessment and Formal Expectation of Mastery

Teaching was meant to be thorough and to lead to mastery. There was exhortation to
mastery similar to that in the hearth family, except for its urgency, and the threat of
sanctions:

*And that was here, we did the same thing ourselves in the whatsit, Ubarr, and
Lorrkkon, Mardayin, when they used teach us very thoroughly so consequently
we did it the right way, we did well. But if we made mistakes they used to get
angry with us. They used to get very angry with us, they would get very angry
with us, and they talk to us very severely. [They pressured you?] Yes, they
forced us - "Don't do this the wrong way! Don't make mistakes!"*  [TN: 19]

Continuous assessment, intervention in the learning process and directed
reinforcement were part of the process, mediated by pastoral concern about the
initiate’s capacity to learn content and to deal with sharply focused expectations and
assessment of their teachers. GW recognises the difficulty of a complex learning task
which necessitates monitoring of learner attempts and justifies directed revision.

*Yes. Yes. If they get it wrong I go crook at them sometimes. That old peoples’
business is quite difficult. We must keep that Yabburlurrwa running
permanently. We keep it running, but while it’s on we'll say, "Take notice of
this!" If I see someone being silly, if I see him, well he’ll have to try a second
time. We "rewind", we take it back so he runs through again. Never mind that
he's already seen it, still he goes back again and runs through it. He runs
through another time. It's a hard Law, so he does it little by little.*  [GW: 29]
Teaching towards a performance outcome, for example a dance or ritual re-enactment, was based on structured approximation, with assessment and feedback immediately applied in continued practice:

*When we couldn't do it properly, so sometimes wasn't any good, then they would just have to do the thing all over again. So they would do it and we would go and watch it again.* [Really?] Yes. [TN: 23]

Individual ability was expected to influence the speed of mastery [GW: 33] and there was a pastoral concern about the pace with which initiates were exposed to the dangers involved [GW: 62].

**8.6.5.3. Formal Expectations of Learner Self-Management and Self-Construction**

Conscious observation was supplemented by explanation which allowed the learner to organise his internal learning, a teaching strategy also reported in the hearth family but here reflecting adult interaction, rather than a child asking for clarification. The learner could, however, ask for teaching if the demonstration and explanation didn't achieve this sense of mastery. JD describes his experiences of interactive ceremonial learning:

*We watched what they did. Whatever, what they were doing, as they did this or that. And they talked about it too. When they would finish what they had been doing, whatever it was, one of them would explain. He used to explain it. And I would think, "Oh, so that's what he's doing. That's what they're doing." We would do that, and then in turn he would explain whatever. I used to think, "Ah, that's what I'll do." I understood why they were doing it. I would say," Please teach me!" So then I would find out, so I know.* [JD2: 22]

TN experienced harsh but effective ceremonial teaching where there was some pressure to learn more quickly:

*SE: Why did they say that? Did they want you to learn quickly?*

*Yes. Very quickly, we had to learn. We had to achieve it all quickly so we would perform everything the right way.* [TN: 21]

**8.6.5.4. Exhortations to Moral Behaviour were Formalised.**

In Ceremony the moral teaching of the hearth family was explicitly codified and linked to adult consequences through formal warning:

*But I was taught Kunabibi. Right here, in the south end. I saw that Kunabibi here. But that Ceremony. I didn't really get involved with it, you know? They instructed me, they said to me, "Don't just go along...this business we've taught..."*
you, means you should just stay in one place. Don't go and touch women or whatever. Leave that. If someone else sees you doing that, they'll spear you. If you treat the Ceremony lightly, or the food taboos." [JD: 23]

These formal warnings were part of the exhortations which animated the most important turning points for ceremonial participants.

8.6.5.5 Ceremony Involved Formal Graduation.

Formal assessment led to graduation. This mechanism was explicit, with decisions made collegiately by the group of teachers:

*And then Yaburlurrwa they taught us that too. I saw that Yaburlurrwa. I went along through ceremonies five times. Yes five. Then they told me, "That's enough. You're a big man now, we'll admit you." So they admitted me, and taught me.* [JD: 23]

The hearth family’s informal decision to “graduate” their child into ceremonial participation [MM: 29; JN: 15] led to a more formal process of graduation within Ceremony from novitiate, through repeated attendance over a number of years to a higher order of learning. This may well have been the pattern in all the ceremonies.

As a participant in the *Wubarr*, my closest colleague was the son of the senior Ceremony leader. He was then taking part in his sixth *Wubarr*, so I asked him whether he understood some of the activities we were watching. His answer was along the lines that he was not yet experienced enough to have been taught the meanings behind the dances and songs. In the meantime, we both just did as we were directed.

Elkin (1977) described the process of ceremonial learning in traditional Aboriginal Australia generally as a “ritual journey” of esoteric learning, dependent on revelations given in Ceremony (p. 3-4). Elkin describes the final graduation from this process as imprecisely analogous to entering a higher degree learning in mainstream academic life (See for example, p. 17). Elkin’s terminology may not be motivated by a pedagogic model, but it does point to the revelatory function of higher order ceremonial experience. In Kunwinjku ceremonies, the final stages of participation involve “showing” certain objects to near graduates. Since the verbs for show and teach are so closely related in Kunwinjku (*bukkang* and *bukkabukkang*), and since this showing was always accompanied by explanation and the expectation of learning, these revelatory aspects of Ceremony were pedagogic whatever their motivation. In a sense, the progressive nature of this kind of
revelation is “natural” in the sense that knew learning depends upon both the learners capacity (that is, his mastery of previous learning) and his commitment, proven in the continued attendance and attention in Ceremony.

8.6.5.6. Formalisation of Economic Relationship between Teachers and Taught.
Most Kunwinjku ritual behaviour involves dependency on people outside the hearth family, whether as performers or advisers and there is always the expectation that these people will be paid in some way – traditionally in kind, but often with money in the present day, supplementing certain “in kind” objects still given because of their association with an earlier age of Ceremony. For example, men conducting mortuary procedures in present day Kunwinjku society are often paid in tobacco, cloth, sugar and flour at the close of the final public phase of the process. Their costs in travel, drinking and other money and food will have been provided beforehand. This expectation is current in Kunwinjku life and in the recent past extended to ceremonies. The role of exchange procedures in ceremonial pedagogy was not directly addressed by my informants, leaving unanswered the question as to the balance between payments or gifts given to offset expenses or enable travel, and those which are a reward above and beyond this.

Keen (1994) has looked at self-interested motivations of older men in the formal pedagogy of a tribal group similar to the Kunwinjku (see for example Keen 1994, pp. 190-191). The linking of economic and personal models in pedagogy cannot be developed here, except to note the way contrived scarcity and desirability of knowledge (and therefore of perceived power) may simultaneously valorise and exploit the demand for desirable learning. This would provide a more individual and covert motivation for teaching than those mentioned by informants and discussed in 10.5.3.

8.7 FEAR, SECRECY AND GENDER IN THE PEDAGOGY OF CEREMONIES

8.7.1 A Pedagogic Interpretation of Ceremonial Fear and Discipline
Ceremonial pedagogy is distinct from that of the hearth family in its use of threatened and actual punishments, although these were more spoken of than actually applied in living memory. Universally, most human beings have some memories of fear associated with pedagogy. Whether it is fear of peer criticism produced by failure to learn, or a fear induced by a teacher’s constructed pedagogic persona, the emotion may be a universal of childhood. Beyond these expectations, Kunwinjiku ceremonial teachers appear to have used a strategy of real fear to obtain a deep
commitment to a moral lifestyle (as distinct from exhortation as a motivational tactic enabling learning at a lower level, say of a song or a set of procedural skills):

Ceremonial teachers, like the “Old People” generally, are said to have been tough disciplinarians [JD: 23; TN: 11 for example]. The elders had wide powers to observe and assess obedience to their ceremonial teachers and a capacity to apply sanctions, and so to invoke fear:

- So you know this Ceremony, this Mardayin we're teaching you. Well, if you muck around with it, we'll probably kill you." That's what they told us. They frightened us. Well we thought, "Yes. Maybe if I treat this wrongly, or I go and do something wrong, maybe those elders will see me, and kill me." That's what I had in my mind. That's what I was thinking. So for my part, I used to be careful. Whenever I would go along with the elders, or just with the young men, we wouldn't try to make each other do anything wrong. Because I was thinking about that word I had from them. So I went along carefully, and that was fine. If those others wanted to get each other into trouble, that was their business. Because I realised the Law was very strict, that Law was very hard. It was the elders' Law. They used to say, "Don't make yourself into something where you think you can go beyond the Ceremony, or put yourself above it." That's what they said, "Mardayin or Kunabibi". They would use sorcery to sing the one who made trouble, or made a mistake. They would sing him. And he would die, whoever that man was. [JD2: 52.]

- Yes, some men see (the Ceremony), but they just keep on doing wrong. They are taught at ceremonies, and they see how hard it is. Maybe they learn from that, or maybe they just don't. [Young men or women?] Young men, yes. And women too. The Ceremony warns them not to be sexually promiscuous, not to cause fights. Various things, it stops them doing, it prevents them doing, so they don't do the wrong thing. Because the elders already notice that they are not doing what they teach them. So then they teach them the hard way too. If they don't behave, then there's a consequence. Maybe they'll pay a money fine or they'll kill them, they'll die. If they don't pay the money fine, then they'll kill them and they'll die. They'll sing (a curse on) them. [Straight away or maybe later on?] Mm. Later on. If that man or women who commits a serious crime doesn't pay up the fine quickly, then his family, his brother, her child, uncle, father, mother, they'll attack them and they'll die. And then that woman or man would be in the clear. If they kill one
man from her family, or his family. Well, that's it, he or she has paid. [DM: 70]

There was a close identification between the Old People, the ceremonial process of teaching, and the Law as its content. Disregarding the Old People’s teaching was breaking the Law. The death penalty was sanctioned because it amounted to rejection of the Old People as source of the Law – implicitly, a rejection of Kunwinjku Law and therefore Kunwinjku society.

Yes. Don't you (s) break (the Law), that's morally wrong. Going beyond the Law -what is already there in the Law, what it's already said, the Law? Well, yes, that Law of ours. That Law we used to have. In the past what used to happen was when they taught (someone) the Wubarr Ceremony, if someone then went along breaking the Law, they would kill him, he would die. Mardayin when they taught someone, if he just went along and broke the Law, they would kill him, he would die. Why did they kill him? He was breaking the Law of those senior people, the Mardayin and Wubarr Law. [MM: 28]

MM then immediately implies a beneficial intent behind the death penalty: the ceremonial teaching of the Law was intended to preserve the moral life, so its rejection involved more than offending the teachers. the Law, the social process at large, was at stake:

They are the ones that keep you going straight, that teach you. Those are the ones that teach you...Wubarr, Mardayin, Lorrrkon, Kunabibi, those are the ones that teach you, that give you direction so you (s) go straight. You (s) listen to the Law. You (s) think about what (you learn) up at the Ceremony, you young men. You know what we (exc) do at the Kunabibi - they do it for us senior people. That's what I'm talking about. That's what the Law is about. It's the same thing. So that is why you (s) don't break the Law. [MM: 28]

The link between the men who taught and the content of the teaching was strong and it is reasonable to view the role of Ceremony as a reinforcement of political or social power relationships dominated by the Old People. But this domination depended upon the fact that sanctions could be applied to the novitiate’s extended family [DM: 70-78], implying an at least tacit acceptance of those threats by Kunwinjku society beyond the individual novitiate who may have given offence. The socio-legal power of the Ceremony therefore exploited but was also invoked by the general Kunwinjku principle of shared culpability, by which guilt of an individual is almost automatically diffused across a family. Sometimes an individual scapegoat will be
isolated, but any punishment so directed is meant as a punishment for the entire
group, usually the hearth family.

Another motivation for the hearth family accepting ceremonial authority, has
to do with the dangerous nature of the temporary independence of the novitiate. In
Ceremony, the authority of hearth family teachers submits itself to the broader
Kunwinjku society as it comes together as a whole. The hearth family adjusts
through Ceremony to the potential for its young adult members to form allegiances
with the other strongly defined groups within the Kunwinjku relational universe, the
child’s automatic kinship allegiances become multiform and conscious alliances. The
young adult’s potential for sexual relationships will provide an ongoing concern in
terms of the family maintaining its integrity with respect to other families, taking or
losing the initiative in controlling marriage arrangements that preserve its established
relational network. Both hearth family and ceremonial teachers can be portrayed as
waiting with at least a degree of uncertainty to see how an individual will react to his
moment of choice: to submit to the Law, or to reject the relational network offered
him. In pedagogic terms this is a clear and memorable end point to life as a pre-adult
learner.

Was there a generally perceived pedagogic goal behind this consciously
constructed fear? Our evidence is problematic. MM and JD both make statements
outlining the wisdom of avoiding breaking the Law, implying the punitive sanctions
would benefit those they frightened sufficiently to behave in the manner taught
through Ceremony [MM: 28 JD2: 52 for example]. Sanctions were not applied
automatically and DM (71-72) described the collegiate nature of decision making
when ceremonial breaches occurred, calculating culpability and applicable fines.

Ceremony could be seen as moving the learner from the protected hearth
regime to wider social contacts, where the learner’s relational culpability would no
longer be insulated by, or mediated through, family members, and his responsibility
was no longer towards immediate kin alone. This suggests a benefactive pedagogic
intention in the harsh discipline. For example, JD implies the need to teach
appropriate fear as a defence against inevitable violence when social codes are
breached beyond the Ceremony:

*In the old days, when we did it, back then, when they taught us Mardayin, they
used to explain to us. They would say, "This Mardayin, we're teaching you. So
don't go and make trouble, and don't go and steal things from people. None of
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that. Or you could die." They would say that, "You could die for that." [JD2: 47]

Novitiates needed to learn how to survive in a world of adult, extra-familial penalties, beginning with the preparatory and relatively predictable threat of ceremonial sanctions; see for example JD (23) above.

The process of preparing for adult culpability depended on the specific, known fear of the ceremonial teachers [TN: 11]. In a sense, the food restrictions were a formidable “dry run” for the less predictable situations of moral choice and consequences of adult life.

Yes, well they used to say to us, "Don't go doing anything wrong." "Don't swear at other women or men, don't gossip about them." "You (s) just mind your own business without being silly." They would say, "If you look after yourself no one will abuse you or hurt you. But if you stick your nose in other people's business, if you abuse them, or gossip about them, or swear at them, they'll attack for that and you'll die. Maybe you'll die young. When you're still a young person you could die, or just a child. You might go for a swim and a man will come and grab you by the throat and maybe drown you." They told us that. [Really?] Yes. "Don't go and steal someone else's food or things. Don't steal anyone's things. We don't know whether he might have something sacred there. If you go and steal his things, whatever, we could die, or your could die, they could kill you while you're playing. You could be there with other children, yes, or could be swimming, and that man would kill you there." When we thought about that we were frightened. So we didn't go and steal things, or abuse people or swear at them. We were too scared. [DM: 18]

Some informants testified that they embraced this fear in a considered and beneficial way:

And that's exactly what I did. I never went and ate in secret. I was too scared. I thought maybe I would have died, or they might have speared me because it was so potent. [You really paid attention?] I used to listen to what they told me. And young men...If any young men ate anything secretly, they would get really angry with them, because they knew that Mardayin or Ubarr or Lorrkkon. So they knew whoever ate would die, die or suffer in some way. [TN: 11]

Although it is possible to argue that the fear is part of the curriculum, and is intentionally linked to the preservation of gerontocratic predominantly male power
structures, it is also possible to construe these threatened punishments as a pedagogic device, a fear constructed in the learner as a self-preservation motivation. Ceremonial fear can also be linked to more general relational fear in Kunwinjku society, particularly the diffused but real fear women have towards men. Ceremony can be interpreted as an intensified venue for the operation of all these relational tensions, a dangerous, liminal space where young Kunwinjku adults hold as much personal independence as they may ever feel, and this danger necessitates the possibility of control and constraint. Fear is therefore analysable as one of the three tightly related strategies for pedagogy and social control constructed in Ceremony. The other two involve the formalisation of gender protocols and the formalisation of “secret” modes of knowledge.

8.7.2 Gender Issues in Ceremonial Pedagogy

Part of the formalisation of ceremonial teaching is the much more rigorous gender separation during instruction. More significantly, new aspects of gender behaviour become significant curriculum items, socialisation in regard to gender enters a new phase. The authority of women in Kunwinjku in the child’s life is more clearly domainèd. Kunwinjku men regard women as equally capable learners, and their powerful roles in extra ceremonial life are clear, so ceremonial restrictions must involve some kind of submission on their part, whether forced or invited, to the male ceremonial leadership, perhaps to a higher doctrine of self-construction among Kunwinjku women.

Ceremony is an intensely gendered process within Kunwinjku life. Women and men both have clear roles as teachers and administrators enabling Ceremony. Women taught young women; men taught young men [for example TN: 2–4]. Women who are presently more than thirty five years old usually recall their involvement in Ceremony. JU (19) for example, participated as a young woman in the “women’s business” (daluk kudjamun) at Kunabibi and watched painting of novitiates at Mardayin [JU: 21]. In fact, the ceremonies depended on women’s co-operation, particularly in preparing, sending and supporting their sons and cooperating in the food taboos, see BG: 37 above.

Ceremony assesses and graduates children as products of the hearth family, whose teaching should have included the gendered domain of kinship terminology and gender protocols within general kinship behaviours, providing the mechanism and discourse for gender self-construction. Novitiates move through Ceremony into
adulthood with its primary and defining capacity for marriage. The male novitiate’s movement to adulthood in Ceremony completes a process through an unstated but powerful curriculum of gender awareness and interactions experienced in pre-ceremonial, childhood forms of the most intimate kinship dyads involving the prime Kunwinjku relationships before adulthood: the mother and her son, the boy and the hearth family women. Ceremonial food restrictions on novitiates, their mothers and sisters extend this training period in adult sexuality beyond the ceremonial events, allowing time for both novitiate and hearth family to absorb the new adult as adult.

Approaching puberty children will be expected to restrict their conversation in certain ways in the presence of, or when discussing, the opposite sex, beginning a process of consciously gendered language that will become more complex through adult life. Certain ceremonial events and processes are never discussed by men in the presence of women even when the content is inoffensive or not specifically to be kept secret. The general term for ceremonies of this linguistically restrictive kind is *mayh*. (See discussion on this term above at 8.4.1).

Berndt and Berndt (1970, p.163) note that very old women were sometimes taken to ceremonial places and shown some of the secret ceremonial objects. This may not be a concession to age in itself. Given the tremendous social power of older women in daily life, both historically and in the present Kunwinjku society, this process may have been part of a power sharing arrangement within the gerontocracy. Old women had considerable power in encouraging young women to go to promised husbands, as well as a crucial organising role in the ceremonial process. (Significantly, it is unlikely that any man would be admitted, or want to be admitted, to any secret domain of the women.)

In ordinary Kunwinjku life ceremonial matters are never discussed with or near members of the opposite sex regardless of age. This is significant, considering the range of other sensitive topics that are open to discussion in mixed conversation, such as circumcision, sexual issues generally, religious and adult mythical narratives and so forth.

Despite their indispensable roles, women typically claim to be ignorant of male ceremonial domains, at least in public, while also revealing a general knowledge of its content. ED’s comments are typical:

*That's what it was like. And sometimes they would take them to the ceremonies, and they used to teach them Wubarr - what it was about, and they would show...*
them what to do there. Of course we don't know about it, we women. That is a sacred place, just for them where they used to take them. I know they used to take them there and teach them about our language, that's what we think. They used to teach them, for example, that Duwa stuff which was like teaching them the Ten Commandments. [ED: 5]

This transparent posturing is more than the polite reticence that avoids direct references to menstruation or other gender related topics, and certainly more than the rigorously enforced training of children in correct kinship address. Gender restrictions in discourse about Ceremony are generally accepted as mandatory, and it is possible this protocol reflects parallel structures of power in Ceremony, or perhaps the power structures of Kunwinjku life where gerontocratic authority (of the Old People) may subsume gender based power. Certainly woman carry as large a burden in organising and teaching as men in ceremonial contexts, and an arguably greater burden in monitoring post ceremonial performance of its graduates.

8.7.3 Food Restrictions and Gender

TN associates the discipline of the ceremonial teachers with the food restrictions they imposed and enforced:

Yes. The elders used to teach me - those ones who have died. Um, they taught me. [Were they strict with you?] They made it tough for me. Yes. They would say, "Don't you eat those things. That kangaroo is restricted for you, that fish is restricted, or bush honey, whatever, you don't eat that. You're restricted in what you can eat for maybe one or two years. You remember this. Then they'll release you and you can eat that stuff. At that stage (they will wipe their sweat on you ceremonially, and) you'll be released." And that's exactly what I did. I never went and ate in secret. I was too scared. I thought maybe I would have died, or they might have speared me because it was so potent. [You really paid attention?] I used to listen to what they told me. And young men...If any young men ate anything secretly, they would get really angry with them, because they knew that Mardayin or Ubarr or Lorrkkon. So they knew whoever ate would die, die or suffer in some way. [TN: 11]

PS has described ceremonial food restrictions in pedagogic terms. The rationale for what he implies is social training, has to do with the protocols of constructed relationships generally. (Significantly, he puts the words of advice about this social goal into the mouth of a mother, implying her powerful ceremonial teaching role):
Actually, The Old People were themselves under that restriction in the same way. A woman, for instance one's mother, she is under that restriction in the same way, she won't eat or touch whatever those things are. And that means she doesn't disregard that teaching, but she hangs on to that teaching strongly. So she'll say to us, "This is what you do, my child." She'll say, "Be very careful lest you become a bad person. That would cause pain to you and me both. We would ruin things for ourselves. We would lose the righteousness which is in that sacred teaching so we can possess the truth. But if you keep on going right through to the end, and those old people come back, who were with you at the start, and they see you there, they'll say, 'Now its okay for you to eat and handle those restricted things. It's okay.' So then you help other people in their turn as they come along. You watch those other people. Whoever turns up, you give them something. You give them somewhere to stay. You should also show them the good spots where they can go to get food and animals. So you can eat and drink together. You should help those who arrive from a long way off. Take them along. Give them a hand. Give them somewhere to live, so you can camp together at your place, make them do this - by giving him a place. Then, I mean, you'll be able to work together, helping each other, make things together. Sharing the same camp. Maybe you like that place where he's staying. He likes that place too. So then you keep an eye on him for your own sake, see if he's going okay or not. So you keep an eye on him. And he in turn will keep an eye on you, to see if you're going well or not, so then he can do that for you. So you pay attention to each other's views, and that's good. Its good you're together." [PS: 43]

The food restrictions were strictly enforced [GN: 60]. Novitiates and their mothers alike both required “teaching” about the constraints of the ceremonial food restrictions and the consequences should they disregard them. This teaching was provided by older women who taught in a parallel structure of pedagogic accountability to that of the men. The men may have been perceived as originating the food restrictions but their detailed application and their enforcement was women’s pedagogic business during and beyond Ceremony:

"Others will look at them and assess whether they are observing those food restrictions or disregarding them. That's why they teach a child, and his mother
too. The mother will also organise him, supervise him all the time, at night when she and her son are both following the Ceremony. [GN: 19]

RN confirms the widely held notion in Kunwinjku society implied here by GN, that some women express personal resistance to the food restrictions, even to the extent of preventing their sons attending the Ceremony:

Yes, that's right, she's your aunty, and those children, all my brothers, went to that Ceremony, so these others were crying because they wanted to go to. That was probably what happened. But they told them, "No" because the mothers didn't want them to go. They said, "It would be bad because that Ceremony would put us under food restrictions." This would mean long necked turtle, fish, barramundi I mean, they won't be able to eat them because their children would be in their first Ceremony. [RN: 172]

This is further evidence of how, in practice, woman make or break effective ceremonial discipline through their powerful role in the hearth family structure. Older women are the usual arbiters in whether, when and how ceremonial demands on the hearth family are met, evidence of an inter generational role among women in maintaining Ceremony as a pedagogic process.

8.7.4 A Woman’s Critique

Woman are confronted not only with intergenerational power processes around Ceremony, but also face sharply defined issues of relative power between genders, often involving abuse and a great deal of fear. Kunwinjku women grow up constantly alert to a generalized danger from men. This is an issue girls discuss openly, from early puberty onwards and even before. The issue of violence towards women in Aboriginal communities has been widely canvassed (Keel, 2004) and was raised in the context of ceremonial learning directly by DM. She has commented on her experience of the way power relations of gender shape the economic role of women in providing the goods required for ceremonial payments, and the practice of using young women to pay fines imposed for breaches of ceremonial discipline, implicating ceremonial pedagogy with the reproduction of male dominated power in Kunwinjku society:

They would give each other spears. [Spears?] They used to give each other spears, boomerangs, and um, they gave each other spearheads. And they would make paintings, string bags, baskets. That was so they could come to one mind together. [Just men, or women too?] The women made the baskets. They made
shoulder bags and headband bags. They would give them to the men to sell, to sell off. [Really?] Yes, they in turn would give them spears. Of sometimes they would pay using women (instead of money). [They used women until when...]

Mm. This was done right back with the first people. [Yes.] They would pay using women. They would give them women. The men would go out west and get a woman. Sometimes a woman would come down, come from the west down to the coast. Those were dangerous men, Maung and Balang men or.... Yes. That's what they used to do, they would pay fines that way back then, when they didn't have money. And even now it still goes on. [Really?] Now, yes. That Law is still in force. That can happen to pay a fine. Women, women getting exchanged. [Does she stay with a man all the time, or ...] Yes. They stay together permanently. If the women leaves that man, if she runs away, well her family will die. That is still happening.

SE: So what do some people say about this, do they think it’s good or bad?

DM: Yes, some of them say this is a good thing. Some say it's wrong. They continue to pay fines, and if they don't have enough money, they pay with women. Or a child, the woman's young daughter. They promise her to a different man and then give her to him. [Straight away or...] After she's grown up, then he'll get her. Yes, that's going on all the time. It still happens now.

[DM: 76-78]

Middle aged Kunwinjku women remember family members given in marriage on this basis [JU, personal communication] and even younger adults concede this kind of process is still potentially operational. Despite this public knowledge, only DM mentioned the issue in an interview. Nevertheless, her information needs to be taken into account in theorising about Kunwinjku pedagogy.

8.7.5 Secrecy as a Pedagogic Strategy?

8.7.5.1 Secrecy and Admission to Ceremonial Learning

Like everyone else entering ceremonial domain, my participation was conditional on agreement with an undertaking required very specifically and clearly from me, that I would tell no one of certain things I would see, and particularly that I would not even discuss the men’s’ part of the Ceremony in women’s company. I gave this undertaking only after serious thought, and I don’t believe the written observations I make in this research breach this agreement. (GW was concerned in discussing
ceremonial pedagogy to limit his comments to what was publishable, that is
describable in a general way in public.

8.7.5.2 Non-ceremonial Arcana in Kunwinjku Life

It is possible to identify different kinds as well as different levels of secrecy, apart
from simple privacy, in Kunwinjku life. There are three areas of pedagogy that were
not addressed by any interviewees and which operate in either apparent or real
secrecy:

- Sometimes adults will teach a particular child content from curriculum
domains which might be construed as warranting some secrecy: for example,
explaining post mortem processes, the use of good luck charms and
ritualised, apparently religious, aspects of food gathering and preparation.
Examples include the procedures to avoid other people accessing a person’s
excrement or hair, or the mandatory process of burying certain feathers when
preparing an emu for cooking. This strand of pedagogy is certainly not
carried out in a secret manner, although it is necessarily only “public” within
the limited family domain. It may not be obvious to Kunwinjku people that
the diurnal teaching of these ideas and systems is distinctly “pedagogic”, or it
could be they associate this area of curriculum with a kind of privacy, but in
any case no interviewees described these aspects of pedagogy.

- There are two consciously covert areas of pedagogy with particular social
potency not discussed by interviewees, though each of these domains
obviously does entail a particular pedagogy. In both cases pedagogy is an
exchange based relationship, the knowledge having commodity value, and
both parties aware of socially invisible potential for mutual reliance in certain
projects:
  - There is a significant but secret teaching process in preparing men to
    inherit the functions of marrkidjbu, but no interviewees mentioned
    this area of pedagogy. This is hardly surprising when all discussion of
    these men is covert because of fear of any comments coming to their
    attention. Non-Kunwinjku people may refer to these men as “witch
doctors” or “traditional healers” depending on the ideological stance
    of the commentator. Kunwinjku people almost always regard them
    with some fear, even those they may pay for their services as healers.
    Some of them are known as namarndeyi (literally ”murderer”).
particularly when one or other of them makes public their role in a death in the community due to their powers of sorcery.

- A second covert pedagogy is associated with acquiring and using magic substances and skills (njiri) to enhance sexual attractiveness or the power to hunt effectively or musical skills.

8.7.5.3 Ceremony, Secrecy and Relationality

In 1977 the school library in Kunbarllanjnja had acquired eight copies of R and C Berndt’s 1970 monograph, *Man Land and Myth in North Australia: The Gunwinggu People*. Over a period of weeks, each copy was borrowed by a certain Kunwinjku family and each returned a few days later with most of the pages of photographs removed. I made discreet inquiries and was told publication of the photos had been considered a breach of ceremonial secrecy. These guardians evidently did not read the text accompanying the photographs which described in detail material never envisaged for any sort of publication by its Kunwinjku sources, particularly in regard to the *Wubarr* Ceremony. This apparently extreme activity was a purposeful and effective response to Balanda pressure on ceremonial secrecy. Within Kunwinjku society there are generally known protocols about access to all levels of information.

Kunwinjku people have strong systems for preserving personal space and privacy in a range of contexts, not all ceremonial. Children are taught for example, not to ask questions about where adult couples have been or what they are doing as a couple. They are taught to avoid “noticing” or discussing sexual behaviour between adults generally. There is a general reticence about “noticing” or discussing personal behaviours in members of the opposite sex, at least not in public. In most families good manners are taught informally but continuously to young children, for example, the ethics and processes of asking, thanking and greetings.

Every child learns which relationships in his expanding social experience are marked by avoidance of various degrees, and what kind of eye contact is allowed, together with the appropriate forms of address and reference involved in each kinship dyad. Group behaviours are consciously taught and learnt: who can sit where, facing which way and near whom in family groups. The process of ensuring there is no misreading of such behaviours constitutes a significant item in the learning of most children. Children by middle primary years practise, and are very sensitive about issues of being “forced” or “bossed”, and especially of being noticed or talked about, particularly by their peers - sometimes leading to conflict in the school setting where
children are brought into artificially close proximity with each other. The doctrine of
secrecy in ceremonial instruction should be considered against this general
Kunwinjku experience. What is being taught and learnt in all these contexts is a
complex system of relational protocols and processes that allow a balance of
relational tensions. Gender and age become more significant aspects of this strategy
during and after ceremonial participation.

8.7.5.4 Pedagogic and Other Models of Ceremonial Secrecy
Ceremony socially bifurcates future ceremonial learning careers, by offering some of
its graduates the opportunity for specialist apprenticeship over several years, gaining
competency as a ceremonial teacher, to be authorised by his mentors. From a general
Kunwinjku point of view, this instruction is always covert and was not discussed by
interviewees. Other ceremonial graduates will continue to attend ceremonies only as
participants rather than apprentices or leaders. But ceremonial processes and content
are perennially secret for all participants outside the ceremonial boundary, and this
feature needs some discussion, since secrecy of this sort seems to go well beyond the
pedagogic notion of readiness, that is, the insistence that novitiates should be mature
enough to handle the content kept back from them up to that point.

Secrecy can be construed as a strategy to valorise ceremonial learning, making
it attractive to young people as part of the risky process of winning their allegiance to
“Law”. Perhaps the element of mystery explains the way younger boys had their
interest piqued in Ceremony some years before they were sent.

There is also a relational option in explaining ceremonial power, at least in
terms of epistemology. I began to feel this when from time to time, some older men
have taken time to explain the meaning of things to me, citing as their sole reason,
the fact that they call me, Mamam, or Korlonj or Kankinj (Sister’s son). It was clear
that on account of those relationships, they were entrusting me with certain
information. This is one of the patterns of pedagogy of Kunwinjku life (in the male
domain at least) in both secret and public but gendered contexts. It is common for
example in some of the families whose men are commercially viable artists, where a
successful father or older brother will teach his sons or siblings how to paint for sale.
MM taught some of his sons painting but neither MM nor his family has become
involved in the arts industry centred on Oenpelli.

Sometimes an analysis of ritual learning can be reinterpreted in terms of
relationality. In writing a preface to Elkin (1977) Beckett addressed what he claimed
as a lacuna in Elkin’s approach. Beckett, citing Stanner and Maddock, described the revelation to a young novitiate of the simple, man-made explanation behind a ceremonial mystery as an example of how secrecy, in this case effectively pedagogic lies, was used as “a secular screen for truths too sacred to be revealed to the uninitiated”, resulting in the novitiate perceiving the mystery as mystical truth (Elkin, 1977, p. xi). I suggest this “disillusioning” experience may have produced in the novitiate not so much agreement with the lies he has now seen through, but a point of relational bonding with the liars – they have admitted him to their own inner world. It consists entirely of them. It is radically relational. The knowledge is what they produce, as much as it is what they pass on. He is admitted to the group by tacitly sharing their deceit of those outside. This secretive pedagogy has a clear relational goal in the alliance of the novitiate with his mentors.

Secrecy, as constructed sacredness or restriction, may also be motivated by the desire to express social status or power. Restricting access to knowledge is universally potent in this way. One version of this motivation involves constructing sacred domains in the physical, spatial world beyond the immediate boundaries of ceremonial events. It has emerged in the last decade in Kunwinjku speaking areas. Arrangements have been made by some ceremonial leaders to have the Northern Land Council and other bodies make public statements that certain roads would be closed for ceremonial reasons for certain blocks of time – usually only a few days. These announcements, which have no basis in Balanda Law, appeared to other Bininj to be authorised by the Balanda world, who fund and shape structures like land councils, lending power to ceremonial leaders. In the case of the Yabburlurrrwa ceremonies near Oenpelli, where there was no Balanda political will to make such announcements, unwritten demands were made so that any woman passing near the ceremonial site was required to pay money fines, whether the journey was necessary or not. Since the roads involved were the only routes between Oenpelli and the outstation homes of many people, and the ceremonial site had been chosen long after the roads had been constructed, this appeared to be a revenue raising scheme. In fact almost no one co-operated and the ill will engendered may have been a factor in the collapse of this Ceremony locally. There is however a more general loss of interest in Ceremony among Kunwinjku people.

8.8 CEREMONIES IN CRISIS
8.8.1 Ceremonial Decline Recognised.

Kunwinjku people are coming to terms with the collapse of their ceremonial system within the lifetimes of presently middle aged people. There is frequent discussion in everyday life about this failure, particularly among the men, despite some optimism about the Ceremony continuing. JM (39) for example plans to send his sons, now only young children, as they grow up. MM provides an index of dissonance about this issue in Kunwinjku thinking. He exhorts present day young men to remain committed to Ceremony, speaking about it in terms of its permanence:

You young men if you don't understand properly, you must really get hold of that Law. So you will know it. Don't just go a little way with it, that's the wrong thing. You should start with the Aboriginal way, our way first. Start there, with what we do. Learn, so you will know. Don't get muddled up in your thinking and get wrong ideas. What I've told you about, what I've said about Ceremony - Yabburlurrwa, Kunabibi, Lorrkon, Mardayin, Wubarr, these are business, Law. These are our Aboriginal ceremonies. We have that Law. It's what our old people had and taught us. They gave it to us, so we must hold on to it just the same way. What I mean precisely is, whenever we talk about Aboriginal (Law), it teaches you, maybe it's the Kunabibi that teaches you, well that Law will take you the straight way. That business is the Law, and that Law still exists. [MM2: 13]

In contrast, in his previous interview MM announced the demise of several major ceremonies and accused present day young men of a failure to learn from the Kunabibi as the only viable continuing source of Law:

- Now that Law of ours, "business" as English calls it, we say our Law, Kunabibi...Nowadays, it's Kunabibi that we have. Mardayin has gone, Wubarr has gone. Lorrkon...maybe we have it, I don't know. It's gone, we only have Kunabibi now. So is it a fact that we don't believe that Law? That's the thing that schools us! English says "school". We teach you when you watch Kunabibi. That's what happens, we take you and we teach you at the Ceremony as we do all those many different things. Then later when you (s) come down you (s) you go bad. The next week, you (s) will deliberately just become stupid, you (s) change and then just go along breaking in, then you (s) steal things. So then you (s) just do wrong, then you (s) just do wrong. You're (s) acting against the Law. English says, "Against the Law", which is business. You're (s) acting against the Law, as
we Aborigines say, you're opposing the Law. You're (s) "against the Law" against your own business, our business. The white man knows you've seen Kunabibi or whatever, or Lorrkkon, and then you go and steal. He knows and he says, "This one, didn't the men explain any ideas to this child?" The white man knows about the Law. But you (s) haven't got hold of it, not at all. [MM: 34]

- When we complete the Ceremony of Kunabibi, we go back down. We come (to the Kunabibi) and body paint you. Then in a few days time, you forget it. You subsequently just go wander around anywhere. Perhaps another month and you forget - you go and steal things from white people, this and that. Why don't you think about that business we teach you? Well, why not? Why don't you really hang on to what that (Law) or ours? It is morally wrong when you (s) go beyond the Law, when you (s) break the Law. It belongs to us, it's ours. That business - that's the thing that takes us straight. It reminds us about what we (exc) used to do. [MM: 32]

MM’s passionate exhortation is made more urgent by his self-aware status as the last surviving member of the “Old People”, which he reveals in his next comments [MM: 33]. He is acutely aware of the ceremonial hiatus that must follow his death in the absence of any identifiable future teachers among present day novitiates. Other interviewees echo his critique of present day ceremonial learners. For example, AN (28) has accepted that the loss of the Old People has impacted ceremonies; The imminent collapse of Mardayin and Lorrkkon are cited by GW (3) as part of his motivation to commit himself to Yaburlurrwa. ED (35) claims young women are simply not receiving ceremonial training any more. Wubarr is said to have failed because the only men qualified to teach it have now died without finding or training successors.

### 8.8.2 A Kunwinjku Self-Critique.

Most interviewees made criticisms of either themselves or other Kunwinjku individuals or groups in connection with either ceremonial failure or other problems in present day Kunwinjku society. In chapters thirteen and fourteen I will discuss the way some Kunwinjku people are reacting to their own critique, and to the problems they have diagnosed.

In terms of ceremonial failure, some have been critical of the attitude of present day novitiates toward their ceremonial involvement:
• Maybe what happens is that when the kids are talking to each other, they get a lot of ideas, and they see a lot of new ideas coming along, lots of different ideas from the Balanda world - there's an exchange of ideas. And in the Aboriginal domain, they're moving away from those ceremonies that have been around for ages, and moving towards these new ideas. So they might be thinking that way, or maybe they'll want to really hang on only to the Aboriginal ways. Maybe that is what it all means for them [PS: 8]

• I know about that business, yes. It's very tough. But, the new generation, the ones growing up now, when we send them up to the ceremonies, they're silly. They just go their own way, sniffing petrol and stealing things. Breaking in to places. They're doing the wrong thing. [JD2: 45]

GW (66) notes young men (of the correct age) are no longer being sent to Ceremony, nor showing any interest in the adult discipline associated with Ceremony:

Now, those old people (put it) there long ago...but young men are not being sent up now for us (inc), for (the ceremonies) our own (inc) old people put there, what they put there, those first people. As well, not only that, but they should stop treating life as a joke, those bigger ones, I'm talking about those old enough to grow whiskers, a young man, young blokes. They still go to school, but they should be still teaching them that other business too, I mean they should teach them the ceremonies, and by that, they would stop and put an end to them taking life lightly. They still play games - I'm thinking of football which they play, but that's fine. The other kinds of playing around in our terms..."Don't keep on clowning around" they tell them. [GW: 66]

I have suggested (8.1.2) that the disappearance of particular ceremonies did not indicate a collapse of Ceremony generically, and was evidence of the way Ceremony acted as a fluid venue of pedagogic resources and opportunities, a sort of smorgasbord of ritual tools for social reproduction. Alternatively, we could interpret the range and diversity as reflecting an inevitable heterogeneity in human affairs.

This varied range of ceremonies may have been the case before Balanda contact, and even up into the 1950s, but since that time there is clear evidence that the Kunwinjku ceremonial system has become very limited, a fact evidenced in many of these interviews. Berndt (1970, pp. 126 ff.) reports on Kunwinjku expectations of a long ceremonial apprenticeship for young men, entailing a syllabus of attendance at six major ceremonies, but notes in a number of places that this system was in decline
Chapter Eight Ceremony as Pedagogy

during his field work forty years ago. In 1978 the organisers of the *Wubarr* Ceremony at Wurlwunj, 40km north of Oenpelli, had to stop proceedings very unwillingly on a number of occasions and send vehicles to Oenpelli to round up men who should have been on site for rehearsals and other tasks. Attendance at other ceremonies is said to have generally dwindled over the last four decades. In support of this, during the 1970s and 1980s there were rumours of under-age boys being allowed to boost the numbers at *Kunabibi* ceremonies held at outstations, and in 1982 one of my students, a boy then twelve years old in claimed to have seen a complete *Kunabibi* Ceremony, meaning that most Kunwinjku people would have thought him much too young for such an involvement.

In 1979 I was invited to sit with the older men who organised what became the last of the *Mardayin* ceremonies near Oenpelli, listening to their deliberations about the decline in interest in the Ceremony in the Kunwinjku community. Their concerns were shared by those organising every major ceremonial event in the community and its outstations over the last three decades.

> But that other way from our old people, our own, from our language, it can teach us. On the other side, the Balanda way is teaching us. And they are learning that. Because when they leave school, they don't go through anything else. That's it, they just follow along the white way.[JD: 79]

What are the causes for this collapse of the most significant formal venue for Kunwinjku pedagogy? Why are young men either failing to attend, or failing to be sent to Ceremony, or failing to take into their adult lives the ceremonial teaching?

What is the relationship between the collapse of ceremonial teaching and the failure of hearth family pedagogy? These questions cannot be answered without some further discussion (in chapter 14) of the impact of the *Balanda* world on Kunwinjku life generally and the parallel decline in attendance at school, public meetings and other social events, even including funerals.

8.9 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO OTHER CHAPTERS

Ceremony is the context in which Kunwinjku people are most conscious of pedagogy as intentional socialisation. It is the pedagogic context where Kunwinjku people are most likely to discuss the curriculum being taught. When they do, they use the word *mankarre* ("Law") to subsume the entire range of learnings and to recognise the completely socialised Kunwinjku adult. I will discuss Kunwinjku Law in the
following chapter, concluding with some further development of the theorisation about Kunwinjku pedagogy interacting with issues raised by both Ceremony and the notion of Law.
CHAPTER NINE
LAW AS CURRICULUM
CHAPTER 9. LEARNING TO BE KUNWINJKU: “LAW” AS CURRICULUM

9.1 INTRODUCTION TO KUNWINJKU LAW

9.1.1 The Law

Kunwinjku people have described a complex curriculum to be taught and learnt in Kunwinjku pedagogy. Taken together, their interviews reveal a comprehensive curriculum of attitudes, skills and knowledge to be learnt and applied in the whole range of life experiences: religious, social, linguistic, creative and practical daily survival. They describe all of this as their Law, rooted in the Old People and their teaching in the hearth and the Ceremony, and linking together Kunwinjku epistemology, sociality and the educational praxis of its transgenerational operation. Not only is it artificial to discuss Law in isolation from Ceremony, but in talking about Law, everything in the self-aware Kunwinjku universe is potentially in mind. Law is deeply associated with the most intimate hearth family learning:

... just like Mawah and Nakurrng, Makka, Ngalkurrng (his sister), that eldest Mawah - and the youngest - they all used to tell me about the Law. And I wouldn't get up and go. Never. I would just sit there until they used to say, "Okay, that's it. I've finished. So now you go to sleep." Then I would sleep. That's what I used to do. Now, later, I'm talking myself, explaining that Law. I'm not learning it nowadays, but to start with, at the start, they used to just explain to us, those old people, Mawah, Nakurrng, that old lady, (your) Makkah - my mother that Makkah, and that sister of that Nakurrng (you call "Ke Nakurrng", and I called "Kakkak"). That brother and Doydoy, my nephews, those I call Mamam. Makkah, who was the aunty of my mother, used to teach me too. I didn't mix in anything of my own when I listened to that Law. They started talking to me and teaching me. Aboriginal thinking: they taught me and talked to me about all kinds of things, everything. [MM2: 31-32]

Kunwinjku people experience pedagogy in three broad domains: the hearth family, the ceremonies, and in contact with the Balanda world, especially its school system. They have discussed both the content and the goals of these pedagogic contexts, reflecting their responses to social and epistemological disturbance since Balanda contact. I will discuss the way Kunwinjku people look at their curriculum, their Law, from a variety of viewpoints, and the way in which this Law is associated with Kunwinjku identity.
Kunwinjku life is intensely focused on itself, and was presumably more so before Balanda contact. I have called this trait endosociality and hinted at some of its operations in discussions (at 8.2.5 and 8.6.2 and 3 for example) about the way tensions between Kunwinjku individuals and the groups and alliances within Kunwinjku life are expressed and resolved. I suggest that Kunwinjku pedagogy was therefore a process of endosocialisation, that is, socialisation exclusively towards membership of a closed social universe. It could be argued that in any society, socialisation is expressed and directed towards the reduplication of that society. In fact I will assume for this discussion that all curriculum statements are bounded by a particular society’s unique process and programme for socialisation into that society. What is unique about Kunwinjku endosociality is the degree of isolation from other groups and the small size of the society, both factors intensifying an inward focus. The Balanda world has entered this closed social domain and produced two apparently contrasting responses, reflecting forced Kunwinjku re-theorisation about relationships with people beyond their own society. Firstly, the Balanda world needs to be learnt, and learnt about: in other words it necessitates a radical adaptation of the Kunwinjku curriculum. Secondly, and in parallel with the first response, Kunwinjku people have become more analytical of their distinctives and more possessive of, and focused upon, what uniquely constitutes their society and its curriculum, and what they need to teach and learn as uniquely theirs. The Balanda world therefore challenges but also reinforces Kunwinjku endosociality. Kunwinjku people talk about this process in terms of its impact on teaching and learning Law, which has led to an extraordinary and extended process of self-analysis and reconstruction of the self, both individually and as a society.

9.1.2 Law as the Kunwinjku Curriculum for Life.

In Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse, the content of learning is the Law and this term encompasses all of what a Kunwinjku person needs to learn and what Kunwinjku people need to teach in every part of life. Kunwinjku Law is a complex and complete mental picture of what constitutes a curriculum for life. Applying the terminology of Law to the whole range of desirable learning in life valorises the notion of curriculum beyond a simple listing of experiences or outcomes. In Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse, Law defines the totality of socialisation and enculturation, rather than isolating a scholarly or other specific strand of learning. The content of Kunwinjku learning and the outcomes expected in a well-socialised Kunwinjku
person are Law, and this word is global, encompassing domestic and field skills, moral values, a corpus of oral literature, social knowledge, social language variants, family history, hunting, manufacturing, cooking and navigation skills. In larger societies curricula are specific to pedagogic contexts embedded in larger social subgroups such as the school system, so global statements about educational goals are usually only made in political contexts.

The Kunwinjku curriculum is not expressed in taxonomic terms, but is self-consciously intentional. Its goal is adults who have learnt and will teach their children the Law - what it means to be Kunwinjku – how to relate well within Kunwinjku society, how to speak Kunwinjku well, how to live prudently as a Kunwinjku adult, how and who to value in Kunwinjku social life. Finally, there is a strong emphasis on knowing how to ensure that the next generations grow into the same kind of Kunwinjku adulthood. This Kunwinjku curriculum universe is radically challenged by the extrinsic curriculum of the insistent outside world. This Balanda curriculum is demanding technically and in its range of language and functional skills. But its most powerful impact on Kunwinjku pedagogy is its offer of an authoritative alternative epistemology, a system of knowledge divorced from power relationships among Kunwinjku people, constituting a competing curriculum, that is, a competing Law. (This apparently extrinsic factor impacting Kunwinjku pedagogy is discussed in detail below at 9.7.5 and 9.7.6.)

9.1.3 Talking about “Law”

The terminology of Law needs some introduction. Generally, discourse about Law depends on words based on mankarre. So, mankarrebadjan - foundational or basic Law (literally: the mother Law); mankarre mandulmuk - heavy or most important Law [DM: 37]; karreyolyolmi – he spoke about or explained the Law. Context is mandatory for translation since mankarre is commonly used over a range of meanings and could be glossed as “Law”, “song”, “plan” or “system” with the underlying semantic link the notion of a pattern to be identified or followed. Hence: karrikarremarnbu – we should make plans; ngakarremenwakwam – I didn’t understand what he intended; mankarre duninjh - the real Law [AN: 9; JN: 28]. (Duninjh unmarkedly means real or original, and has the connotation of “legitimacy in terms of Kunwinjku reality”. For example Kunwinjku Duninjh means Kunwinjku spoken properly, as by a Kunwinjku-first-language speaker.)
Other partial synonyms for Law (mankarre) are sometimes used by older Kunwinjku and may sometimes carry additional connotations.

- **kunkunadj** – identity or “knowing how to fit in socially” (For example in MM2: 87).
- **yikurrumu** – glossed by some Kunwinjku speakers as “culture”, but applied mainly in talking about the social knowledge children should master preparatory to adulthood. It is broadly synonymous with other Kunwinjku expressions like “well mannered” (menmak) or “intelligent” (kodjkulu djad).

The two informants who spoke in most detail about issues of Law (JN and MM) both seem to have adapted terms idiosyncratically for the purpose. JN (17) uses an older and more precise term, yiwarrudj, for Law, which must be glossed as either “fundamental Law”, or “moral code”. This term is no longer used in general Kunwinjku because it has become permanently associated with Christian contexts, translating “Christian belief” or even “prayer”. MM has described how both yiwarrudj and kunkunadj act as synonyms for mankarre in current discourse on Law, suggesting that precision of terminology is not crucial in analysing what constitutes it. Note that he attributes the application of yiwarrudj to Christian morality as due to Balanda appropriation:

> But about Yiwarrudj, that, that Yiwarrudj, it used to teach us too. It was very big, that Yiwarrudj. Yiwarrudj, well, it's what (makes us) so we don't....we don't take things, we don't steal, for example. Or, we don't get violent, we men, according to that Yiwarrudj. It's the same as what Aboriginal people talk about. Yiwarrudj is the same. The Balanda call it Yiwarrudj, but Aboriginal people have the same thing, and they used to call it Kunkunadj, when they discussed it. That's what we are talking about in fact. We're (talking about) that right here. They used to call it Kunkunadj. In fact, I explain Kunkunadj, it's what I explain to my sons' children: (those you call) Nadjakerr and Narrumanj, and to your sisters and brothers, Nadjakerr too. It's that Kunkunadj that I explain to them - The Law (mankarre). I've told them about it. I've taught them that Kunkunadj, told them about it. I'm staying with that Yiwarrudj, I've kept it for them. [MM2: 87]

MM throughout his interviews generally preferred the form kunkarre for mankarre to mean Law. The alternative prefix (kun- instead of man-) is an idiosyncratic choice of noun class marker. MM’s major contribution is his highly structured text (MM2)
which amounts to a treatise on teaching, learning and living in accordance with, the Law.

When Kunwinjku people use English statements about pedagogy, they often describe what is uniquely Kunwinjku, as opposed to what is Balanda, as “culture”. Apart from the unusual application of yikurrumu noted above, there is no commonly used term that could legitimately translate the range of meanings in the English word. Its use by Kunwinjku people is highly specific. For example G, a 40 year old woman, explained to me when I asked why she looked so tired, that she had spent all night organising a group of dancers who were being filmed close to Oenpelli. In her long description of the event, the only English word she used was “culture”. “Culture” used this way includes dances, Ceremony, the manufacture of artefacts like spears and baskets, and bark paintings – the objects that Balanda have focused upon and commoditised as unique to Kunwinjku people, and which Kunwinjku people now think of as distinctives. It is never used by Kunwinjku speakers to include language or kinship issues or the daily lifestyle of people, probably since these are not often the subject of inquiry or interest by Balanda film makers or other investigators. These other areas, together with the “culture” items, are all usually spoken of as Law. JM however has quite idiosyncratically used the English “culture” throughout his interview (7, 9, 12, 18 for example), clearly intended to carry the same meaning as Law. (Interestingly he glosses his English usage in one place as Malak, a word normally meaning “traditional” or “old fashioned”.)

The sense of “unique to us” or “belonging to us” is a strong connotation of Kunwinjku usage of mankarre for Law. In a number of interview texts the word “culture” is supplied in brackets to translate expressions like ngadkenh (literally, “belonging to us”) and Bininjkenh (literally, “about Aboriginal people.”) The fact that Kunwinjku people have appropriated some English words for this kind of topic reflects the significance of the way the Balanda world and its language have impacted Kunwinjku thinking about issues of identity and pedagogy. This theme will emerge throughout the following discussion.

9.1.4 “Our” Law.

Kunwinjku people often refer to this Law-as-curriculum in ways that reflect a sense of their personal identification with the Law, and a sense of ownership of it. The Law is “our own Law” [JN: 9] “our Aboriginal Law” or “our own Aboriginal culture”
“And we also give them, that, ah, the Law. We give them our own so they will know that." [ED: 13]

This proprietary or personally associative notion may reflect the necessary preoccupation of any minority with its distinctives, so that pronoun “our” would be exclusive - “not belonging to you or to them”. But there is also a strong sense of stewardship involved – so the pronoun “our” is inclusive - “yours and mine”. Both exclusive and inclusive forms are available in Kunwinjku grammar, and both are used variously in the interviews, but regardless of what a particular proposition focused upon, both these perspectives emerge continually in Kunwinjku discourse.

The sense of ownership is intimately centred on the hearth family and its Old People: “our Law” emerges within “our family”:

In my case, for example, I think about those old people, my father, my grandmother, my mother's older sister, my aunty - they raised me. I still think about them, and now I’m teaching my children, daughters and sons, as I raise them I’m telling them what their forebears were like, who they refer to as Mawahmawah. They call the women that too...[JN: 48]

This assertion of ownership of, and identification with, Law raises questions: Do people think of Law as controlling or merely summarising their lives? Or is the primary unmarked sense of “ours” in the present day mainly an oppositional response to the arrival of the second and invasive Law of the Balanda? ED (102-106) described the way children now reject as Balanda, aspects of Kunwinjku life they find irritating. Her comments invite the discussion of anomie at 9.7.6 below. From the viewpoint of a Kunwinjku learner, does he or she see two curricula or two domains of curriculum? How does he or she learn to categorise what is learnt as either Balanda or Kunwinjku? To what extent is the content of each kept separate in the mind of the learner? Most of these issues emerge in discussion of Two Ways or Both Ways Education at 9.7.4 and 9.7.6.

9.2 SOURCES, DOMAINS AND A HIERARCHY OF LAWS

9.2.1 Law and “Laws”.

Kunwinjku speakers distinguish in everyday speech between Law as a reified or global entity, and Law as rules and regulations. JN makes an excursion into the
diversity of contexts and the range of significance of “Law” and “Laws” in Kunwinjku experience:

That's how you learn. You get something and mix it in so you know about minor sorts of Laws and the more important Laws, about Balanda Law and Aboriginal Law - including Aboriginal Law from other language groups. Not only black, but we have both Bininj and Balanda Law - they're all Law. But our (inc) Laws are not identical - some, some of them are different. Some of them are different Laws. Some. Some are the same. There are different sorts of Laws. For example, Balanda, different Balanda have different Laws. And in each different place black people in their turn have different Laws. So the coastal people have different Laws, the inland people too, in their distant place. They each have their own Law, but they have some that are the same as ours. [JN: 18]

For JN, Law is realised through “Laws” which variously express universal human categories across race and locality but are situated in particular societies. JN implies the need to learn how to analyse and interpret Laws hierarchically. In everyday Kunwinjku life, even children distinguish between important rules or Laws (mankarrekhkimuk) and minor requirements (mankarrekilehkilelk - literally “little Laws”).

One of the commonly made distinctions within the global concept of Law is between public or “outside” Law, and the Law presented within Ceremony. The “outside” Law is the Law taught by the hearth family, the attitudes and protocols which are the basis for all adult social intercourse. It is rooted in the Old People and in the intimacy of hearth family learning and contains the essentials for survival and relationship:

Yes. About the Law, well in my case, my father's father, my Mawah, to start with, they didn't teach me the Wubarr. No. They would just explain things to me and teach me, and this went on until I was fifteen years old. I was learning the outside (public) Law, from what they talked about and what they taught me. It was our Law from way back at the beginning, when their first ancestors taught those people and then in my turn my father's fathers taught it to me. They would say to me, "Don't go and steal from people. Don't go and steal things. They belong to someone." Or "What are you doing touching things?" "When you go ahead and grow up, don't go chasing after things. That means you will
break the Law." Those Mawah of mine used to say that. "When you go hunting
for fish or any animals, bring it all back to the camp, don't hide it for yourself,
even if you are hungry. Even so, bring it back to camp. You eat it in camp
where they can see." That's the sort of Law those Mawah used to tell me about.
That's what we used to do. [MM2: 27-28]

The terminology should not be taken as indicating any secondary or less important
status for “outside” Law. On the contrary, the “outside” Law is not only continuous
with ceremonial Law, but is the absolute prerequisite for productive participation in
the ceremonial Law:

When I turned fourteen they showed me that Wubarr. They said to me, "Okay,
you're ready to go. Go and look at that Wubarr." They had taught me, "Don't
eat that" and "Don't get too close to that thing there" and "Don't cross over
that way. It's all the same thing. This is what the Law says." They said to me,
"Do you remember what we told you before, what we've taught you?" "Yes," I
said, "Why?" "All right then. We're saying you can see the Wubbarr." That
Wubarr of theirs was the part of the same thing. "This is what we talked about
before, when you were small, and we spoke about it." [MM2: 29]

9.2.2 Relationality as a Hierarchic Principle in Law.

JN explicitly addressed the idea of another kind of distinction within Law, making a
hierarchical distinction within the curriculum, valorising relationships and social
learnings above what he called “the small stuff”:

I tell them what kind of people our family are like, my father and his siblings,
my father and aunty. That's part of the fundamental Law...That is what it
means to be educated. It’s very deeply important. It’s not the same as when you
teach someone to straighten a spear. That's easy. He can straighten or break it.
Snap it at the joint. Or break the stick. And when does he straightens it? When
the bamboo dries out properly, dry, you leave it out to dry in the sun. When it is
just right. You tell him the best time. And when he puts the spearhead on, you
tell him how long to make it, not too short or it won't go fast, when you're
trying to throw it with woomera. That's all small stuff. He'll fit it in somewhere,
he or she, he'll figure it out eventually, that child, girl or boy. [JN: 48-49]

JN’s hierarchy reflects an organising principle within Law. Even when discussions of
Law focus on the details of daily life, say, the nitty gritty of hunting and food
preparation, these procedures are always presented as socially (or morally) motivated and relationally potent:

*About learning the Law - they watch us when we go hunting and we also teach them. We say, "Cook it this way. This is the way you cut it up and cook it. And don't eat it all yourself. You all eat it that animal, you eat it - say five of you. Five people eat it - it could be ten! - a group of men together should eat it. Not just you alone eating. You cut up the leg that way, you cut it up thus into little pieces. Small pieces. And the whole group shares."* [GW: 40]

There is a clue here as to the organising principle that draws into the term “Law” such an apparently diverse range of skills, behaviours and protocols. All the lists, whether hearth family or ceremonially based, have as their common organising centre, relationality. They all talk about either the relational implications and principles of what may appear to be merely procedural or technical skills.

### 9.3 CURRICULUM CONTENT: WHAT CONSTITUTES THE LAW?

#### 9.3.1 Areas of Law

“Law” summarises the Kunwinjku curriculum, and this curriculum is holistic: it is a map for personhood in the family and society, from birth to adulthood. I discussed (in chapter five) the wide range of skills and ideas subsumed under hearth family curriculum – language learning (including kinship address), technologies, vocabulary and processes of hunting and other food gathering, art, environmental knowledge, building shelters, knowledge of fires and firewood, family history and the Kunwinjku oral literature. All of these are spoken of as the Law. Within this extremely broad global notion however, there are some recurrent topics in Kunwinjku discourse that are reflected in the interview texts identifying discrete areas of learning and a diversity of ways of characterising the Law in general and analytical terms. Law is such a complex domain in Kunwinjku discourse, and is encountered in so many life situations, that people use a variety of images to explain it. I have noted at 8.1.3 the identification of Law with Ceremony, and I discuss the way some people analogue Law as school at 9.7.4 below. The following list includes some similarly general models of Law, but also explores particular areas of Law.

#### 9.3.2 Hearth Family Teaching is Law

JN (21) has described the content of hearth family learning as “part of the fundamental Law”. AN (6) locates his childhood learning of hunting and fishing skills as “real Law” (*mankarre duninjh*). The whole range of hearth family learning
My father on his part taught me about animals as I was growing up. I knew how to stalk them. He taught me that. He taught me how to spear them. He gave me a spear thrower. He made me straighten the bamboo (for spears) and he made me cut it myself. He taught me about that bamboo and showed me how to cut it, chopping it off at the roots and straightening it out. I used to put the metal head on the spears, and make fishing spears, sharpening the wires. I carved those little bokko spears. I chipped spear throwers from wood. I did that too. I made up the sharp point. He showed me about resin from the ironwood tree you use to glue (the head on the spear). He showed me the beeswax, and told me how to follow the native bees. That wax, you see the honey first, then there's probably some wax. All that was part of our fundamental Law. So now, when I go about, as an adult, when I go along anywhere in the bush, if I happen to get hungry I know about those animals, the bush foods, the fish. I know all that. I know from having watched them when we camped there in the bush, before we came back here to where the Balanda were, and they made me start going to school. [JN: 21]

JN gathers all the diverse hearth family curriculum items together as “Law”, suggesting “Law” is coterminous with any chunk of the whole scope of Kunwinjku learning experience, the essential body of childhood learning acting as a foundation for lifelong education, reinforcing the point made by several informants that hearth learning is pre-eminent and the pre-requisite to all other learning. (See for example at 6.1.10) JN’s use of expression, “fundamental Law” (yiwaruddj) could be equally well glossed as “foundational” or “basic” Law, taking in not only survival skills, but the social and mental apparatus for the adult formation of relationships well beyond the hearth family or even the Kunwinjku context:

And that is the fundamental Law, that's what the fundamental Law is. That is what they passed on to us - when we (inc) were small. We all lived there in the one place, and grew up in the one camp. It was only later we went away from there. So we become adults and we have that fundamental Law. That's why we can then leave and go off to distant places - the "wider world" as Balanda say, far away. It was maybe, as the Balanda would say, we went "exploring", to find
out whatever for ourselves. We try to find out for ourselves what other people
are thinking. [JN: 17]

9.3.3 Law as a Belief System or a Set of Guidelines for Living

Not all aspects of the Law can be presented as lists, either technical or social. Many
informants speak of Law as an organising principle or an abstract entity, sometimes
with transcendent qualities, in either religious terms or as a guiding principle in life.
Law in this reified sense proves problematic, since Law, when applied outside the
Kunwinjku domain, must either become plural, challenging the idea of its monolithic
and absolute status, or Law must be thought of as the reification of universal human
capacity to choose behaviours, allowing people with different Laws to be equally
Lawful.

This epistemological tension emerges in various ways, for example PS (35)
implies “Law” is an authoritative statement about what is to be believed.

Yes. Um, Nungalinya (combined churches training college in Darwin )is a
different sort of place but it's like, it's similar to Kunbarllanjnja in the mission
days. But that system has moved - they've put it there at Nungalinya. That's
what they call the place. I've actually learnt things there. We learnt there. We
were learning how to think the right way. It's well established there. If anyone
wants to really learn, he'll change his thinking there. He'll do some thinking,
he'll think about good and evil. That's actually what we all learn (inc), or they
learn, or we (exc) learn at Nungalinya, so then we can look after each other.
We can look after each other, and we can listen to the correct (mandjad) Law
about our Christian belief. [PS: 35]

His comments are about the teaching role of Nungalinya college, which provides
Christian training to Church leaders in Darwin: but a similar association between
Law and the authorisation of belief is made by others who claim the Ten
Commandments as a useful analogy with the core role of the Law in Kunwinjku life,
such as JN (37) and ED:

That's what it was like. And sometimes they would take them to the ceremonies,
and they used to teach them Wubarr - what it was about, and they would show
them what to do there... They used to teach them, for example, that Duwa stuff
which was like teaching them the Ten Commandments - it's the same as that
kind of Law. They used to teach the young men so they came out of it they
wouldn't just muck around any more or not take things seriously. [ED: 5]
There is no suggestion here of any necessarily hierarchical relationship between Law in the Kunwinjku domain and Law as applied to a Christian system of authority. The implication is that Law can be thought of as a personal set of principles regardless of source, rather than any reified system beyond the personal. In practice, people are often confronted with dissonance between their individual Law and the Law as others apprehend and personalise it. The hegemony of “our Law” in Kunwinjku life is challenged from three directions. Firstly, the multifarious and constant operations of Balanda Law, especially its enforceable nature through the police and courts, demands some mental accommodation to brute facts. Secondly, the assertion by Kunwinjku Christians that God’s Law transcends Kunwinjku Law provokes considerable discussion and usually leads within families to a process of mutual accommodation as individuals respond to apparently dissonant truth propositions in their own thinking. Thirdly, internal variations within Kunwinjku Law reflect the rapidity and unevenness of changes in contemporary Kunwinjku life, accommodating the range of Kunwinjku individual responses to pressure on their transgenerationally inherited Law. In one form or another every Kunwinjku person faces this kind of challenge to the self-management of identity and epistemology on a daily basis.

Law is used quite broadly in discussion of the characteristics or components of the Balanda world. Both Balanda and Bininj have their own Law, and the term here seems to mean “knowing how to live in that social domain.” This implies that the unmarked meaning of Law in Kunwinjku discourse as “knowing how to live as Kunwinjku”. Law can therefore simultaneously encompass productive technical skills, social skills and the undefined and complex content of another culture, at least the part of it necessary to my life in our own society:

Both Aboriginal and Balanda, the two. We want them to teach Balanda things, so they know that, and teach them Aboriginal, and come back to teach our own stuff, our Aboriginal things. Both those Laws. They should learn properly Balanda things and Aboriginal things, so they should teach it all. Then they can make things, cut spears, make baskets and mats, dilly bags. [NN: 42]

BG (12-25) compared her experiences learning the Balanda world at boarding school with her return to Kunwinjku society to learn the Old People’s Law.

We saw how to live in the city, what life is like living in the city. Yes. It's as if we can say, "Ah, so we know that's what it's all about living in the big city.
However, we're back living here at our place, so we concentrate on here where we are.” And they teach us the Law and what it tells us is the right to do, in accordance with what those old people say. We understand the meaning of that Law. It’s strict just the same as the white people's Law. [BG: 25]

She reserves “Law” for the Old Peoples’ curriculum, describing the content of Balanda learning as “how to live life in a Balanda way” [BG: 13] perhaps indicating she considers “Law” as an appropriate reference only to Kunwinjku learning. BG’s association of both Kunwinjku Law and “Balanda ways” with representative people in both groups (Old People and white people) is typical of Kunwinjku discourse. Epistemological authority, that is the perceived veracity or reliability of what is taught depends on, and is ultimately inseparable from, the people who teach it. Law is therefore contingent. It is authorised, rather than authorising.

Personal reflection on the Law as a set of guidelines for life, or a moral template, suggest parallels to the wisdom literature of other cultures. The Law can be thought of as a mental picture of right living, a model offered as a demand rather than a mere representation of desirable behaviour. JD (11) describes Law in terms of an external behavioural model he could apply to himself, with the Law as a mechanism for prudential self-control, a means of remembering, and possibly a means of assessing one’s deviation from, the safety of the Kunwinjku ideal:

I was thinking about the Law, because I had a hard time, too much fighting. We would argue. We would fight. I was going along like that and I was thinking. I was thinking hard. I decided it would be better to get rid of the grog. [JD: 11]

MM has described Law as a kind of guide through life, a roadway, providing a sense of direction:

- That business will take you the straight way. Not for nothing they teach us that Law, that business. They teach us that business, that Law, and it takes you along properly. How will you go? What's your direction? It will explain what is right. [MM2: 58]
- I just stayed there at that place where they were teaching me the Law, which is the road they showed me. It's like a road, that Law. That's what they taught me about, and I'm still with it. I didn't leave it, and I haven't lost it. No. If I'd done that, if I'd let it go, I would have gone against the Law they used to explain to me, those old people. I'd have broken it if I'd argued with that Law. [MM2: 37]
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9.3.4 Law as the Corpus of Narrative Transmitted by the Old People

In the hearth family, the corpus of stories was thought of as Law. The Law was taught and learnt through stories [DM: 37] passed on by the Old People [JD: 4] who were explicit as to the learning task:

- They would tell us stories, and they would say to us, sometimes they would say to us, "You pay attention when we tell you this so you will know it." The old people used to tell us stories, and they would say, "This is the really important Law. (mankarre mandulmuk)" [DM: 37]
- In the past there was just that one system of Law, the black system was operating, the one The Old People used to talk about. That's what we used to sit around and listen to, that story. That's how we learnt it [JD: 4]

JN reflects on the important function of stories in his childhood learning of Law.
Without these “Aboriginal stories, our own stories” [JN: 19] children grow up “without any fundamental Law”:

So it was very different then. And stories, we had lots of stories, Aboriginal stories, our own stories we were told as children. I see that this is not happening now. I'm talking about kids growing up without any fundamental Law.[JN: 54].

The significant role of narrative in Kunwinjku pedagogy, implied here, is developed in chapter twelve. Stories are associated with the most intimate of childhood learning experiences reflecting a powerful connection in Kunwinjku thinking between learning the Law and personal relationship.

9.3.5 Language as Law.

Kunwinjku curriculum is fundamentally about the nature and operation of relationships. Language, as the locus of relationship, is therefore core curriculum, and at the heart of learning the Law. Language learning is in fact the curriculum area most spoken about in these interviews and warrants detailed discussion here.

Learning language is learning the Law [GW: 9 and 33; JN: 23; MM2: 78]. Mastery of language skills indicates an intelligent man or woman [MM2: 71]. MM’s exhortation to learn “this Aboriginal Law” is focused on learning language skills:

But this other thing I will talk about so you will know: you must learn when we teach you children... We're educating you, teaching you, so you will go on and work hard for us, you new generation. You children are more or less working. Young women too, they work so they will get knowledge. You will get
knowledge; getting language. Don't take that Law lightly when we are telling you about it - this Aboriginal (Law) I'm telling you [MM: 9]

This kind of exhortation is not unusual in Kunwinjku life generally, and points to the serious interest taken in the way children develop language skills. From earliest childhood people will ask about and remark upon an infant’s initial speech development. For the most part children learn grammar and extend their lexicon through participation and imitation. There is no general concern to correct mispronunciation or grammar. In fact there is an expectation that children will simply go through the stage of speaking Kunwinjku in the manner of children, with certain frequently occurring mispronunciations and grammatical misunderstanding, but eventually emerge speaking well formed Kunwinjku.

Adult interaction with infants is however, very purposeful about social aspects of language. Mothers and other family members, especially siblings, engage in conversation with even the youngest children from birth onwards, who are typically picked up and spoken to at any time, unless already asleep, by any family member. This extends to distant relatives or people outside the family who may be attracted to an interaction with the baby. Some mothers seem to make a project of talking with their babies constantly, but is rare to hear adults using any form of “baby talk” with even small children. Usually adult grammar, whole sentences and very clearly and slowly articulated terms are used, with a range of emotional tuning – usually people speak to infants while smiling and looking very friendly or solicitous, but young mothers will sometimes act in a mock anger or surprise as a joke when talking with toddlers. When children misunderstand any of this input and become distressed, the universal and immediate response is to cuddle them and provide reassurance.

These activities constitute a sociolinguistic curriculum. All interaction with babies and toddlers involves a kind of universal teaching game in Kunwinjku society: whenever the child focuses on someone, or is encouraged to focus on someone, he or she is coached with the applicable kinship term. In other words, the social network around each toddler provides constant scaffolding and incentives to master speech relationally. This focus will develop by later childhood into a preoccupation, shared by most primary school age children, with the formalities of how particular people in their relational universe relate to each other. Children are frequently heard talking about how they are required to address other children or adults. This mental mapping out of the extended Kunwinjku relational network
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requires the simultaneous development of appropriate sociolect skills. Learning to speak and to relate rightly are intertwined and assessed through the learning of the two special purpose social variants of Kunwinjku: *Kunbalak* and *Kundebi*.

9.3.5.1 Kundebi

Kunwinjku speakers have highly valorised the learning of *Kundebi* (or *Kundembuy*). This is a complex system of third person reference which simultaneously accounts for the relationship of both speaker and hearer with the person referred to. I have compiled dictionary entries for about 210 terms in current use among adults who have mastered the system. MM and some other older adults constantly try to train their younger family members to use Kundebi. MM provides a snapshot of the relational framing for Kundebi, and its learning:

> *Now this Kundebi: Nakurrng, Mamam, Kanjok and so on...Kanjok, that's when you are first cousins with someone, so you call them Ngabba or Korlonj - (you relate to them) something like a younger brother. Now my sons' children, I've told them, "Ah, you are all first cousins. So really (you call each other) Korlonj. So those ones (using Kundebi) Nangarrkkang or Ngalngarrkkang, they call you Korlonj, your first cousins. It's the same either way - those first cousins you could call them Korlonj, or they could call you Korlonj. That's how it works. In some cases you call people Mamam (mother's father or man's daughters' children) - that's one way, and it applies in one kind of relationship. But there is also the situation where you call (someone in that kind of relationship) Korlonj. That's what's called "Modjarrkdoiyiburk", which is when you call each other Korlonj (your child), Ngabba (your father) or Berluh (your aunty). When your Mamam is your mother's father, then he's called Mamam. But we call some people Mamam because our full first cousins are their mothers, that is, the people we call Korlonj (my child). That's what we call "Law". It's all part of the same thing.* [MM2: 78]

The greatest burden in learning *Kundebi* is of course, the detailed knowledge required about the nature of kinship relations between all other Kunwinjku speakers, including those beyond one’s immediate family. This amounts to a protracted exercise in memorisation of the Kunwinjku social universe.

*Kundebi* is the most formal manifestation of the strong Kunwinjku ethic of language sociality which can be summarised as: *avoid at all costs using anyone’s personal name*. Calling out an adult’s personal name is one of the few childhood
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offences that can earn public punishment, usually delivered by a mother or grandmother as a slap or severe chastisement.

- We (dual inc) don't go and use peoples' names - that (behaviour is) debiwarre: "Where did he come from?. "Who taught him?" "Who taught him Law?" That's the Law they taught us, those elders. It was good. [GW: 9]

- But I've heard some who say, "We're ashamed because we don't know that (Kundebi)." And I've said, "It's so we won't be ashamed. That (language) is so you (s) won't just call people by their name, do you know what I mean? When you (pl) use peoples' names, you're doing the wrong thing." [Yes, I see.] That's the message I tell them. We (inc) black people do not just call people by name, either men or women. Women will show respect whenever there is a male present, especially a son-in-Law or a group of them, then in that case we (women) don't even address each other using our names. That's when we would use Kundebi. [GN: 29]

Kundebi is taught in the hearth family, usually by mothers of school age children [JD: 17]. DM (49) reports with some pride her own children’s progress in learning Kundebi from her. It is always taught, as is all kinship information given to children, with explicit social knowledge about its application and necessity. GN describes her role as a mother teaching Kundebi:

Yes, I teach them. So our son and I talk together using Kundebi. Sometimes he says to me, "Teach me some more." I teach him that. He wants to sit with me and have me teach him. So I tell him, for example, "Nakeywurd", "Nababba"...They'll say, "Hey, we're doing it." Then they'll say it again for themselves, so they'll learn. I teach them that too, so they will know it. Although, sometimes they forget. I hear some who don't speak Kunbalak very well. But just wait, we (inc) will explain it all to them again, so they'll all know it. [GN: 29]

Mothers who teach Kundebi are applauded even beyond their family:

Some mothers, you know? they think, "Oh, I'll teach him. He'll start doing it while he's little." For example, Ngalwamud, your little niece, little M___. She knows how to talk with her mother in Kundebi. Her mother is teaching her. So she's learning little by little. So she knows how to...[BG: 56]

Children who use Kundebi are spoken of with some pride, even by people outside their family:
In my case, I don't...with my kids I teach them, my kids, M___'s kids. And J___'. I speak to them using Kundebi and I do that, I mean, for example when their fathers are involved. And there is one child I've actually heard speak Kundebi very well. It's that young Nawamud, the son of Old Nakangila... [RN: 189]

Oh, there's one boy, Nawamud, but, like I call him Nakurrng. When he was small, only so high, about her size and age [[BG points to her four year old daughter]]

He started talking Kundebi and Mother-In-Law language. Ngalbulanjang taught him. She's passed away now. It's her son B___D___. When he was very small he knew Kundebi and Mother-In-Law language. Now he's a big boy and he knows and uses Kundebi, because from an early age he knew it. [BG: 55]

Kunwinjku children learn a number of systems for avoiding personal naming except within the most intimate family circles. Typically, the only people addressing each other by personal name are husband and wife, and parents and their children, though there are some older Kunwinjku people who are significant enough politically to be named for purposes of public discussion. Sometimes personal nicknames are substituted for personal names, but usually only in informal settings. There is a strong aversion to using the personal name of the recently deceased, in order to avoid distressing the bereaved family. Younger children are often referred to, though less often addressed, by personal names, and children are expected to master the alternatives by early adolescence. These include: the use of subsection terms, clan names, nicknames, ceremonial titles, euphemisms, or combinations of these to disambiguate reference. Kundebi is the most formal of these tactics.

Now, for example, my family, my children and I live with their grandmother, my mother. I tell them stories, and I say to them, "Learn Kundebi. Yes, you make sure you get that Kundebi and keep it. It's wrong if you just go along and use people's names, or you just say 'Where is he? - well that's the wrong way to do things. The old people didn't do that, they didn't teach us that way. That's wrong." Old people nowadays, we ask them using Kundebi. If we don't use Kundebi, the old person won't understand us. If (I'm talking with) an older person, for example that Namardinjurlngunj brother of mine, or that Djalama brother who is Narrongalkki as they say, well if I use Kundebi he will know who I'm talking about. Or I can also refer to someone by their clan name, for example I say, instead of "Where did Dad go?" "Where did Nabulengarrku from Ngalngbali clan go?" In that case he will know who I'm talking about. Or
for example, if I say, "That brother, the same skin as me, the Marndjurlngunj man", well he would know who that is too. "Oh, I know who you mean", he would say. "There's that Namarndjurlngunj bloke here." He would know who it was. [GW: 9]

Deliberate non-use of personal names can be analysed as a deeply unifying social mechanism, since *Kundebi* allows address and reference in ways which not only specify an individual but simultaneously recognise and thereby reinforce the nature of the relationships between all parties in the intimate universe. Additionally, the triad of participants in any *Kundebi* usage becomes, or is reinforced as, a kind of small relational network, embedded in the wider relational matrix. GW thinks of Kundebi as expressing the intimacy of the hearth family and deriving from its Old People:

*And now, what we're teaching about now is Kundebi. That is a very important thing for children. Kundebi is when we say things like, "Berlohkowarre", "Nakurndjewarre". That is really the way you and I show good manners, for example if you and I say, in reference to someone, "Ngorrkbelko Namaninj kali, where is he?" What I just said I gave as an example. Yes. I'll explain about Kundebi. That's the one, that's our language, put there for us by our Djongok and Mawah forefathers. That Djongok, as I call him, he's not my father but his father, that's how he's related to me. Now the relations between that Djongok and Mawah as I call them - Mawah was that Djongok's father. They all fit together like parts of the one tree - it goes along, goes round and round - what people call in English "The Family Tree". So that's where we come from... [GW: 8]*

Limits to human memory or relational matrix at intimate levels may explain some of the decline in *Kundebi* use. *Kundebi* presumably developed in small hearth family centred groups, where contact with other Kunwinjku people was graduated and manageable, so that additional relational networks could be learned at the pace required by the experience. In communities like Oenpelli where people regularly interact at some level with up to a thousand or more other people, *Kundebi* may simply become either unlearnable, or unmanageable for day to day reference purposes. This explanation is speculative and may be challenged by the phenomenon of *Kunbalak*, a much easier sociolect skill to acquire, which is also said to be in decline.
9.3.5.2 Kunbalak

*Kunbalak*, sometimes referred to by non-Kunwinjku people as “mother-in-Law language”, is considered a special form of *Kundebi*. *Kunbalak* allows people in avoidance relationships, whether temporary or permanent, to communicate with each other or refer to each other unambiguously but with the required degree of obliqueness. It operates by substituting alternative root forms in the main parts of speech, whilst retaining the normal Kunwinjku grammar. As with *Kundebi*, formidable memorisation is involved, since there are several hundred of these alternative roots available for substitution. This lexicon is closed, but its items cannot be generated from ordinary Kunwinjku by any general algorithm. Kunwinjku people generally know and use at least some *Kunbalak*, while usually declaring themselves challenged by the demands of *Kundebi*. Sometimes young Kunwinjku adults consciously substitute even limited English in situations where they are embarrassed by their ignorance of the correct *Kunbalak*, regarding this tactic as at least an attempt to recognise the nature of a particular avoidance relationship. Using unmodified Kunwinjku could be taken as rudeness – something worse than a confessed ignorance of *Kunbalak*.

The connection between the skilful use of sociolects and self-aware Kunwinjku identity is strong. Even Kunwinjku speakers with an earlier first language regard themselves as obligated to master *Kundebi* in order to feel fully educated:

*Now my own Aboriginal Law, I already had that. The only part I didn’t know was Kundebi. In our (exc) own languages, Wurningangk, Erre, Mengerddji, Kakudju, we don’t have Kundebi. We just address people as Berluh, Ngabbard, Ngalkurrng, that’s all. We have no Kundebi. I’ll talk about this later on. [JN: 23]*

Adult men will often make similar comments, agreeing with JN’s valuation of *Kundebi* as part of the Law, and lamenting their lack of *Kundebi* or asserting their intention to learn it soon. So *Kundebi* becomes an index of one’s education, and also of one’s regard for the Law. Language is a powerful mechanism of the intense endosociality of Kunwinjku life, so any failure in this learning may reflect a rejection or neglect of the bonds of hearth family and wider Kunwinjku society.

9.3.5.3 Social Language Skills in Crisis.

Both *Kundebi* and *Kunbalak* are learnt and spoken by fewer people now than in the remembered past. *Kundebi* has been such a valued part of Kunwinjku learning and
social intercourse, that this decline is alarming to older Kunwinjku. Failure to learn and apply Kundebi is associated with stunted educational progress: without Kundebi you speak like an infant:

Also, some of you children don't know...you don't speak well. You don't know the Law very well. You only know (how to say) "Grandma", "Grandpa", "Mummy", "Daddy". That's all. You don't know any of the big Kundebi (language).[MM: 6]

Reflecting the social motivation of the Law, the core status of Kundebi in the Kunwinjku curriculum means failure to learn it implies an oppositional attitude to the Law:

The Law itself says: if someone has no Kundebi, he breaks the Law, he goes outside the Law, the Law. He opposes it, he actually opposes it. He doesn't really oppose it, but he just goes without it, that's what he does. That child doesn't really understand, not at all. [MM: 40]

The strong association between the mastery of sociolect skills and high educational achievement means failure to learn the appropriate social language skills also equates with a shameful ignorance of the Law:

But I've heard some who say, "We're ashamed because we don't know that (Kundebi)." [GN: 29]

Language is the locus and mechanism of relationship, and Law is socially motivated, so the socially “right” use of Kunwinjku is a pre-requisite to adult socialisation. Social language variants associated with the so called “avoidance” relationships are motivated by “respect” – the English term sometimes used in Kunwinjku, where high regard and well understood mutual social obligations are patterned into certain formal relational dyads, articulated through formal language. This link between language and Law reflects the overall goal of the Kunwinjku curriculum, which is the realisation and preservation of Kunwinjku group identity and social structure.

9.3.6 Law as Kinship Behaviour and Relational Morality

The most deliberately and explicitly taught area of socialisation for Kunwinjku children is the expanding knowledge and practice of kinship protocols. We have discussed the social focus of language teaching above which is learnt inseparably from other relationally tuned behaviours. As children grow they are taught, and expected to apply, knowledge about what sorts of obligations and outward behaviours are associated with each relational dyad. For example both genders play
together and share food and blankets as young children, but in most families formal adult gender patterning is imposed at the latest a year or two before puberty, with boys and girls expected to behave appropriately, including mastering methods of indirect reference to avoid using the names of opposite sex siblings.

Other relationships are formalised at puberty or just beyond regardless of whether a young person attends any Ceremony. For example, young men in particular become aware of the women they address as mother-in-Law (*ngalkurrng*) and they should begin to practice avoidance formalities, including the use of *Kunbalak* and physical avoidance strategies. All of these protocols are spoken of as Law or Laws:

- **So we teach him. His sister can’t come close or be with him. That would be quite wrong. Nor must she go near where he sleeps or sits. The sister just avoids him. Our Aboriginal Law. That would be wrong. She must keep her distance.** [JM: 42]

- **Yes, sometimes they were very strict. You weren’t allowed to touch your cousin, for example, male or female, or your full brother-in-Law. It was a very strict Law. It was hard.** [AN: 8]

Children learn relational Law as “Law in the sense of rules”, approximating adult parameters. In adult life these “laws” are subsumed by the Law – a general knowledge of relationality in Kunwinjku life, which acts as a general principle guiding the small protocols of social life that express relational principles. The Law can provide, for example, principles allowing negotiated adjustments in classificatory kinship relationships take account of advancing age or marriages already made. For example, the Law includes the systems for promising marriage partners [GW: 69] but also allows a principle-driven adaptation to pragmatic realities. For example, a man and woman in marriageable relationship (calling each other *kakkali*) may agree to change this to one where the man calls the woman *berluh* (aunty) because she has no siblings married to any of his immediate siblings, and both are now subjectively old enough to concede marriage to each other is no longer a viable option. This in effect redefines their relationship as though they were first cousins, in terms of a subsystem of Kunwinjku relationships, which formally prevents marriage between children of siblings (who are actually in the appropriate sub-sections for marriage). So rather than breaking any rules, the Law subsumes the possibility of working within a number of its subsystems by exercising the decision.
making process of *ngarriweborledkerren* (literally: “we change what we call each other”), demonstrating that the relational calculus in Kunwinjku life can be sharply self-aware and under at least some control by individuals (or pairs) who initiate the process. This in turn shows Law as contingent upon, or at least subservient to, real life Kunwinjku relationality.

### 9.3.7 Law as Prudential Relational Morality

Part of childhood learning about relationships goes beyond kinship to include protocols for interacting beyond the family boundaries. Usually these interactions involve only a parallel presence – contact that is simply part of going shopping, waiting for mail, being on a bus for example. As soon as any purposefulness is involved, Kunwinjku Law urges caution and calculation. These deliberative interactions are bipolar. At one extreme, Kunwinjku people will often act out of sympathy for someone hurt. In fact this often becomes sentimentalist, so a child who is bullying another but then ends up in tears himself will often receive more sympathy than his victims, who are not making emotional demands on the audience at the time. Sentimentality replaces any considered discipline of children in most contexts, but also applies to the way people evaluate adult behaviour. For example RN (213-215) refers to an incident where a Kunwinjku man was sacked by the Kunwinjku senior staff member at the community school after repeated failure to attend and carry out duties. He immediately became the target of sympathy, accompanied by criticism of his boss, who was accused of “making herself out to be a *Balanda*”. This episode reflects both the inherent likelihood that sentimentality will replace any other programme of assessment, but also the complication that men (and boys) receive more sympathy than women or girls in similar circumstances, an issue that young teenage girls speak about often as they try to develop coping strategies at the end of childhood.

More usually, Law is sometimes used to describe the guiding principles in relating in a way that minimises risk. Stories were used to teach children prudential attitudes, hoping they might avoid consequent danger:

> And we warn about that whatsit, so that in everything, as they grow up, they won't, for example, have sex too early as it were. Well, we (exc) warn them about that too. If they just go off and do anything, with other men and women, and they take someone's woman, and he'll kill them. They'd die too young. And I do the same, warning those women, I mean my (family), where I've got quite a
lot of women, and only the one man, and also just that one uncle. So I give
M___ a hand too, warning those children about things. [RN: 78 – 79]
The Law teaches social behaviours (morals) in prudential terms. Moral misbehaviour
risks specific consequences. Failure to teach the Law exposes a child to danger:
A child should have been educated. They should have explained to him/her,
telling him/her, "Don't eat that: you've seen Mardayin. Don't eat that big fish,
or maybe you'll get killed." Or," About kangaroo - don't eat the taboo one, or
maybe you'll get killed." They didn't really learn that Law, no. They didn't tell it
to them straight, "Don't you go start a fight with another man. He will kill you.
This is the Law that I'm telling you. Don't you go and steal. [MM: 21]
Moral ideas and behaviour in this prudential sense are part of the Law [MM: 5, 21].
Sometimes references to living morally seem to mean living “in conformity to
what I learnt”, suggesting morality is circuitously defined simply as obedience to
Law:
Its the same that Law. What is it? That very Law of ours teaches us, and
that's how I lived. I went the straight way, but what if I’d got muddled
up? Well, then I'd have gone the wrong way. That's the wrong thing. [MM2:
12]
But this apparent definition (moral behaviour means obeying the Law) is never
isolated from Law as morality in terms of reciprocal social obligations. When
Kunwinjku people list moral behaviours, behaviours addressed by the Law, the are
always presented in explicitly relational terms:
This Law, what I'm talking about, I'm not just making up now, I'm just talking
about in my turn, what was explained to me right back at the beginning, when
they used to tell me about it - my father's father. My mother, with her sisters,
she also used to tell me about it: she would say to me, "Don't steal!" "What are
you doing there?" Or, "Where are you going? Where? Where?" "Don't eat it
yourself when you spear fish. Bring it back to camp." It was just the same with
your Ngalkurrng - it was her sister I call Kakkak - she used to say the same
things to me - she would be giving me that same Law. So I wouldn't just go for
myself when I went fishing. I used to spear a big fish, maybe barramundi or
whatever, and I would take it home. I would take it home, and not eat it out in
the bush. No. I would take it home and show it to them. This was because they
had said to me, "No. Don't eat...if it's only a little fish, eat it - marrngun, okay
9.4 LAW AND THE RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY

9.4.1 Teachers and Learners of Law

The Law originated with its subjects: the Kunwinjku people, represented by the Old People and particularly the specific, remembered Old People who taught the present day middle-aged generation. The transmission of the Law authorised its teachers, and vice versa. The powerful association of the Law with the Old People authorises it as the unique curriculum. Law is taught, as is the whole Kunwinjku curriculum, in and through purposive interactions which are constructed within the range of kinship dyads, which are always broader and more complex relationships than “merely” pedagogic. Hearth family members have the foundational role in teaching the Law. Especially, the Law came through fathers’ fathers [JD: 2; JN: 16-17, 48; MM2: 27-29, 31, 35]. The Law is the sum of what a father’s fathers taught [MM2: 29]. To disregard their teaching was to break the Law.

In ceremonial contexts the learner faces teaching relationships that move beyond the family and require conscious construction together with more adult commitment. This is not an automatic, non-problematic process, since the learners are free to make adult choices – precisely the basis of personal accountability on which ceremonial discipline focuses. Thus MM calls on young Kunwinjku men to submit themselves deliberately to learning from the *Bininj* men who teach, the sole authorities to teach *Bininj* Law:

*You must obey that man's words, the man who taught you the Law. So you will understand, and so you'll really know the Law. So don't treat it as a joke. You live with the two (Laws) - they're the same: the Balanda teaches you Law, the Aboriginal man teaches you Law. The Aboriginal man will show you, he'll teach you what the Law says. Don't go up to the our ceremonial area when the Yirridjdja (moiety people) -are doing things, it's their business, separate from ours. We Duwa men are separate from them. That's what the Law says. Aboriginal men must teach you the Law, so you will possess it. You must not break the Law. [MM2: 5-6]*

MM’s exhortation is a call to submit to this relationship, an extension of the hearth experience - to embrace the Law as *your* own, because it is *our* own, taught by our own people:
But you Aboriginal people are missing out on our Law, you don't really hold on to it when you hear it. Listen to that Aboriginal man telling you about it, that old man talking about it. Oh, you young men, think about that one who is in charge of business - when we have the Kunabibi, the man in charge of Yirridjdja, and (the man in charge of) Duwa. (This man) is in charge of Yirridjdja; (that man) is in charge of Duwa. [MM2: 8]

9.4.2 Law as Transcendent: A New Curriculum?

When “Law” means the content of transgenerational teaching, its independence from the immediate generation is reified or de-personalised, in a similar way to larger societies where “the rule of Law” is spoken of as though it didn’t ultimately depend on the present generation of people acting through social processes. Larger societies also rely on the likelihood that the human operators of Law will be well removed from any kinship connection with people they arrest or sentence or discipline. Social group size allows this unexamined, constructed transcendence. The transcendent quality of Kunwinjku Law is enabled through its remote origin in the Old People, and its persistence beyond the death of those who transmit it to succeeding generations:

- So I really took to heart that Law, that same one I'm explaining - it still keeps on going, the same Law, the same meaning. I know that, but I don't know what else others know. What my father's fathers told me, that was the Law, that is what they gave me. They gave me that real Law. And on my part, I used to really listen. I paid attention to what my father's fathers said. So I understood that Law. And I still keep on explaining it. That won't change as long as I live. [MM2: 35]

- But for me, I was really listening because I wanted to get hold of the Law quickly, so I would know it. "I'll remember the words of that man who taught me - my father, and my mother's mother and my mother. I'll get that Law so that if they die at whatever time, I'll still keep hold of it." Just as it is now: they've died, they're gone, but still I have it, I have the words of those older ones - my grandfather that you call Nakurrng, your Ngalkurrng's brother - his sister I called Kakkak. And my mother, your Makkah. I still keep his words, even though he has died, but I still have his word just as he used to tell me. He explained to me the actual Law. [MM2: 38]

MM reflects high Kunwinjku doctrine of transgenerational pedagogy animating the teaching of the Law:
We were just talking, and that old man just made that comment. We were talking about that matter, and he defined it for us. He said, "Why do I teach them when they just get up and keep going along." And at the moment that's what they do, and it's the same with the parents of these children, and small children, teenagers or young people. Yes. That's why we've started trying at school, and so we also remind them, or teach them, and others too. I mean we tell them about whatever so they will grow up knowing it, because they'll be the only ones, when their mothers pass away, and they'll still have that knowledge and they'll carry on that Law. Yes. [JC: 36]

The transgenerational dimension to learning, or rather the obligation to teach the Law transgenerationally, was in fact taught explicitly, parallel with skills or processes being learnt:

- I just watched what they were doing when they made things. They used to say to us, "When you become an adult later on, you'll be able to do this. You won't just sit there. And when you have your own children, you should teach them, and that's how you will tell them the Law, later when you're grown up." [NN: 38]
- Well, the kids, our kids, we should teach them well. I mean about both Balanda and Aboriginal things, so they can go on and grow up and not forget. So they'll know. Just as the elders taught us before. And those children will then become the teachers in their turn. Of our culture. What The Old People taught us, and we in turn have taught the children. [JM: 2]

9.5 MOTIVATION AS METHOD IN TEACHING THE LAW

9.5.1 Commitment to the Law as Prerequisite to Learning

Kunwinjku pedagogic praxis – the nitty gritty of both teaching and learning methods (and styles) are fully discussed in chapters ten and eleven. I have argued that Kunwinjku people use Law to describe the whole Kunwinjku curriculum, so there is no practical methodology specific to Law in isolation from any of its curriculum components. Nevertheless, Kunwinjku people talk about issues of pedagogic motivation when they discuss the obligation to both teach and learn Law. For example, MM exhorts young men to commit themselves wholeheartedly to learning Law:

You young men if you don't understand properly, you must really get hold of that Law. So you will know it. Don't just go a little way with it, that's the wrong thing. You should start with the Aboriginal way, our way first. Start there, with
what we do. Learn, so you will know. Don't get muddled up in your thinking and get wrong ideas. What I've told you about, what I've said about Ceremony - Yabburlurrwa, Kunabibi, Lorrkon, Mardayin, Wubarr, these are business, Law. These are our Aboriginal ceremonies. We have that Law. It's what our old people had and taught us. They gave it to us, so we must hold on to it just the same way. What I mean precisely is, whenever we talk about Aboriginal (Law), it teaches you, maybe it's the Kunabibi that teaches you, well that Law will take you the straight way. That business is the Law, and that Law still exists. [MM2: 13]

In the Kunwinjku world, there are specific people behind every principle. MM encourages an attitude to the Law as an entity in itself and it is possible to speculate that the vaguely anthropomorphic language above may reflect a view that there is an underlying representative persona in the Law:

You should really believe it. You must say, "Of course, that's it! That's what I will do, that's what I will do, that's what I will do." Don't take it lightly. If you're taking it lightly, you will not really get hold of the Law, no. If you let go of the Law, it will leave you, [MM: 10]

JD implies prudence as a motive for respect towards the Law, responding to the association of authority (and even fear) between Law and the Old People, especially in ceremonial contexts. Taking the correct attitude should be a conscious concern:

Because I realised the Law was very strict, that Law was very hard. It was the elders' Law. They used to say, "Don't make yourself into something where you think you can go beyond the Ceremony, or put yourself above it." That's what they said, "...Mardayin or Kunabibi". They would use sorcery to sing the one who made trouble, or made a mistake. They would sing him. And he would die, whoever that man was. [JD2: 52]

PS have described the process of teaching their children Law. P seems to prefer a very laissez-faire approach in methodology, at least in terms of their need to learn about the Balanda world:

Yeah. Okay. We'll talk about what we've done with those two children of ours, what we teach them. For some of the time we had three kids, including M____. We teach them. What do we teach them about? Everything about living in a house, and also whatever we've learnt ourselves when we used to pay attention to the words of those who taught us. Also we (2) in our turn (teach them) what
the elders used to teach us. For example they taught Ngalkangila, my mother's mother, they taught her, and then she taught me too, my mother's mother. She's the one I used to know her, that old lady. I knew her, my mother's mother, when she was still alive. And my mother and father both used to teach me. I would listen when they told me things, and that's what we want, we want to teach (our two), about our Aboriginal things, so they'll then have it, that language. Another thing we want is that they will discover for themselves some white people's things, learn the language so they can understand the Law, the Balanda Law. And learn it. So then they'll understand both the easy and difficult. They'll learn. It's the same with Aboriginal people, with our Aboriginal language, in the same way, it has both difficult and easy parts they will learn. The three of them are learning. [PS: 80]

This statement is revealing: P had to learn his own Law, which he did in the classic hearth family manner. But faced with teaching his own children a second, additional “Law” he can only begin to train them in basic survival skills – for example, living in a house. His comment that the Balanda curriculum has less easily mastered areas, just like the Bininj curriculum, may reflect some pessimism about the possibility of mastery. Although he returns to a more optimistic comment at the end of this quote, there is an implied question here as to how the Balanda curriculum is to be mastered without the parallel epistemological authority and rich experiences he cites as part of learning Kunwinjku Law.

9.6 BREAKING THE LAW: FAILURE IN PEDAGOGY

9.6.1 Breaking the Law Defined Relationality

Law contains the moral guidelines required not only to take part in society productively and positively, but also to do so without giving offence or incurring punishment. Kunwinjku moral Law was taught within a system that included sanctioning the death penalty for certain offences, both ceremonial and in the wider society [MM: 28; MM2: 9-12] so to a significant extent moral teaching was prudential. “Breaking” the Law was dangerous [MM2: 11] and resulted from an oppositional attitude to learning the Law:

If you are stealing, then by that you are hostile to (yihdung) the Law - when you are stealing. When you are stealing, by that you are hostile the Law. When you just go and grab something, just pick it up in your hand, that's the wrong thing." It's like the ones who go and steal petrol, that stuff they sniff, that juice,
petrol, that stuff. Children who do that are hostile to the Law, it's as if they're making themselves unable to keep the Law - they go and break in and steal things. They are hostile towards the Law. [MM: 21]

This addresses a more serious kind of educational failure than slow progress in mastery, or some technical inadequacy in hearth or ceremonial skills. (Kunwinjku views on learning difficulties and failure to learn are discussed in chapter nine.) Kunwinjku people do not regard all educational failure as morally serious, but the relational nature of the Law means that serious failure to learn, or failure to want to learn, does have relational implications.

MM implies rejecting the Law means rejecting his own authority as its teacher, and his transgenerational association with the Old People who taught the teacher:

"This is business, and it will lead you the straight way wherever you go. You'll be wrong if you turn around and steal things, you'd be breaking the Law. You must each keep the Law yourselves. Whatever I tell you, remember it whatever happens. I mean, when I die, you must still keep the Law just as I did for those Mawah who have all died. I still have the Law. I still have their words here. [MM2: 90]

Keeping the Law is here an obligation to both MM and the Kunwinjku ancestors. MM also used this highly personal form or exhortation in describing his own example as a model of receiving and holding on to the Law as an act of transgenerational trust, implying that failure to do so would be an offence against even previous generations of the Old People:

That's what your Mawahs used to tell me. I know it, so now, later, that's what I talk about it. I'm not just inventing this now, no. I'm not just thinking of it now, this Law. Not at all. With me, this Law was earlier on given to me by my Mawahs, this that I'm talking about now in accordance with what they used to explain to me. That's what they explained to me and I've still got it. I've just hung on to what they said, those Mawah. I didn't write down what they said on paper - but I wrote their words in my head, whatever they told me. I put their words here. [Points to own head.] Your Makkah, my mother, that Nakurrng, your Nakurrng - I still have all their words. They've died all those old people, but I still have their words now. That Law they gave me, I haven't let it drop. No. I have that Law. That's what they gave me and I haven't lost that Law, certainly not. [MM2: 64]
9.6.2 Terminology of Law Breaking

Law breaking is usually spoken about in terms of relational offence. The notion of Lawlessness, or failing to learn or obey the Law or even failure to teach the Law are associated with social consequences. In everyday Kunwinjku life, wrongdoing is usually spoken of in terms of someone being *bengwarr* – literally “deaf”, but with the connotation of acting without listening to other people, implying a social distancing or disconnection. Deafness, or an attitude described this way, is associated with people who don’t communicate well with others, who may be either eccentric or withdrawn. The word is most often applied to a child being naughty, or a young adult acting immorally, but extends, for example, to a *Balanda* giving offence, apparently unintentionally, by misunderstanding a Kunwinjku request or situation. More serious offences like interpersonal violence, rape or large scale stealing, lead to the perpetrator being described as *nawarre* or *ngalwarre* – a bad person, rather than merely *bengwarr*.

In contrast to acute and deliberate wrongdoing, there is a more subtle, chronic kind of Law-breaking associated with pedagogic failure, either in teaching or learning. Failure to apply the Law means acting against, or rejecting something which is part of your own people:

*We teach you when you watch Kunabibi. That's what happens, we take you and we teach you at the Ceremony as we do all those many different things. Then later when you come down you go bad. The next week, you will deliberately just become stupid, you change and then just go along breaking in, then you steal things. So then you just do wrong, then you just do wrong. You're acting against the Law...You're acting against the Law, as we Aborigines say, you're opposing the Law. You're "against the Law" against your own business, our business. [MM: 34]*

Opposing the Law, acting against the Law, failing to grasp it, all mean abandoning the thing that provides life guidance [MM: 34]:

*I told them, "This is business, and it will lead you the straight way wherever you go. You'll be wrong if you turn around and steal things, you'd be breaking the Law. You must each keep the Law yourselves. [MM2: 90]*

ED, for example, provided an overview of the problems caused when children are not taught the Law:
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And the kids! What kids learn now, well, they don't really learn much. Some of them, specifically the children who live at the outstations, they are taught our Law - they're the ones living on their country. Now the kids who live here with us (in Kunbarllanjnja) - no one has enough time for them - their mothers, grandmothers, no one. Some of the kids just go out and wander around doing whatever they want to do. Some of them are growing up sniffing petrol, breaking into houses. They must realise they have to stop this. I see them not respecting their mothers or fathers - really provoking them. They'll say to them, "We don't want to. Why are you telling us what to do? That's just what you want, so you do it." And so in their turn the mothers and fathers just do as the kids say. They don't try to force the kids. No use. The kids growing up now have become very hardened and they just don't listen to what we tell them. We all just go our own separate ways - them and the adults. Now it's like we are all growing up. And the younger generation have a lot of different ideas. They know a lot of different ideas, which they follow. It doesn't match up with what used to happen before. [ED: 10]

As well as noting some specific Law breaking behaviours, like petrol sniffing, as consequences of failure to teach and learn Law, ED has described a failure in the parent -child, and the more general adult-child, relationship. She implies here an important aspect of the Kunwinjku mental picture of childhood – children are not well socialised without deliberative teaching. In other words, Law subsumes the notion of a well socialised person, someone explicitly and effectively taught, the Law.

Other interviewees made similar observations which are also discussed in terms of adult child relations generally in chapter ten. Many Kunwinjku adults express concern about a general change in the behaviour of young people because of the impact of aspects of the Balanda world [GN: 82; JD2: 57] resulting in failure to learn the Law [JN: 54].

Inevitably, without the Law to guide, there may be no way back, given the dependence of subsequent generations implied by transgenerational pedagogy [MM: 13]. MM’s model is one of mutual responsibility: The Law must be learnt, which means it must also be taught. To oppose or neglect either of these imperatives leads to social disaster.
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The father mustn't forget. He should teach you to live right...Probably you oppose (the Law) and moreover you don't really understand the Law belonging to us (inc) Aborigines...If you steal now, then as a consequence, later on you'll get much worse and become a criminal. Thus the Law will hold you liable and accuse you. You'll be blamed for things. [MM: 25]

MM’s observation here, that the very Law rejected by the Law breaker will still be in force to condemn him, reflects the notion that the Law is the collectively asserted parameters for acceptable Kunwinjku social membership. Rejecting the Law means rejecting “us”.

This preference for interpreting Law breaking as social offence rather than the breach of an impersonal code, is supported by the way people talk about criminality or recidivism (or even the commission of an isolated but serious crime) in Kunwinjku society. The language expresses a response in terms of other people’s perceptions of the actor, rather than in terms of the Law: Thus to become a criminal is literally “to spoil what people hear about you” or “to ruin your reputation” (kawowarreworren) [MM: 25; MM2: 11].

9.6.3 Punishment and Sociality in Kunwinjku Law

This topic does not appear immediately linked to the general notion of pedagogy, but it was not only of interest to several of my informants, but is a topic frequently discussed in everyday Kunwinjku life, and has some important implications for school based pedagogy. Because Kunwinjku children are in general not excluded from adult conversation, they are at least passive learners in conversations about issues of punishment and guilt among adults, forming the basis for their own later adult participation in legal issues. Given the broad prospect of offending real individuals, both living and dead, it is understandable that Kunwinjku discussion about Lawlessness and breaking the Law is invariably focused on relational issues. The offence is always against specific people, not abstract rules or principles. The small group size, and high degree of propinquity, or rather the relational density and intimacy of Kunwinjku society, necessitates an acute response within a limited range of options.

Typically leaving Kunwinjku society permanently to avoid recrimination after breaking the Law is unimaginable, although people can stay secluded at home until hostility towards them decreases and occasionally an accused person goes to live for a time in another community, especially following a suspected murder. In general
however, accused people feel an acute need for reconciliation one way or the other. A kind of social surface tension operates - individuals are pulled around inevitably to face inward towards the Kunwinjku society. Kunwinjku people are always in tension of some sort with other Kunwinjku, whether conscious or welcome. This force of intense endosociality demands resolution in two contrasting ways – either immediate resolution within the family, or slower resolution, more formally and deliberatively, where Kunwinjku people beyond the hearth family are involved. In either case, sometimes a response to offence is mediated through family members representing the offender and or the one offended. In more formal contexts, where the offence is diffused over a larger, less intimately associated group (that is, when there is less relational emotion) money fines or even payback killings, actual or threatened, may be arranged. For lesser offences, or purely personal offence between two people in an extended family, sometimes a period of mutual avoidance will gradually give way to resumption of normal relationships.

Law is often described as having been demanding [GW: 62; JD2: 52; BG: 27] and often this harshness was associated with the potential punishment and other consequences for those who broke it or disregarded it. Punishment was as relationally mediated as Law breaking is relational in its impact. In both ceremonial contexts and everyday life punishment for Law-breaking (as distinct from responses to personal insults and the like) is often directed at, and received willingly by, the perpetrator’s extended family on the apparent basis that the individual and his culpability is inseparably associated with the family group. Within the family, punishment of small children is, in most instances, verbal and usually carried out by mothers, though some adults do smack smaller children. More usually the public verbal dressing down is considered serious enough and even this will often invoke interference from an older relative (especially a father’s mother) in defence of a child. In older children and adults, with more serious matters, physical violence is sometimes part of the process, where for example a brother in Law may fight with his sister’s husband because of bad behaviour towards the sister. Punishment becomes less controllable beyond the family boundary.

I have discussed enforcement of discipline in ceremonial contexts (8.7.1). Punishments included the potential death penalty but for the most part involved fines and a great deal of public criticism of those who rejected the ceremonial disciplines, especially mothers of novitiates.
It is the area between the hearth family and the ceremonial context where Law-breaking and punishment are most complicated, firstly by the intrusion, often invited, of Balanda police or other authorities, and secondly through the general principle that family members may substitute for each other in confrontations. In the heat of this kind of dispute, people will often discuss the merits of actions in terms of them being in accord with “our Law”. Two more levels of complexity can develop. For example, in the case of the death of a non-Kunwinjku person married into the Kunwinjku society, the non-Kunwinjku relatives may insist, with death threats necessary to obtain co-operation, on conducting what amounts to a coronial inquest. In one such confrontation following a suicide, I was with a group of about a dozen Kunwinjku people who were arguing in public (in front of a large but passive audience) over the relative status and applicability of Kunwinjku Law, Balanda Law, the Law invoked by the non-Kunwinjku Aboriginal people, and God’s Law. Police intervention supplied the practical answer in the immediate situation. The system of payment in lieu of delivering an agreed woman or man to marry into another family is more in the nature of a contractual issue and isn’t considered a matter of breaking the Law. (Neither is divorce, although domestic violence even when tolerated, was regarded as wrongful behaviour.)

The ideas and systems of punishment discussed here have a significant impact on even routine pedagogy. Since all learning is subsumed under Law, and since breaking the Law has such inescapable and serious consequences, a powerful motivational mechanism operated, exploited in both Ceremony and hearth pedagogy, as for example in MM’s exhortations to young men [MM: 4, 28].

9.7 BALANDA LAW AND THE CRISIS IN BININJ LAW

9.7.1 A Crisis in Law Declared.

Kunwinjku people often talk about the nature and rate of change in their society in response to the Balanda world. Even young adults in everyday conversation concede there has been a decline in learning the old ways, or participation in Ceremony and use of Kundebi and Kunbalak. Most interviewees made comments about this situation, some in terms of the Law, for example [JN: 50].

Some people suggest that members of the current adult generation, or perhaps its predecessors, may have given up teaching the Law:

*That's the way I went - straight. But now (there's) the mistaken way. It's all wrong. Why did those adults abandon that Law? They didn't put it there for*
them. Well if it was like that, so we could teach them, like earlier on you were saying, who will go back and teach them about language? You have to do both. [GW: 69]

JN and MM both suggested Kunwinjku people should face their joint failure to teach the Law, here equated by JN with Kunwinjku language skills:

Maybe we’re not always giving it to them, so we need to ask ourselves about this. We should ask each other and talk it over, about what we should do. How do we teach the children Aboriginal things, and educate them, so they’ll have the ability to think from when they are quite small. [JN: 50]

This collapse in teaching is across the whole of Bininj learning, even in the most valued attitudes and behaviours. AN and GW ([AN: 8-10] and [GW: 8]) both concede a collapse in usage of avoidance protocols. Hearth families are failing to teach good manners [JN: 66-68]. ED suggests the lack of manners, and a growing willingness to beg are as much a failure to teach as a failure to learn [ED: 100-102].

Most people seem to blame parents for failing in their teaching responsibilities:

Now the kids who live here with us - no one has enough time for them - their mothers, grandmothers, no one. Some of the kids just go out and wander around doing whatever they want to do. [ED: 10]

Families that try to maintain hearth teaching have to compete consciously against other influences on their children:

Nowadays they are still teaching them but, there is a lot of, lots of things that distract them: there's alcohol, the disco - that they put on for the little kids, but the young women and young men all go into the disco. And then they don't think about anything else except dancing, which I reckon means they are all mixing together. So that (Law) of ours (exc) well, it's not, it’s already died out. But to some extent, we who are mature adults we still know it. So we want to teach them, but they don’t want to listen. [DM: 43]

The process of displacement of Bininj learning is not so much one of rejecting old ways in favour of new, but is a kind of default process, where time on task for teaching and learning specifically Kunwinjku content is diminished, and demands on use of time are multiplied:

That's how it was. But nowadays they don't go doing that -it's like they have forgotten. Nowadays things have changed completely. We've got houses, and all sorts of things have come along. All this, this "technology" and so they've
forgotten - or maybe not forgotten, but it's like they've just let it go. It's like we're moving on, keeping going as technology is developing. [ED: 8]

9.7.2 Failure of Transgenerational Processes

Present day Kunwinjku life contrasts sharply with remembered past experiences of learning Law:

*Now in these modern times, there are two Laws, because the Balanda way is in force. There's the white way and the black way. That's what operates now. In the past there was just that one system of Law, the black system was operating, the one The Old People used to talk about. That's what we used to sit around and listen to, that story. That's how we learnt it.* [JD: 4]

JD identified two significant differences with the contemporary society: the pace of life allowed time to learn through stories, and there was only one system to be learnt. The second “Law” - the *Balanda* world as a whole - makes demands both on the time available and the priority assigned to teaching *Bininj* Law, which is consequently displaced:

*Are the kids learning much? Um...no. They just don't really understand. And they haven't got hold of the Law, they've got their new Law. That's what they know about. That's all they try to do. But the Law itself, no, they don't know it. What generally used to happen was they would go get some wild honey, eating bush tucker with The Old People. That's what they used to learn. They would teach them.* [JD2: 9]

9.7.3 Two Laws? Analogy as a Survival Tactic.

*Balanda* Law, that is the totality of the *Balanda* way of doing things, is now part of the reality to be considered and dealt with [JD: 4]. In Kunwinjku usage “*Balanda* Law” is not distinct from the whole raft of phenomena encroaching on Kunwinjku life from the non-Kunwinjku world. The English language, with its treacherous tendency to trip up Kunwinjku speakers, is *Kunbalanda* (literally – “the abstract *Balanda* thing”). I have heard Kunwinjku people use the expression “Oh, Balanda!” in praise of some new technology. On the other hand, accusing another Kunwinjku person of acting like a *Balanda* is a serious, calculated insult. In any case, the *Balanda* world is constantly immanent in Kunwinjku thought and discourse, always demanding a response.

There is a daily need to talk about how Kunwinjku life relates to the *Balanda* world, or whichever part of it needs to be dealt with at the time, making
comparisons, and often appropriating English to talk about the Balanda domain. For example, people will say Bininj Law is like Balanda Law in its rigor [BG: 25] and its diversity [JN: 18]. Despite other differences, both Laws involve punishment for those who break them, [MM2: 9]. Both Bininj and Balanda teach their Laws [MM2: 3-4] since both Laws must be learnt, although the Bininj Law is explicitly tied to survival:

You young men, don't break the Law. You (s) go to school. Maybe you know that way. You must go to both. Don't just go one way. You go to both so you'll know. Really get hold of Balanda (Law) and our Aboriginal (Law). That Law, the Law is there so you won't die. [MM2: 9]

MM asserts that both systems of Law can be subsumed in a general moral obligation to Lawfulness, so breaking either Bininj or Balanda Law is morally reprehensible:

And this applies if you (s) go and steal, if you (s) break in and steal from white people, you're breaking the Law. When you steal whatever from a white person, it's morally wrong. If you oppose the Law white people make, then you will become a criminal and not unfairly. Probably you oppose (the Law) and moreover you don't really understand the Law belonging to us (inc) Aborigines. [MM: 25]

MM seems to imply a hierarchy here, since keeping Balanda Law (or not breaking it) is now a function of keeping the “Law belonging to us”.

Like the Bininj Law, Balanda Law is seen as rooted in a religious belief system.

You teach him that Law that was from the beginning. White people have Law too, it's there in the Christian Bible - the ten commandments, it's there. The Balanda have Law too, that's where it is. From Christianity and their ordinary Laws. If you steal, well, you'll see that Law in the Bible. Now in all this, you have to teach the child how to think. So he'll be able to recall it, to think back and understand it. "Oh yes," he'll say to himself, "I understand. I see." [JN: 37]

This reflects the Kunwinjku notion of Law as the entity fundamental in shaping and controlling moral behaviour, something with unchallengeable authority. The Balanda world’s existence proposes, shockingly, that there are two such monolithic or absolute systems in the Kunwinjku domain, demanding some kind of mental
accommodation, and certainly some practical strategies for teaching and learning in this dual domain:

...And parents need to try and raise them with both. They should teach them. Both systems. They should learn to want both black and white Law. They shouldn't just go to school and learn the one. [JD: 48]

### 9.7.4 School and Law

School is deeply associated with Balanda Law. When Kunwinjku people talk about the motives for schooling, they usually do so in terms of the need to learn Balanda Law, implying more than simply the school curriculum:

> We (inc) tell the children, "I'm telling you to go to school so you will know things, so you will learn about the Law of those white people. Because those white people have a lot of Law." And that is specifically why we want to arrange for our children go to school. [GN: 6]

The power of the term “school” as analogous to Kunwinjku formal education is frequently appropriated when Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse attempts to relate the two Laws:

- **You young men, keep the Law. It's what will teach you. It will teach you and develop you like school.** [MM2: 10]

- **How can we describe what that is like in today's terms? It's just the same, that Law I'm talking about, as the way a school teaches (students). That's the school they took me through, my father's fathers, when they used to explain to me so that I would understand. They took me through it just like school.** [MM2: 48]

- **So is it a fact that we don't believe that Law? That's the thing that schools us! English says "school". We teach you when you watch Kunabibi. That's what happens, we take you and we teach you at the Ceremony as we do all those many different things.** [MM: 34]

MM’s point of comparison is the common formal intention and practice of teaching. JN compares the two Laws in terms of their formative and directive significance:

> Actually there were a lot of Balanda teachers who taught us. We went there and it was like they brought us out into something like a better place. It was equivalent to our own fundamental Law. [JN: 58]

### 9.7.5 Balanda Reality as Part of the Kunwinjku Curriculum

JD describes the content of the Balanda world as a “new Law” [JD: 56]. His expression could have been glossed “new system” or “new way of doing things” but
given the global connotations of Kunwinjku *mankarre*, JD may be implying a recognition that this alternative system is making global claims on learning. At the least his usage is an acceptance that the *Balanda* component intruded into the Kunwinjku curriculum. Kunwinjku people are thinking urgently about responses to the impact of this new Law. Is it becoming an additional part of the learning burden for Kunwinjku people, or will it become the bulk of what needs to be learnt, substantially displacing much of what constituted the Kunwinjku curriculum before its intrusion?

JN also describes the changes in social and economic life as a part of this “new Law” [JN: 56]. Law here seems to mean “the situation we are in, our lifestyle and circumstances”. The possibility of a second source of Law, in this case, the impact of the non-Kunwinjku world, is a dramatic challenge to the Kunwinjku society. Kunwinjku Law as a continuing heritage, deeply owned by Kunwinjku people as part and representation and map of themselves, passed on from Old People to the continuing Kunwinjku generations is now torn open by, and exposed to, uncontrollable outside pressure. Faced with this, some Old People have given up their role as Law teachers [ED: 11].

In fact the whole of Kunwinjku society feel this pressure. Whether it is due to the attractiveness of some of the *Balanda* world, or to its pragmatic usefulness, the pressure to adapt or respond is constant and growing and has deep implications for teaching and learning: 

- *So then, now what? Oh, yes, I'll just talk about another thing. Yes that's right. Here...here what's happening now is that something has muddled their thinking, the young men who have been to ceremonies as initiates...But why, why do they go and do these other things I'm seeing? The young men haven't understood, when they get into arguments and go looking for trouble and finding it. Other things have muddled their thinking - that white people's thing that arrived a while ago - alcohol - that is the worst thing that has impacted them. When they are 16 or 15 and they drink, they get more and more silly, and this is happening everywhere. That's not the right thing. But why don't they know our Aboriginal Law? The Law is out there in the bush, but here, it's different. Could it be they just don't know it?* [MM2: 33]

- *As I see it, we have far too many things. That's what I think. Television, grog, motor vehicles and so on. And we have big money - for card games.... So*
nowadays, what is this new "Law"? There is a new generation of people, we (inc) are a new generation so therefore we should think hard about the future. Where we're headed for, that's what we should be talking about. So we can make progress, so we can go ahead with these new ideas and get through this new situation that's developed. It's a new Law we need to make for ourselves, so we can go ahead. [JN: 56]

JN implies that it is now obviously a matter of survival to learn the skills of the Balanda world, and of urgency to adapt Kunwinjku pedagogy to cope. However, JN may have gone further than simply making a concession to the unavoidable. He seems to have embraced a two stage learning process, where the roots of education are in Bininj Law, but the child would be encouraged to explore and make progress through the Balanda education system as he or she grows up:

*And there's that new way of learning. What I mean is, if you take the child to school, and maybe, if he's good, he'll go on later to Kormilda College, and he could go a lot further, if he looks towards going to university, from senior high school, he'll go past that and move along to university. Now from there, if he goes beyond that further, a bit further on, he will more or less, as English speakers say "explore." He'll look for something extra, go further. And from there he'll look back where he's come from, from when he was young, he'll see all the rubbish, the mistakes he made, although he still might be making mistakes, no matter if he graduates from that university domain, or before that. [JN: 39]*

JN’s commentary here is remarkable given his insistence on the stability and sanctity of hearth learning as the foundation for life.

JM claims he will simply build the new Law in to the curriculum he teaches his own children:

*I teach them Balanda and Aboriginal things. I teach them our own culture, and about Balanda people, the Balanda system. They'll know that as they grow up, they'll know two ways... [JM: 7]*

JM’s intentions are in fact complicated and problematic, as he concedes, immediately following his statement above:

...Balanda, Aboriginal. We don't just teach them the Balanda way. Or they'd grow up only going along the Balanda way, and they'd forget our own Aboriginal way. We must teach them two ways: our own culture, and they do
the Balanda way at school. They learn about two ways. They can go along the Balanda way if they go to school, that's the Balanda way. They would grow up knowing Balanda, but they would just forget our culture. They just wouldn't know it any more. But if we teach them both, Balanda, Aboriginal, when they grow up they will know Aboriginal and Balanda ways. They would then know both. [JM: 7]

JM identifies the fear most Kunwinjku people have in mind when they discuss the need to learn (and teach) the *Balanda* curriculum. Their intention is ensure that their children will not fail to learn the Kunwinjku curriculum. JM’s commitment, throughout his interview, to Two Ways or Both Ways learning is deeply pro-Kunwinjku. In the next section I will argue that the Kunwinjku view is children need to learn the *Balanda* Law in order to be good Kunwinjku adults, not bicultural adults or bilingual adults.

In fact the need to learn even a significant portion of the *Balanda* curriculum poses some practical questions not yet answered by either Kunwinjku or mainstream educators: When will this second, massive curriculum be taught within the present patterns of Kunwinjku daily life? What will be displaced by the time and content given to the *Balanda* curriculum? Who will teach the new Law? What will the relationship of the teachers be to the learners? *Balanda* Law is impersonal, not rooted in known and trusted Old People. It is not enforced by people authorised by the hearth family. So how should this new Law, this new learning task, clearly unavoidable, be approached? The question Kunwinjku people have faced is, How do we teach our children our own Law effectively, given the need to admit the *Balanda* curriculum, and the impossibility of excluding the *Balanda* world, from their experience?

### 9.7.6 “Both ways” Means “Our way too!”

The reality of facing a choice of “Laws”, and the real possibility that young people may prefer the *Balanda* Law, or perhaps no Law at all, are urgent issues. Anomie is a growing reality in Kunwinjku society: a state of mind where no guidance is looked for or felt from either legal system and no allegiance to either is preferred, resulting in behaviour based entirely on the self, without relational reference. Kunwinjku people speak of this as “drifting” or being without any personal direction (*kebrokyak*). MM warns failure to learn *Bininj* Law leads to this purposelessness:
He must understand all you (2) teach him. This it what the Law says. He must not go along without Law, that child. Suppose that child just goes along and does his writing, but he doesn't understand properly, he doesn't really know how to address his father, mother, mother's mother, mother's father, mother's uncle, uncle, mother. Nothing. His older brother, his youngest, he can't address them. Nothing. He just goes along without any purpose (burudjang) [MM: 41]

Moreover, purposelessness or anomie automatically involves Lawless behaviour:
A child who just goes along without those ideas (mayaliyak), the result will be he will break in and go and steal things. He smashes, and he then goes and steals, he steals anything. He acts against the Law. He doesn't know anything, nothing. Without any use (burudjang), he just goes along [MM: 44]

Young Kunwinjku have the option of living mostly in what is practically an internomic space. In the absence of self-conscious decision making on their part their lifestyle becomes anomic by default. Much of the rhetoric directed at them by adults mistakenly reads their tendency to anomie as a desire to adopt Balanda habits and ideas. In fact they are not situated in the domain of either of these Laws. They have missed and are missing both Balanda and Bininj curricula.

Kunwinjku adults generally see their children as influenced more and more strongly by the Balanda world. This is deeply resented, probably because people invariably declare themselves powerless to stop the process in which they are also swept up. Their tactics are nevertheless persistent, even though often misread by Balanda observers. In particular, Kunwinjku advocacy of “two ways” or “both ways” learning is motivated as a warning to the younger generation not to simply abandon Kunwinjku Law for Balanda. It is certainly not an open-armed welcome to the Balanda curriculum, as some Balanda have thought. In fact, insistence on “two ways” learning is a call to consciously resist the imbalance in learning forced by the Balanda world in its favour:

There are two systems: when those young blokes go to school, and also the young ladies going too - there are two systems they follow: one black, one white. That's the issue. There isn't just one way that they follow, just the Balanda way. But they should learn the other, our own Aboriginal system. That's what we talk about. And parents need to try and raise them with both. They should teach them. Both systems. They should learn to want both black and white Law. They shouldn't just go to school and learn the one. [JD: 48]
MM (14) encourages explicit comparison in order to reinforce the value of learning Bininj Law:

*Don't you (s) let it go. It's not a laughing matter. It's what is teaching you, it's taking you through school. Nowadays, well what you children are doing, you call it "school". In fact we all say the same thing. We however, we black people say "We are teaching you, which is what educates you and teaches you." Well, English says "It's this school that educates you." Why use the word "school"? School educates you and teaches you Law. That's why we say, we on our part say (the Law) is teaching us.* [MM: 14]

The hortatory language here recalls the appeals made to novitiates in Ceremony: it is necessary to consciously engage in managing one’s own learning, and this will require a complex balancing act by the young Kunwinjku learner:

*But pay attention to this: you must use both. We should have Balanda language ourselves, speak his language, the Balanda language. And also our language, we black people, our Kunwinjku - you must keep hold of it, so you can run with both: English and Kunwinjku. It's good that you do that. But if you just go always on the one side - English says, "one side": "kukarnkudji" is what we say -if you (s) go just the one, the one way as it says...(but) if you also go the other side, then by doing that you will know, you children. If you go "one way" as English says, "one way", then you will not know our own Law. You'll miss out, you won't know the Law. You will "miss" as English says; "You don't know the Law, you 'missed'." (You missed) that Law which is our own Kunwinjku language. You children must always go to school. It teaches you Balanda language. (And you must also learn) Aboriginal language, so you will really understand it. This is true. If you go on just the one side, if you (s) go one way, you won't know the Law. You (s) should go a long way, further on, through the black (Law), and (don't) drop it.* [MM: 11-12]

### 9.7.7 Literacy and Biculturality as Pro Kunwinjku Tactics

All human pedagogy is fundamentally oral, but in large cultures written literacies are a considerable part of both methodology and content. Kunwinjku pedagogy was exclusively oral both in methodology and content. Whether this content is thought of as oral literature or the system as one of primary oracy, its difference from Balanda, especially school-based pedagogy is fundamental. In Kunwinjku pedagogy, the need to memorise stories, specialist sociolects, long song series, comprehensive social
data and other more technical curriculum items was at the core of learning experience, with oral performance and assessment. Some Kunwinjku people are quite proud of their capacity for oral memory:

I've just hung on to what they said, those Mawah. I didn't write down what they said on paper - but I wrote their words in my head, whatever they told me. I put their words here. [[Points to own head.]] Your Makkah, my mother, that Nakurrng, your Nakurrng - I still have all their words. They've died all those old people, but I still have their words now. That Law they gave me, I haven't let it drop. No. I have that Law. That's what they gave me and I haven't lost that Law, certainly not. [MM2: 64]

GN relates oral literature to transgenerational teaching:

Yes, well, we still know it! And this was before books - there were none.
What we did was we just held on to it then we went along to adulthood.
And then in turn we teach our children, and then they do it. [GN: 25]

In Kunwinjku thinking, Balanda Law and pedagogy are particularly associated with writing [MM: 4]. Learning Balanda Law can be described simply as learning to write [MM2: 5]. School learning was perceived as focused on literacy [JU: 106]. Literacy is iconic for the whole task of mastering English, which is always talked about by Kunwinjku people as extremely difficult [So for example AN: 69-71; JN: 23-24; JB: 8]. Their commonly confessed failure to master English is iconic in Kunwinjku thinking for a general incapacity to deal with the Balanda world. GN may be revealing a more general Kunwinjku self-appraisal when she describes adult responses to children who fail to learn English literacy:

If he started doing some writing we'd look at that and approve. If he can do English properly, they'll say to us, "Okay then. Maybe this child is good." That's where we're heading. That's the way we adults see it: If someone can't write, he's brainless. [GN: 82]

MM2 (27) reflects a general view among Kunwinjku people, that learning English is both pragmatically beneficial and an index of educability. MM immediately notes, again reflecting a general Kunwinjku viewpoint, that learning English is adjunctive to learning “our thinking”:

Our Aboriginal language, so, yes. They should teach Kunwinjku and English so there's two. Two so that they will have both, so they will know Kunwinjku thoroughly, like a good man, as an intelligent man, or intelligent woman. They
All Kunwinjku statements about the desirability of learning English or its literacy, need to be viewed from this viewpoint. Within a general assent to the need for Two Ways learning discussed above, Kunwinjku people usually say their children should learn English (For example, RN: 61; NG 114-116). This is usually in response to questions or suggestions from Balanda. Their greater motivating concern is always to buttress learning of the Kunwinjku syllabus. Given this response to the displacement of Kunwinjku pedagogy, and given the perceived power of the mechanism of literacy within Balanda Law it was inevitable that Kunwinjku people would begin to think about literacy in Kunwinjku as a resource for preserving and strengthening the teaching of their curriculum.

MM, in fact, claims he initiated this process of appropriation in the 1960s. He described in detail how his son’s English literacy skills inspired him to direct those skills to mastery of Kunwinjku literacy [MM2: 68-69]. Given MM’s considerable pride in the process of oral memory this willingness to utilise literacy must reflect alarm about the collapse of the transgenerational process. MM’s radical proposal is that literacy replace oral memory to preserve his teaching of the Law. He is quite explicit about the mechanism, and assumes the authority of his teaching will survive technologisation:

> Whatever I tell you, remember it whatever happens. I mean, when I die, you must still keep the Law just as I did for those Mawah who have all died. I still have the Law. I still have their words here. And you can write it on paper. Write it all down, write what we say, put it there so that when I die, you'll say, 'O yes, I've still got what Dad (said) in this book.' Then you can get it out and see what I'm saying. I like that." [MM2: 90]

In chapter 13 I will discuss the way these, and other reactive motivations, complicate the issue of school pedagogy for both Balanda and Bininj teachers.

9.8 LAW AND CEREMONY IN A THEORY OF KUNWINJKU RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY

9.8.1 Law and Ceremony in Relational Pedagogy

This section continues the development of a theoretical expression of Kunwinjku views on pedagogy, commenced in section 5.1. We have now surveyed the broad domains of Kunwinjku experiences in teaching and learning (apart from the school)
and discussed the idea of a Kunwinjku curriculum realised as Kunwinjku Law. Because of the complexity and closeness of the association between Law and Ceremony in Kunwinjku discourse, I have discussed both before attempting to engage them with the preliminary theory. I will argue that a relational model of pedagogy can accommodate and explain the tensions and processes of both Law and Ceremony. In terms of the topics that form chapters six through nine, how can we relate the Old People, the pedagogy of the ceremonies, and the Law, to a relational view of pedagogy based on the experiences of the hearth family?

9.8.2 A Pedagogically and Relationally Focused Analysis

I have argued that Kunwinjku pedagogy is experienced and discussed as a relational enterprise, rooted in hearth family experience. Ceremonial pedagogy brings some powerful tensions to this pedagogy, challenging the notion of hearth family hegemony in teaching and learning, and its role in authorising and brokering all education experience and gendered and other relational behaviours. In Ceremony, the intense endosociality of Kunwinjku family life is in tension with the broader Kunwinjku relational network. What was utterly normative is reconstructed or reanalysed in Ceremony as part of a larger structure. This process can be thought of as one of formalisation and recognition of the hearth family pedagogy. But formalisation is driven by the size and therefore the reduced intimacy of a large group process, where relationships are consciously constructed, the locus of relational determinism is owned by each individual. Characterising this process merely in terms of tensions between consanguineous and affinal kin loyalties would exclude the focus of much of the data here on the tension between the individual and the Law, and the need for each Kunwinjku person to behave simultaneously in relationships across the whole of Kunwinjku society, where loyalties to family members are to be seen post ceremonially as part of the wider Kunwinjku pattern of alliances.

9.8.3 A Brief Note about the Law and Theorising Ceremonies

Ceremony demands its own theoretical space within any model of Kunwinjku pedagogy. Assigning theoretical, as well as situated functions to Ceremony in Kunwinjku and similar Australian contexts, has resulted in a wide range of results – the story of the five blind men and the elephant may well apply. There is not the scope in this essay to interact with other broad theories about ceremonial function but the phenomenon of Ceremony is so global, and so significant within Kunwinjku
life, that multiple analytical approaches are justified and compliment each other.
General theories of ceremonial function, or of pedagogy, must account for relational
purposiveness in Ceremony, and its strongly pedagogic mechanism, and hopefully
build this theory on the discourse of participants.

9.8.4 Ceremony as a Resource for Socialisation into the Law

From a Kunwinjku viewpoint, Ceremony is not about Ceremony; it is about Law, and I have argued in this chapter that Law is about the total process and outcomes of Kunwinjku socialisation. I have argued in 8.1 the powerful pedagogic function of Ceremony, suggesting Kunwinjku people view ceremonies at least to a significant extent as a raft of resources to be applied in the process of educating their young. (I briefly mooted this “smorgasbord” concept at 8.8.2). No individual Kunwinjku family can control which Ceremony may occur or when, but when, through collective processes, a Ceremony is brought together, their participation allows certain pedagogic goals to be achieved which have no other natural venue for their outworking, and this seems to have been one of the major motivations to involvement for the hearth family. MM has provided a sweeping overview of ceremonial purpose, blurring distinctions between the separate ceremonies, and simultaneously associating them with a pedagogic progress of his hearers:

All right. This is about the original Law we Aboriginal people are taught by the previous generation. They teach this to us throughout childhood. They tell us when to go to Wubbarr, Mardayin; they take you to Kunabibi, when they take you to Lorrkkon, Murdduh - Yaburlurrwa. They're the ones. They're all the ceremonies. That's where they instructed us. Where they taught us the Law. They teach a child, a young man - a novitiate. They teach him the Law, so he will learn our Aboriginal Law. We learn the Law, the real Law. Maybe, up to that point, he has been just going along without being serious, but then he learns the real Law. That "business" - our Aboriginal business, is not done in public. It means the same as "Law"; in fact it possesses the Law. [MM2: 3]

MM implies the distinctives of particular ceremonies are not as significant as the Law being taught across and through them all. Rather than each Ceremony being thought of as a singular experience, “Ceremony” fulfils, regardless of apparent diversity, a single social function. Though embedding some specific non-pedagogic processes like adoption or circumcision, and providing the large group venue for other motivations, the particular Ceremony is submerged in the way ceremonies
collectively are the locus of the pedagogy of the Law. MM’s approach is supported by the following evidence from other sources:

- Berndt and Berndt in their brief survey of Kunwinjku ceremonies, concluded “The rituals are very varied indeed, and so are the objects used in them” (1970 p. 135). They noted the capacity of some ceremonies to fulfil parallel functions: the Mankinjdjek may have formalised the removal of food taboos imposed in the Wubarr (p. 132); Lorrhkon combined mortuary rites with pedagogic functions (p. 133, and see 8.2.5 above about its close similarity with the *Kunj Murrng* Ceremony). The Berndts also claimed, “Most of the ‘big’ rituals (Wubarr, Lorrhkon, Mankindjek, Mardayin, Kunabibi) emphasise increase of natural species, but others do the same in a smaller way, in reference to specific *djang* sites” (1970, p. 143). This notion of shared or duplicated function argues for the importance of Ceremony collectively over its particular examples. Functionally, the distinct roles become blurred. Berndt also noted (p. 117ff) that mythical narratives associated with ceremonies are distributed over large distances and a number of language groups, and vary a great deal, suggesting their contingency upon local manifestations of the pedagogic reduplicative powerhouse that uses and is informed by them. I will discuss Kunwinjku narrative in chapter 12.

- Keen’s analysis (1994) explores religious knowledge not simply in epistemological terms, which in itself would predicate a pedagogic venue or process of some kind, but in terms of its commodity value, pointing to pedagogic and social aspirations for which the Ceremony was a venue and realisation.

- I have noted in 8.6.5.5 Elkin’s generalisations about the Australian Aboriginal ceremonial procedures culminating in revelatory acts, which I have argued are explicitly pedagogic acts, of “being shown”. Elkin also described ceremonial learning and graduation in pedagogic terms. Both these generalisations are true of Kunwinjku ceremonies and link pedagogic with other functions within Ceremony.

- Kunwinjku discourse is almost always about Ceremony as a singular entity. In these interviews, as in general conversation, people theorised about ceremonies in lists, associated all of them with learning of the (singular) Law.
The use of terminology like *mayh* (8.4.1) for all ceremonies reflects a reification as a single life experience of the diverse ritual instances.

- I’ve also noted at 8.2.5 a range of component rituals (e.g. *Djarnbinj*, *Wolngwong*, etc.) which can be used within larger ritual frameworks, suggesting these entities may be viewed as discrete objects, subservient to the needs for which they are assembled, rather than suggesting they have the power to make demands on their users. Kunwinjku people are pro-active in importing or adapting ceremonial components such as circumcision, and in the case of the Kunabibi, an entire Ceremony (8.2.5). More recent innovations in mortuary procedures, involving the use of money and air travel, and ritual procedures brought consciously from Eastern Arnhem Land, all suggest an attitude situating Kunwinjku people as volitionally outside the ceremonial and ritual, with the power to choose and use ceremonies to their own ends.

- The fact that ceremonies are now dying out wholesale is regarded as an unwelcome and quite new phenomenon, but Kunwinjku and Kundjeyhmi people have told me of older ceremonies that died out in their lifetimes, say between 1930 and 1960. It may be that the major rites listed by the Berndts and MM simply replaced or developed from, or were versions of, these other ceremonies, since the continuity of Law always necessitated some venue for its formalisation. Certainly MM’s acquiescence in accepting the Kunabibi is explicitly driven by the pragmatic necessity of a venue for the teaching of the Law [MM cited above at 8.2.5]

If Ceremony is a resource, perhaps the most formal or potent resource for valorising and teaching Kunwinjku Law, we need then to explore whether and how Law fits with the relational pedagogy.

**9.8.5 Law and Relational Pedagogy**

I have argued in this chapter that Kunwinjku discourse about Law is radically endosocial and is focused intensely on social roles and obligations. Law is about being and reproducing the collective self. To put this another way, in Kunwinjku pedagogy enculturation is subservient to socialisation. This endosocialisation is most intensely, if unconsciously, the goal of the hearth family, but in Ceremony, the same goals drive its pedagogy. Ceremony must protect and valorise the core hearth family relationships, while simultaneously enabling equally valid relationships that provide
cohesion within and between Kunwinjku groups beyond the hearth family. The pedagogic point of Ceremony is to graduate a Kunwinjku individual socially.
Socially, it articulates the hearth family with other structures. Social learning has been preparatory to social adulthood. The Law subsumes these goals and processes.

Kunwinjku people conceive of Ceremony as a venue for formal acceptance of the Law, transgenerationally transmitted by and from The Old People. What matters is the assured adoption and application of that Law, mediated relationally and expressed in relational protocols. The fragmentation of Kunwinjku society under pressure from extrinsic sources immobilises Ceremony, which relied on mutuality and profound unity of commitment to maintenance of transgenerational curriculum.

Kunwinjku responses in adapting their curriculum to Balanda Law locate curriculum as subservient to a higher order formulation of what constitutes socialisation. Motives and models for achieving socialisation exist above curriculum and above pedagogy, shaping those resources to social, that is towards ends framed in terms of valued relationality.

Kunwinjku pedagogy can therefore be described most productively as relational. Kunwinjku pedagogy is the expression and mechanism, in curriculum and Ceremony, of the overriding focus of Kunwinjku life beyond the individual – the valorisation, celebration and reduplication of Kunwinjku social life cohesion. This is Kunwinjku Law.

9.9 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO FOLLOWING CHAPTERS
In chapters five through nine I have presented and discussed the roots of Kunwinjku pedagogy, and the domains in which it is experienced. In chapter ten I will discuss what interviewees have said about the mental and social processes of teaching and learning, from the viewpoints of both the learner and the teacher, the nature of children and of the teacher-learner relationship.
CHAPTER TEN
CHILDREN AS LEARNERS; ADULTS AS TEACHERS
CHAPTER 10: CHILDREN AS LEARNERS; ADULTS AS TEACHERS

10.1. INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL MECHANISMS OF PEDAGOGY

10.1.1 Articulation with Previous Chapters
In chapters five through nine I have described Kunwinjku pedagogy in broadly social, historical and philosophical terms, and in terms of social structures in a period of stressful change. This chapter explores Kunwinjku viewpoints on two other foundations for a pedagogic theory, firstly describing the ways in which Kunwinjku people talk about teaching and learning as a cognitive and developmental process, and secondly, the way they construct adulthood, childhood and the nature of their engagement, reflecting both adult and child predispositions. These final aspects of pedagogic theory set the scene for chapters eleven and twelve, which will describe the nitty gritty of pedagogy in practice.

10.1.2 Summary of This Chapter
This chapter explores Kunwinjku views on three areas.

1. Pedagogic Terminology (Section 10.2)
The chapter begins with a brief overview of the rich Kunwinjku lexicon specifically related to pedagogy, and to the nature of children, adults and their relationship. The size and diversity of the specific lexicon applied to pedagogic processes reflects a strong body of thinking about, and frequent experience of talking about, children learning.

2. The Nature of Children and their Thinking (Sections 10.3-10.4))
There is a strong model of Kunwinjku childhood and what constitutes an expected appropriate pattern of development from birth through to adulthood. Childhood is seen as a period of mandatory and intense learning, through stages framed by the child’s perceived readiness. Interviewees have clear views on what children think about themselves, and what sorts of mental processes the child employs and experiences as a self-aware learner. Interviewees have discussed how children think, remembering their own experiences as children, and using attributed quotes to present the self-awareness and self-management decision making within the child. They have also discussed issues of intelligence, teachability and motivation in learning. Put together, the interviews reveal a multi-dimensional model of the psychology of children in general and of child learning in particular.
3. The nature of adults and their roles as teachers (Sections 10.5-10.6)

There is a general assumption that adults must teach, and that children perpetually learn. Adult-child relations embed teacher learner relationships which are co-constructed explicitly. Interviewees have described a number of motivations for adults engaging with children in teaching roles.

10.2 KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGIC TERMINOLOGY

10.2.1 Discursive Resources Introduced

Kunwinjku discourse draws on a rich terminology of mentation and pedagogic communication. Children and adults alike can be categorised in terms of intelligence or evaluated in terms of their ability to think and talk about complex ideas. Discussions about learning capabilities utilise terms based upon the words for the physical brain, or the head, or on the terminology of ideas and mentation. The range of synonymous expressions for core aspects of cognition, teaching and learning suggests these areas are attractive to Kunwinjku ideational explorations.

I will introduce here a limited set of examples as an index of the discursive resources applied to pedagogy in everyday Kunwinjku life.

10.2.2 Examples of the Kunwinjku Pedagogic Lexicon

- **Kumnayali** – The ideas, or a person’s thinking about a specific issue. Sometimes *kodj* - “head” is used metonymically for the mind in expression like *kodjiyimeng* (literally: “head said”) or *kodjmenwam* (literally: “head meaning proceeded”). These terms can replace the more specific term for thought - *burrbom*.

- There is also a range of specific verbs of apprehension and thinking, e.g. *bengdayhmeng* – realised, and its transitive form, *bengdayhkeng* – “reminded”, “brought to someone’s notice”.

- **Burrbom** – thought or knew, which can be qualified, for example *wohburrbom* – “realised”; *kukburrbom* – “recognised”, and so on.

- Words based on seeing (*nang*) or hearing or feeling (*bekkang*) can also navigate the ideational realm. For example, *menmenbekkang* – “understood what someone meant”. (the stem *menmen* only occurs in incorporated forms and has to do with intention, motive or underlying meaning); *burrknang* – “saw his point” (*burrk* is the substance or main body of a thing).

- The processes of internal reflection can be simply “thinking” (*burrbom*) but is often more figuratively, “asking oneself” (*djawaren*) or “listening to oneself”
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(bekkarrinj), including “analysing how one feels” (njilngbekkarrinj). These processes can occur in the mind, perhaps leading to a change in thinking (mayaliborledkerrinj- literally turned ones own idea around) or an act of decision making (karremarnburrinj – literally made a Law for oneself).

• There is a range of synonyms in common use for the methodology of teaching and learning. When you show me (kanbukkan) or teach me (kanbukkabukkan), I learn (ngabolhme). When you teach me (kankan - literally, “you take me along) or give me ideas (kanmayaliwon), then I understand the meaning (ngaburrkburrkbekkan), I understand the position or motives (ngamenmenbekkan) or simply, I see (nganan).

• Teaching may be a demonstration (kanbukkabukkan) it may be explaining something to me (kanmarneyolyolme); it may be pointing out something or warning me (kanbengdayhke). Pedagogy can be thought of as “giving ideas” (BG: 79) or “getting” the content of the teaching, figuratively extending the literal meaning of ngamang, “I grasp something physically”.

• Kunmayali as an independent noun means ideas or concepts, and is the root for a number of verbs of process in pedagogic discourse. For example, mayaliyimeng – to have the view, to be of the opinion; mayaliwong – gave someone an idea. Concepts can be described as complicated or deep, using for example– mayalikimuk – literally “large idea” or mayalidulmuk- literally “heavy idea”. A person who is mayaliwern (literally, “lots of ideas”) is, however, rather suspect and inclined to hop from one project to the next. This contrasts with someone who is mayalimak – literally “having good ideas”. Mayali is like menmen in that both can represent the content of thought, or an abstract idea which can be taught or learnt.

• Becoming enlightened, or realising something, usually suddenly, is part of learning. So kannimbayhkeng – literally “you opened my eyes”; ngadjalwohburrbom – “I suddenly understood”.

• Forgetting or failing to grasp meaning is part of learning experience too: For example, I forgot (ngabengmidjdaj). I remembered what you said (wokbengdayhmeng or wokburrbom). Teachers and learning can “misunderstand each other” (kabennowokmidjburren –literally “they didn’t recognise what each other was saying”).

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10.2.3 A Note on Lexical Clues about the Moral Curriculum

I have discussed the strong moral connotation of learning the Law in chapter 9. There is some evidence in the lexicon for the association between curriculum and moral socialisation. So a person who is ill mannered (*menwarre*) is also often referred to as “stupid” (*bengwarr* – which is only occasionally used in its literal sense - “deaf”).

A distinction is made between *kodjkuludjad* – “intelligent” and *kodjkulumak* – “morally upright”. Both are considered desirable capacities in learning, and these qualities are identified in children as their personalities emerge.

10.3 CHILDREN AS LEARNERS

10.3.1 Introduction to Kunwinjku Childhood

Kunwinjku people have a generally agreed model of child development from birth through adolescence. Each stage is associated with particular aspects of teaching and learning. This discussion is focused on issues of pedagogy and necessarily relegates other aspects of child development. Childhood is a period of mandatory, intense learning. Kunwinjku pedagogy describes the process through which a child becomes a fully adult Kunwinjku person, through a succession of co-constructed pedagogic relationships, with the learner moving towards an expected agency in his or her own learning, culminating in the capacity for adult independence which involves taking up his or her own role as teacher of the next generation.

10.3.2 Childhood from Birth to Adolescence

This section is meant to supplement the description of infant pedagogy in sections 9.3.5 and in chapter six. From birth onwards Kunwinjku people expect to see children learning constantly. People often remark that a toddler is in fact learning (*kahbolme*) or that he or she knows something (*kahburrbun*). Adults frequently comment on a pre-teen child’s capacity to learn or perform in areas of kinship protocol and particularly language. Young teenage children with skills in hunting and gathering or craft are also considered praiseworthy: they may be described as *kodjkuludjad* – intelligent or clever, or *kurdumak* – “competent” - for example when performing a dance or song, or hunting.

Kunwinjku children at birth enter certain permanent social categories. They automatically assume one of the eight subsections (*kunkulah* - literally “skin”) determined by that of the mother, though not identical to hers, and a clan (*kunnguya*) identical to the father’s. The terminology of age and gender locate children and
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adults in a developmental sequence throughout life, and reflect the non-negotiable parameters within which the individual works out his or her identity.

Children of any age are referred to as *wurwurd* (singular *wurdyaw*). Older ceremonial leaders may even use this term to address younger middle aged men in ceremonial contexts, expressing the relative lack of maturity and knowledge associated with childhood. The two morphemes involved are *wurd* – “something derived or additional” (so by extension a woman’s capacity to reproduce), and *yaw* – “small” or “a child”. Children are often spoken of as “growing up” (*kabirridjordme*) or of “having been grown up” or “raised” by someone (*bidjordmiweng*). Children without structured adult teaching or care in their lives are described as “raising themselves” (*kahdjordmiwerren*), or as *namarladj* – literally “an orphan”. The verbs based on *djordmiweng* imply a teaching and caring role by the adults concerned regardless of kin relationships. Usually this sort of caring is provided within extended families, but adoption occurs (*biyawwong* - “the child was given to him or her”) and is universally expected to involve the same caring and teaching associated with biological parenting.

More specific terminology applies to each stage of childhood. Neonates are immediately referred to by skin name, with the collocation “*yaw*” – infant. For example *Ngalkodjok Yaw* – an *Ngalkodjok* subsection baby. *Ngal-* is the feminine noun class prefix. Gender is marked, by prefixing on nouns, adjectives and demonstratives, in almost all Kunwinjku social terminology. Less specific reference can be made: *narangem yaw* or *nabarrken* – baby boy; *ngaldaluk yaw* or *ngalbarrken* - baby girl. These neonatal categories are soon supplemented by personal names after some canvassing for ideas across the family. Each child will normally have at least one *Balanda* and one *Bininj* personal name, though most Kunwinjku people only use personal *Bininj* names in the closest family relationships, and even here the unmarked preference is to address each other by skin or subsection names.

I have provided these details of social relations and kinship terminology because it is so often spoken about in daily Kunwinjku life as the focus of learning in young children.

10.3.3 Adolescence: Getting “serious”

By age 10 or 11 children are expected to speak grammatically acceptable, adult Kunwinjku, though many of them do so three or four years earlier. By this age they
should know how to gather and prepare non-hunted food from their environment, to make containers and take some part in dances songs and stories. The focus for teaching and learning with older pre adolescents of both genders is on conscious relational protocols, including the social aspects of food distribution although learning of more complex kinship language also occurs at this stage.

For Kunwinjku people, early adolescence is expected to involve some social turbulence, with tensions between adolescents and older family members. Some people put a high value on teaching in earlier childhood when the child is still teachable. ED takes a typical Kunwinjku viewpoint associating adolescent misbehaviour with (another) family’s failure to teach the child adequately in infancy beforehand:

Yes. If we teach a child in the right way, that child will learn just as well as an adult. But if the child doesn't listen to us, he just won't know. As is the case with those teenage boys who get themselves into trouble, go to court, then gaol, and then they come back, and then they'll come back because they never learnt anything. Their parents were slack and never tried to teach them properly. They would always take the child's side joining in his fights, and they spoiled him (bindiwarrewong). They spoiled those kids. I always tell them, "Don't just join in your kid's fights, but turn around and give him advice. If you join in, he'll always come back and try to get you involved over and over again until you're completely sick and tired of it." [ED: 66]

ED used both English “spoiled” and its Kunwinjku equivalent (warrewong) to make her point. The involvement of adults in children’s disputes is a commonplace in Kunwinjku life, and contradicts the (also commonplace) comment that such behaviour is bad for the children. Kunwinjku pedagogic theory may be as dissonant with its practice as any other human behavioural theory, but the unwisdom of this interference and the usually resultant escalation of childhood disputes are everyday topics for discussion and argument within, as well as between, families. ED’s comment also implies a definition of educational failure as moral or behavioural failure, a theme in Kunwinjku domestic discourse.

Developmental, or in this case behavioural stages, are imprecise around adolescence. Pre adolescent boys may move into a state of chronic tension with mothers. JD notes the inability of mothers to control preadolescent boys – another topic discussed frequently in Kunwinjku families:
Some of them are big kids - little kids and big kids, about so big [[indicates about 10-12 year old height]]. I don't' know how they can just hide. Their mother should be been telling them what to do. They should say to them, "Don't do that! You go to school!"

Mothers do however try to discipline boys, even using physical punishment in some families, up to puberty and even beyond. It is very unusual to see a Kunwinjku man taking part in this process or even supporting it overtly. Often men will intervene, occasionally with violence towards the scolding mother. Sometimes older women, typically the father’s mother, will also intervene to stop a mother scolding or striking a child. Young mothers often complain about this sort of limitation on their capacity to discipline their children.

Girls also have some turbulence in their relationships at home, some as young as nine or ten may insist on moving to live with even distant relatives rather than putting up with a “bossy” mother. Pre adolescent girls can become precociously involved with boys and begin to resent mothers and other women directing them. At, or just prior to adolescence, girls become quite aware of the sexual politics of their society and will talk about issues of marriage, promised partners and parenting. I have informally interviewed dozens of children about issues of religious belief and their expectations about adult lives. Females particularly will often express strong views on gender relationships and the way children relate to adults. Most of them know to which male she has been “promised” (balakbom) as future wife, and the girl may initiate a challenge to that arrangement either passively or actively.

The “promise system” is extremely flexible, which may explain how it continues to operate despite its mismatch with the Balanda world. The two families involved in such a promise arrangement will make a commitment to each other (birriberreburrinj) based on the strong Kunwinjku principle of reciprocity (kunyurrimi) matching the giving and receiving of daughters-in-Law to preserve a kind of roughly balanced alliance between the clans involved. Monetary fines or other compensations may be negotiated should the arrangement fail, as it usually does in contemporary Kunwinjku experience.

In fact, the promissory element in marriage has changed significantly in the lifetimes of middle-aged Kunwinjku. It is less likely that a firm commitment to “promise” a daughter in her infancy will be made, but negotiations are still expected to go on between interested families, and despite more flexibility most marriages are
between clans with some sort of existing association. It is still rare for people to marry someone from a prohibited sub-section. Young adults now typically marry each other largely through choice within a loosely constructed set of family expectations, and the age difference is now closer to parity than when their grandparents married. Typically, Kunwinjku women will now have a first child by the age of fifteen, without a settled marriage arrangement, but will soon thereafter marry another partner with the intention of a long term relationship. Whether this trend simply reflects some breakdown in family supervision, it allows young woman a tactic for dealing with an unwanted promised marriage, at least until she is ready. Separation of marriage partners now occurs in roughly half of couples under forty, providing an index of social change in Kunwinjku society if middle aged informants are correct in what they say, and model, of their own peer generation who by and large remained married through to old age. (The issue of marriage stability before Balanda contact is beyond the scope of this research, but the number of Kunwinjku families where genealogies involve multiple partners both simultaneously and consecutively, and sometimes from “wrong skin” groups, in earlier generations suggests an era of social turbulence before missionary contact, further suggesting their presence imposed powerful social restraints, though of a different kind than those felt now.)

Some interviewees associated pedagogic failure with these marriage trends. Marriage is not considered an index of educational achievement, with young husbands, young fathers and young mothers all subject to the criticism that their learning and therefore their teaching, has been inadequate [ED: 9-10; JN: 29].

Adolescent boys are referred to and addressed as yawurrinj, a broad category which extends to young married men up to around thirty years of age. Yawurrinj is often jokingly applied to pre-teenage boys, or as an interjected comment on an action done in the typical manner of young men. Chronological age is still used only loosely in everyday Kunwinjku, and often people refer to the age of a young man in terms of whether or not he has whiskers. Whichever system is applied, pedagogic expectations are linked to developmental stage:

> As well, not only that, but they should stop treating life as a joke, those bigger ones, I'm talking about those old enough to grow whiskers, a young man, young blokes. They still go to school, but they should be still teaching them that other
business too, I mean they should teach them the ceremonies, and by that, they would stop and put an end to them taking life lightly. [GW: 66]

In fact, since the schooling process involves a good deal of children being categorised by age, Kunwinjku children of school age invariably know their ages (though only rarely do they know their birthdays, probably because only a minority of families celebrate birthdays formally).

Growing up is a self-aware process. Children are expected and exhorted to act appropriately for their ages. Adults are sometimes heard saying things like, “You’re ngurrikikhkimuk – ‘big children’ - so don’t play roughly with the little ones.” “You should know that by now – you’re a big girl!” In fact, this kind of admonition or even rebuke is exchanged from time to time between middle-aged people: “You women should know better, you’re mature adults!” (Literally: “you’re grey haired” (ngurrikodjbrulu!).

Kunwinjku people consider themselves adult by late teens, regardless of imprecise age descriptors:

I'm just talking about right back when I was growing up, when I had turned seventeen, eighteen or nineteen, as white people count years for us. We don't have that system of counting years of age. We just go along noticing each other getting older and greyer, that's all. We'll say, "He's becoming an adult." But Balanda always count how many years. They start counting a person's age from birth. [JN: 11]

MM, the oldest informant I have quoted, and the one who used English least in everyday conversation, is confident in using chronological age references. However, he endorses the idea of maturational readiness in learning and describes the teenage years culminating in adulthood as a period focused on learning the Law:

It's the same. It's the same with our Aboriginal Law. Maybe you go when you're 13 or 14 or maybe 15 years old, and then you go on and learn more until you are 16 or 17, you keep learning whatever things, till you are 18 or 19. That's how someone learns the ideas, the "kunkarre" - the Law. [MM2: 4]

The yawurrinj years are associated with finalising learning of the mandatory curriculum:

- The time came and I had almost grown up, I was educated. This doesn't happen when you're just a young boy, when they're just starting to be a young men, I mean a very young teenager, what would they say in English -14 or 15 years old,
sixteen? But Aboriginal people would still call them yawurrinj - that sort of thing, getting closer to being young men. That's what we say. White people would say, "He's becoming an adult." [JN: 14]

- When they grow up, yes. They can see them. They can see the Kunabibi, Yabburlurrwa, Lorrkon, and Mardayin. When they are becoming fully adult... We'll (inc) just let him go along and grow up, become more of an adult, grow some whiskers, then we'll (inc) teach him. [JM: 39]

I have discussed in chapter 8 Kunwinjku expectations that adolescents will submit enthusiastically to ceremonial discipline as the culmination of childhood learning and an orientation to adulthood, but in parallel with this, there is also a general expectation adolescents will be exploring and constructing their own identities. ED (110-112), for example, describes the likely response of an adoptee in a cross racial situation once this age range is reached.

People jokingly refer to the occasional overconfidence or bravado of young men (kabirringoynarren) who are often exhorted towards more adult responsibility. MM directed much of his interview explicitly at adolescent males, addressing them as a putative audience [MM 4, 5, 28; MM2: 3, 5, 8, 10, etc.] and generally exhorting them to self-control and adherence to the "Law".

10.3.4 Gender and Learning in Childhood

Kunwinjku people do not differentiate on the basis of gender (whether before or after adolescence) in regard to intellectual capacity or inherent teachability. This is noteworthy given the powerfully gendered universe in which Kunwinjku children grow up. In chapter 6 I discussed some gender-specific pedagogic dyads in the hearth family setting that suggest adult family roles are dominant over gender based teaching roles with young children. Children of both genders are held to be equally capable of learning, and under equal obligation to learn. MM insisted on teaching the Law both to his sons and daughters (he had six of each):

Okay, then I in my turn made your younger brothers (learn) it. And your sisters too - I made them (learn it) too. I told them. I didn't leave anyone out - neither boys nor girls. I explained to them the same Law that those Mawah had given me long ago. What he told me back then. Your sisters and your brothers: that's what I explained to them all. I didn't miss out even one of them, not one. I just explained that Law to them all. I explained the same Law that my father's fathers gave me. I didn't teach them my own ideas, no. That teaching was from
those Mawah. That Law is exactly what I talked about. I explained to them what every part was about, the ideas and meaning, what Balanda calls "meaning" - the ideas of that Law, so that your sisters and brothers wouldn't be ignorant. [MM2: 60]

Young women have to work hard at their learning just like young men, acquiring survival knowledge as well as moral Law. Bush skills are learnt by, and taught by, either gender, although some skills are associated more often with one gender:

And then in turn we teach our children, and then they do it. I've been thinking just about that girl of ours (inc), our daughter. She's got it. She hunts. She gets animals. She cooks it herself. She spears fish, she's like a man. And she learnt it by watching what her father did when he was making fishing spears or whatever else he was doing. [GN: 25]

Both genders need to learn the Balanda system as well as their own [MM: 12; NN: 36].

GW has been impressed with his female students:

Or again, with Kundebi when we (inc) teach them, we might sit down and teach a child all day long for one day. We teach him and he learns fast. He learns it so the next day we don't have to teach it again. And we would say, "Yes. He's intelligent." Or "She's clever - she learns fast." And also with women - women are, well, a bit clever. So therefore they learn things even if no one teaches them. [GW: 33]

Kunwinjku pedagogy is intended to produce effective Kunwinjku adults of both genders:

So with the child, when someone is teaching him, it's up to us, up to our own Aboriginal teachers, when you look at the children and you see that child, we (inc) watch him and we help him if we love him. We make him so he will become a good man later on – or a good woman. (We think about what happens) later, when the child finishes school, when we know the child has gone right through and finished school, he or she should get a job at that stage. The child will continue on further from there, on her own, but we've (you and I) already given her the ability to think. We've given that to her, so she's learnt to think for herself. The teacher can say, "I've filled her mind." "Education", that's what we've given the child. We've educated him, so he grows up well. [JN: 29]
Girls and boys play together up to around the age of five or six, when single sex groups begin to be preferred by both genders. Single sex groups, sometimes led by an older child, spend time together walking around, gathering mangoes or whichever fruit is available, fishing and playing imaginative games about living in a house or going shopping in Darwin. Very rarely they will build a cubby house together, sometimes returning to this project over a couple of days. By around 7, 8 or 9 years girls start behaviours *Balanda* would generally describe as “feminine”: using nail polish, carrying a handbag or wearing perfume. Girls in this age group are routinely in charge of and caring competently for younger siblings or other small children, changing nappies, washing and feeding.

Given the constant access children have to real life babies it is not surprising that primary school aged girls or younger will be seen only very rarely carrying around dolls bought from the community shop. The *Balanda* world attracts them in other ways: bikes and electronic games are popular and children of both genders have in the last five years started dying their hair, usually red, yellow or green. Both genders play basketball from about ages 10 or 11 upwards, sometimes in mixed groups, possibly because the activity is so visible and therefore safe as a context for mixing without the immediate presence of either *Balanda* teachers or family members.

### 10.3.5 Developmental Readiness and Age

The role of the hearth family in determining a child’s readiness for ceremonial learning was discussed at 8.3.4. Children’s learning is in fact generally expected to occur in stages, dependent on the readiness of the child in terms of maturation and ability. Decisions about what to teach, and when, depend on the adult perceptions of individual readiness. Those who teach are in fact obliged to make this assessment:

> But if we give that child something too hard, not just too hard, but maybe even something too easy for him if he's good. If we give him something hard, what I mean is you make it too difficult for him, well you have to realise the fact that this is only a child, you're not handling an adult...But you have to be careful with a child. If you give a child a hard time, he'll really hates that, he's just a child. It's the same with men and women - you might tell them what's good, but they follow what is bad. That's what we do as people. Same with kids, just explain things without going too fast or too slow, just the same as we
Aboriginal people do with our Law. That's why you do things that way. [JN: 31]

Adults need to be able to assess a child’s readiness for ceremonial experience [JM: 39]. This assessment depends on physical indices of development more than on readiness in terms of maturity or mental capacity:

SE: And your children, you will send them so they go up to the Ceremony, later on, in their turn? GW: Yes, when he's older - the two of them when they grow up can go together. Might they'll both go up. This can happen to them when their whiskers begin to sprout and they start shaving. [GW: 22-23]

Children should be taught generally in a manner appropriate to their maturation:

But of course when we're dealing with a child, we don't explain things to him in the way adults explain things to each other. Of course sometimes we adults don't understand either! [JN: 38]

Some adults at least seem to have a well worked out mental picture linking competencies with age and development. GN, for example, says initial learning in literacy is expected by 6-7 years of age:

Now though, children will write a story, he and others about six or seven years old, this child who is writing, you know? And he'll muck it up; it will be all mixed up. Adults do that too, and it's happening, they reckon, with the post primary students. No one helps them. [GN: 62]

MM insists children should start learning Law at an age equivalent to infants schooling, just as he did:

This is all part of the same thing, what we are teaching the children is not wrong. Kids -well some kids, think the Law is bad to start with. He'll say that but as he gets bigger, when he's about so high [[indicates height of an infant school age child with hand]] we should start, when they are up to this height, and then they can pay attention to what their fathers are saying. At about that age. The same age that Balanda begin schooling. So he's old enough to understand a bit. What I mean is, as he grows up, when he gets up to here, when he gets to this stage, he must start being given the Law...[MM2: 55]

MM’s indication of height is the conventional way of indicating an age group in general discussion. (This is an interesting parallel to the rough test of school entry age used by some older teachers in the non-Kunwinjku world, where a child is asked to try to reach over his head to touch the opposite ear.) MM however is not simply
thinking in terms of age or size as indices of learning readiness. He recalls [MM2: 29] the way his family elders managed his own learning development, with mastery of the hearth family curriculum a prerequisite for ceremonial experience, so that readiness can be thought of as learned readiness in the sense of having mastered the pre-requisites to proposed learning.

10.3.6 Nature and Nurture: Race and Pedagogy

Behind the general view of the importance of early childhood learning is the belief that children are fundamentally shaped by their nurturing environment, as distinct from being shaped by genetically inherited characteristics. People often remark on family similarities in both appearance and behaviour, but do not believe attitudes and behaviours are transmitted genetically. Nurture dominates nature in Kunwinjku pedagogic theory. Gender doesn’t predicate capability, and neither do other inherited characteristics. The foundations of identity are laid after birth by the hearth family, whose teaching is uniquely distinct from other families:

I learnt in stages. At that stage I didn't go very far away. I didn't go and stay at any other camp. Maybe if I had gone, then I wouldn't have known certain things. Because I would have grown up to manhood, with the husband and wife in that other camp, knowing their way. I wouldn't have grown up in the way of my father, mother, aunty or father's father or father's mother, my mother's father, my mother's mother nor my mother's older sisters, or their spouses, in their way. I'm talking about the lady I called Morlah, my mother's sister. She was the eldest Ngalkangila. I used to listen to her. [JN: 10]

I have discussed in chapter 6 the high significance Kunwinjku people place on hearth family learning. Its failure may impact all future learning. The mechanisms of this failure are varied. PS for example, speculates that learning difficulties may even stem from failure of the hearth family in ceremonial ritual obligations to its young. The result may be a lack of capacity to learn and to perform practical tasks in life:

P: According to our Aboriginal way, it maybe that they ceremonially warm the child with fire, they warm him with fire, they waft smoke over him, so he'll be all right. For that reason they would know things and learn quickly. Some others, if they don't warm them with the fire, it's as if they haven't any ideas at all. Their mind just works very slowly, and he'll grow up slowly. I mean, you know how they'll look things, I mean a vehicle or a tape (recorder) or a bicycle,
and you know they'll want that, and they'll talk themselves into buying it, but when it breaks they can't fix it. So they have a problem. [PS: 141]

Although in this view, the missing element in the child’s experience is ritual (or perhaps, in P’s mind even magical) his point is that this significant element is missing because of failure on the part of the nurturing family to provide this element.

Kunwinjku people are daily confronted with the need to take a position on issues of race. I asked a number of interviewees to comment on the hypothetical case of a Kunwinjku and a Balanda baby swapped at birth and raised in the home and society of their adoptive parents. Every interviewee thought each child would be socialised completely into the adopting society [AN: 95; BG: 92; ED: 110-112; NN: 99]. Although some interviewees predicted problems for cross-culturally adopted children in their teen years [e.g. ED: 112] there is clear support for the dominance of local nurture over inherited characteristics in the socialisation process:

- The white (baby) would do as black people do. Because the white one maybe just doing what black people do in accordance with (their culture?). The white culture, I mean, the white people raising the black child, well he would do the white way like they do their Law, as they are raised. So he would probably just know the white culture. He would just act that way. [BG: 92]

- When they grow up, they will both have learnt the Law. The Balanda child will learn about Bininj stuff, and the Bininj child will learn Balanda things. But still, they are the same. They are different, but in their thinking ability, they are the same. An Aboriginal child who grows up with Balanda will learn Balanda. And Bininj who grows up with Balanda will become that way.[AN: 95]

- Each child will grow up with it. So he would become just like a Balanda in his mind, that Aboriginal child, as they teach him.  [NN: 105]

Despite the constant need to analyse the differences between, and distinctives of, Bininj and Balanda societies and individuals, Kunwinjku people almost always assert an underlying human commonality. They complain about a particular Balanda or the impact of Balanda power, but don’t seem to automatically attribute these to racial difference:

- SE: What about internally, in the thinking, the emotions, the feelings, not in language but deeper? [AN: Deep in their wills.] Are the Bininj and Balanda different or the same?   AN: It’s..they are the same. In their emotions - yes. [SE:
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Even though the languages are different?] Yes, the languages are different. [AN: 96-97]

- But some children, and this doesn't just apply to children from here, but to others from other languages too including English, from other colours, other languages, from overseas, other lands. It’s the same: some of them are intelligent and some are not. All over. [JN: 45]

Taken with their views on the dominance of nurture in socialisation, Kunwinjku people probably believe all people have broadly the same capacity to learn, and to do so via the same sorts of processes. They can, for example, learn each other’s languages [AN: 87-89]. They suggest a kind of universal potential to learn:

- Yes. In their thinking they are both the same. But, because they were brought up in two different ways, but their thinking ability is the same. [BG: 96]
- [SE: At the deepest level, I mean in thinking, the will, feelings, you know, deep inside, are Aboriginal people and Balanda different or maybe the same as each other. Not at skin level, but underneath?] NN: Yes. Underneath, deep down, they are both the same. That’s why they can be taught English. Both black and white can be taught. [NN: 100-101]

At a general level, the overall pedagogic outcome will be the same across human societies, with the child moving into independent adulthood as the culmination of the pedagogic process:

Well, what'sit, they'll both see life differently don't you think? Eh? Yes. I mean that black kid will see the world from a Balanda point of view. And the white kids will see things from a black point of view. [Growing up here?] The one who grows up here. [And when they become adults, what will they do?] When they become adults, well, I don't know, they can choose their own life then. [JN: 116]

MM (25) has noted that the moral Law applies equally to both Bininj and Balanda, implying a commonality in recognising the moral core of curricula across societies. JN’s comment about the diversity of Laws [JN: 18] also suggests an expected universality in human systems. One’s own learning allows an inspection of parallel systems within other cultures.

ED described her syncretistic theology of human similarities and the way local nurture may operate in this model:
This is how I react to that personally: no matter what way we look at meaning of things, we are the same. No matter what system you grow up with, no matter what race you are, somewhere along the way it all mixes together, shares and looks into itself. I don't know about all this, but older people will say, "Oh yes, he's talking good sense." Yes, it's the same as in our thinking. What I mean is, because I really believe this is the truth, no matter what we...no matter what race, different colour we are, but I believe that our Father God, I say he came and put Adam and Eve there. So every time you ask the older people, "All right then, who was there and made the earth?" "The first people. We don't really know." And I say, "So where did the first people come from?" "No idea. We hadn't developed then. It was just them." Meaning the first people, as we call them. Then that makes me think about Adam and Eve, that business, that kind of Christian story where Adam and Eve were the first people. Well to me, in some ways, God reveals himself in different ways to different cultures. That's what I strongly believe. [ED: 116-118]

10.3.7 Intelligence and Oracy as Perceived Factors in Pedagogy

Kunwinjku people regard themselves and their children as capable of learning effectively. Their intellectual self-image is one of capability. They are particularly proud of their oral memory as a distinctive of their pedagogy:

- I've just hung on to what they said, those Mawah. I didn't write down what they said on paper - but I wrote their words in my head, whatever they told me. I put their words here. [[Points to own head.]] Your Makkah, my mother, that Nakurrng, your Nakurrng - I still have all their words. They've died all those old people, but I still have their words now. That Law they gave me, I haven't let it drop. No. I have that Law. That's what they gave me and I haven't lost that Law, certainly not. [MM2: 64]

- GN: We did watch how they did things. We watched what they did, and they taught us, they would say to us, "Do it like this." That's precisely how we kept it in our brains. Because we didn't write it down on paper. But still, that's the way we went along and we grew up with it. [SE: And you learnt well?] Yes, well, we still know it! And this was before books - there were none. What we did was we just held on to it then we went along to adulthood. And then in turn we teach our children, and then they do it [GN: 23]
ED asserts Bininj children may in fact be more than equally capable compared with Balanda children, because (unlike most Balanda children) they necessarily interact with a second language and culture throughout even early life. Her claim is based on historical realities rather than any consciously racial distinction, again pointing to a nurture-dominant model of learning, and a recognition that exposure to learning experiences may increase learning capacity. (ED’s confidence about Kunwinjku learning ability is not universal among Kunwinjku people. In 13.3.4 and 14.2 I will discuss the issues of negative self-image in Kunwinjku pedagogy in encounters with school.)

10.3.8 Children as Individuals

10.3.8.1 Individual Difference as a Pedagogic Factor

Individuation is appreciated and expected among Kunwinjku people generally, and even in very young children. Family members compare children with other relatives in terms of appearance and personality, and family traits are discussed openly. (See clan language nicknames in Appendix). Nicknames may formalise constructed individuation.

10.3.8.2 Variability in Capacity to Learn

In relation to pedagogy, children vary in their intellectual capacity and willingness to learn. While children and adults alike may be criticised as bengwarr – literally “deaf” but usually meaning “stupid”, this sort of term always refers to a person’s rudeness or recalcitrance, rather than his or her actual mental capacity. There is no evidence of stigma attaching to anyone’s apparent lack of intelligence when this means capacity to learn, though variability in learning ability must be recognised and utilised by adults and teachers:

Some people are clever - you know what I mean? And some are not. [Yes.] The clever ones who have good brains, they learn quickly. For example with kids, when we are teaching them, (we say) "You say Nangarrkkang", or "You say Djongok or "You say...". And he gets it quickly, well that means we know he gets it quickly, he does, or she does. Or again, with Kundebi when we (inc) teach them, we might sit down and teach a child all day long for one day. We teach him and he learns fast. He learns it so the next day we don't have to teach it again. And we would say, "Yes. He's intelligent." Or "She's clever - she learns fast." [GW: 33]
Intelligence and learning ability vary between individuals, and, combined with personality expressed in attitudes to learning, provide a range of individual differences confronting anyone who teaches:

I’ll talk about this. I left it when I had got to that stage. And that is exactly what happens with kids. When we teach a child, we would notice one child, we'll see him, among, say, four or five kids or even six, all different kinds of kids, and there might be that one who is really good, clever. He picks up things and understands very quickly. And he makes progress. So you keep an eye on him from a bit of a distance. And you'll think, "This kid is bright, he'll grow up well. He'll become man, a real man. He'll have the fundamental Law." Another child you'll notice might be hard, and you can't straighten him out. We can't do anything with him. He's always heading the wrong way. He'll go on in life, turn into a man and still be the same way throughout his life. Another child you'll notice is a tough guy. Yet another one you'll see is brainless, who just goes along. He just goes along. You'd just have to say to him, "Go that way. Take that with you." When he watches you work, he won't get up and help. He just doesn't think. You always have to tell him, "Come and give me a hand. Go on! Look after those things of yours." He's different in that way. [JN: 27]

JN believes intelligence or capacity to learn is a universal human variable, providing one of the parameters within which a teacher is obliged to operate. He asserts that while intellectual capacity varies from child to child, and may delimit the teacher’s task, it does not disqualify either teacher or learner from the pedagogic process:

It’s the same: some of them are intelligent and some are not. All over. But just the same we try to teach them, just as I said before. You give him good food and you see the result in that child. But don't make it too hard for them. Don't force too much into their mind or they won't cope. [JN: 45]

Less capable learners are not seen as disqualified from learning or as being badly motivated:

But I think, you might not get…there mightn't be, out of ten children, maybe you will see about half of them are good and half are not - they're not bad people, they just don't have...they're just not bright, not as bright as the others, the bright ones. [JN: 48]

Individual differences in intelligence may account for variability in learning performance:
Some are no good, some teachers. A child may not really understand (minj kawernhburrbun) because some of them are not intelligent (kodkuluwarre), whereas another child is clever (kodjkulumak) when someone is teaching them, but some of them just don't know much (minj kawernhburrbun). No.  [NN: 107]

Yes, some of them have good minds, they pick things up quickly and that's it. They can do it on their own. A ____ is an example, that Ngalbangardi who calls me Morlah. And L____, J____'s daughter. [SE: She's my niece.] Yes. And Ngalwamud, what's her name, yes, oh all those poor kids. But they're good. That's the top class, that one we're going with, because we have lots of kids coming to school every day. So we have the higher classes. Poor things. I think about them in my prayers, the kids, I'll mention them too, those kids. [JN: 138]

With some of them we (exc) say they think well, they are clever, and with others, it's like they can't think well, they don't know much, it's as if they get confused. [GN: 74]

An: I mean he might have a lot of ideas. [SE: Like, some (kids)?] Some kids. [Ri: Some, yes.] They understand and they really listen to the ideas when they are being taught. They really understand, some of those kids. Some (others) of them, when they are being taught [Ri: They just dismiss it.] Yes, they dismiss it, and some are just confused when they are taught. [Ri: Mm. Mm.] About the adults' ideas. Some of them, I mean, they, they know, and with them, they really listen. When they are being told about ideas. [RN: 113]

Children who perform competently in any context attract interest and praise. A child can be described as “clever” (kodjkuludjad) because of his or her skills in any activity, suggesting intelligence and learning capacity are not considered only in terms of formal learning. At various times I have heard adults or children praising one or another child’s performance as a drummer, an artist, a singer, a dancer, a stage performer, a reader, an athlete, a football player and a fisher. This parallels the usually more private willingness to describe another child as pretty or physically distinctive in some way. Children in fact often talk about each others’ distinctive features, sometimes in a joking but non-malicious way. In pedagogic terms, everyone is expected to be able to learn regardless of the fact that some will do so more quickly than others. There is a general peer group expectation that we will all be able to learn. Individuation is expected in pedagogy but not to the point where a member
of a peer sub-group is visibly differentiated. This social constraint on individual
differences in learning poses some procedural difficulties in schooling.

Children with physical or mental problems are usually consciously cared for
informally by family members, and their behaviours tolerated beyond what would be
the case for other children. Children with special learning needs attract one to one
treatment in Kunwinjku family life and by Kunwinjku staff in school classrooms,
reflecting the Kunwinjku unwillingness to exclude anyone from the peer group,
effectively protecting the “writing off” of a child as a learner. ED describes her
school practice of encouraging the child as a self-managing learner to do some self-
teaching.

I'd just sit with that child, and if I had a teaching assistant, she
would help the others. That child who wasn't managing, I'd sit alongside him,
for instance with maths. I'd sit with him and for example, have the MAB
blocks I'd use to teach him. And I'd tell him, "You come every day because I
want you to learn this stuff." And I'd tell that child, "When you're at home,
don't just run around, but get some coins and play with them. Count them,
make them into a circle and practice writing the numbers". And I point out to
the children, "With these numbers, write the name of that number. I want you
to get into that sort of thing." [ED: 76]

GN has suggested one scale of individual difference among learners is a preference
for, or a specific capacity for, learning in what we could describe as the “non-
aademic” domain, suggesting a Kunwinjku notion that intelligence could multiform:

But another kid will have different ideas, so he'll just go hunting. He'll go and
get some game. That's what he does. Kids like that don't just want to learn
about ideas, they've got practical knowledge, so they go gathering food and
getting ant bed for cooking with stones, kangaroos, and other stuff. All
different kinds of meat - buffalo, emu. [So he won't go hungry out in the
bush?] No. He won't be hungry, that man, because he knows how to get food,
yes, and to bring it back.  [GN: 25]

10.3.8.3 Personality and Attitude

Intelligence and aptitude are not the only factors considered relevant in effective
learning. Hearth learning depends on the child’s attitude as well as capacity to learn.
A child’s personality is often the subject of observations by family members, who
may for example say that a child and another family member are kabenemenrohrok – “having the same sort of personality”.

One significant aspect of personality is reckoned to be a child’s attitude to learning, his or her willingness to be taught:

*No. They want to teach them at home too, where they live. [The adults?] Yes, the adults teach them. Some...But some kids, they just run around. They don't want to learn. I mean...they should sit with the adults, because then they would watch the adults and say, "Oh, they'll tell us stories." But they would rather play than sit down and listen to elders talking. But, [But if..] they listen! I've just thought of this: if they want to learn Mother-In-Law language too, they can always come and see you and maybe you can write that book, like you've made this dictionary, so then you could give it to the school and, if they want to, the black teachers could use it to teach bilingual, whatsaname, literacy. They could get that book so, they would know, because, I've heard some kids who speak and know Kundebi. [Some of them do?] There are a few, a few children I know, I've heard. [BG: 53]*

GN says laziness is a factor in a child’s socialisation, although she describes the lazy behaviour in terms of a preference for Balanda amusements, so laziness here may mean lack of motivation to learn or practice the sort of hunting skills that are now less obviously or immediately useful to a child:

*Yes, well, we still know it! And this was before books - there were none. What we did was we just held on to it then we went along to adulthood. And then in turn we teach our children, and then they do it. I've been thinking just about that girl of ours (inc),our daughter. She's got it. She hunts. She gets animals. She cooks it herself. She spears fish, she's like a man. [She knows.] And she learnt it by watching what her father did when he was making fishing spears or whatever else he was doing. Then she would always do it. She was the only one who would help us (2) when we went hunting. Some kids are like that. Maybe quite a lot of them. But others are just too lazy, do you know what I mean? They don't want to do anything else; they just want to listen to white (music) so they can dance to it. [GN: 25]*

The general Kunwinjku model of the child as an autonomous learner, discussed at 10.4.3.3 and 10.7 below, entails the corollary that the child is capable of
autonomously choosing to reject teaching offered to him. The child is viewed as holding his or her educational outcomes to some extent in his or her own hands.

Shyness and other personality traits also shape the teacher-learner relationship, and should be addressed by the teacher.

But some of the children we teach in our class, some of them are very quiet. But they know a lot. They're little "quiet achievers". Yes. It's internal; it's deep inside them, so they know. So we tell them, "Your understanding is there underneath, and you have to bring it out." We encourage them, "You kids know this but why are you keeping it a secret? Let it come out so it can be written down and we can see what you've done. The teachers can see and parents can see how much you know." But some of them just keep it secret, hide it away.

[ED: 70, 72]

Kunwinjku people imply the adult needs to be “reading” the children being taught as to readiness, capacity and personality. They also have clear views on the operations of the child’s mind.

10.4 COGNITIVE PROCESSES IN LEARNING

10.4.1 Introducing Some Kunwinjku Assumptions About Children’s Thinking

Kunwinjku people have described the mental processes involved when a child learns. Their comments appear to be based on a set of unspecified assumptions about this process:

[1] Adults can construct the child’s internal monologue during learning and use this as a tool in discourse about child learning;
[2] Learning involves perceptual and mental processes which operate continuously and automatically in the child;
[3] Children become self-aware as learners and learn to organise the mental as well as the social aspects of their own learning; and,

Kunwinjku commentary based on these assumptions explicitly describes a number of crucial features of child learning and our means of accessing the mental processes involved.

10.4.1.1 Early Childhood Learning is Strategic.

I have discussed the Kunwinjku view that hearth family learning is foundational to later learning, including the ceremonial (8.3). JM suggests that this idea incorporates a view of learning in young childhood as supremely efficient:
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We say to him, "If you're going hunting, that's where you should go, there. As you grow up you'll know the country. And as you go along and father your own child, tell him the same thing. Tell him about it when he's small. If you tell him about it when he's nearly grown, if you tell him about it when he's nearly grown up, he'll just forget and get lost. He won't know where he's going, he won't know any better. So tell him about it when he's little. So then when he goes along and grows up, he'll become an adult with that knowledge. He won't get lost, never. He'll know that, whatever you tell him as a child." [JM: 44]

JM has characterised childhood learning here as not only more effective than learning say as an adolescent, but as more permanent. The implication is that there is either a cognitive or a social component of childhood learning to be utilised or lost, and that this should become a motivation for adults in their teaching role.

10.4.1.2 Kunwinjku Adults on Children’s Thinking.

JM’s statement above evidences a respect for children’s capacity to learn as foundational in Kunwinjku pedagogy. Perhaps curiosity about, or delight in, children learning are also part of the process by which adults form their ideas on pedagogy. In any case, the mental world of the child, and the progress of childhood learning, are objects of interest to Kunwinjku adults.

Sometimes a child is held to be inscrutable, his thought process inaccessible, but generally adults will speculate on the inner monologue of children they observe. I have sometimes heard adults ask children, “What are you thinking about?” (“Njale yiburrbun?”).

Adult Kunwinjku family members frequently talk about the observed behaviour of their children, sometimes ascribing humorous motivations and generally enjoying the children’s earliest efforts at walking and talking (crawling is a rare phenomenon since children are carried by older siblings as well as adults until old enough to begin walking). Adults generally take an interest in the way older toddlers and primary school age children play games imitating the range of adult behaviours: cooking, driving, hunting, conversation, talking in meetings, sexual behaviours, being drunk and so on. This sort of speculation about children also includes a willingness to ascribe to a child certain mental processes during learning.

Adults believe that the child’s thinking is accessible to, and analysable by, adult observers, as well as constituting an interesting topic of conversation. JN (45-
46 for example) implies effective teaching may depend upon a teacher’s analysis of a child’s thinking: This adult attention to children’s’ mentation and internal self-management is fundamental to a Kunwinjku pedagogic practice.

Kunwinjku people typically describe the child’s thinking in the form of an internal monologue, reflecting the general Kunwinjku preference for direct rather than reported speech or thought. They apparently assume their own remembered thinking predicts that of the child learners they observe now. This is the basis for much of the discussion in interviews about the learning process, and constitutes a systematic if unexamined mode of analysis and theorisation, suggesting folk pedagogy has its own, presumably “folk”, methodology.

MM’s remembered childhood learning in the hearth family context reveals the relationship between internal monologue and external dialogue in the child’s participation in a learning episode in childhood:

I didn't just disregard what they used to say to me, your grandfathers, my fathers. For my part, I've kept hold of what they said. "Oh, yes," I would say, "I see!" I didn't just say, "Oh, what does he mean?" If I hadn't understood then I used to ask him, "Dad, what do you mean?" and he would go back and explain to me again. "Ah!" I would say, "So that's it. That's what it means." "Yes. That's what it means. What (you and I) talked about before is different." [MM2: 63]

People remember themselves as having been self-aware as learners. For example, MM remembers himself as a self-aware participant in ceremonial learning. He describes his personal agenda for learning:

But for my part, I was really listening because I wanted to get hold of the Law quickly, so I would know it. "I'll remember the words of that man who taught me - my father, and my mother's mother and my mother. I'll get that Law so that if they die at whatever time, I'll still keep hold of it" [MM2: 38]

GW remembers his awareness of instructional tactics and assumes this thinking is typical of children generally:

He would talk about hunting kangaroos for example. He would say, "I went..." and I in my turn would say "You went...". "I went" -"I went"; "I went and looked" - "I went. You went and looked." That kind of thing I'm thinking of. That's how it works and maybe even now. The kids think, "We should copy them." Kids think like that. [GW: 37]
There is no direct indication in any of episodes of the age of the child at the time remembered, but the behaviour suggests the primary school age range, say from six to twelve years when learning was intensive, requiring conversational participation, but was not in a ceremonial context. In 10.6.2.2 below I will discuss some Kunwinjku comments on the crucial way in which children internally construe the motives and intentions of those teaching.

### 10.4.2 Internal Self-Management of Childhood Learning Experience

NN has commented on children’s responses to her group instruction in basket making, providing a representative example of an apparently simple teaching episode:

> Yes, they watched me while I was making (baskets) - they were watching as I made it. The kids all crowded in together, close, those kids, white and black. They were thinking (birriyimi) "What do we do?" I pulled and tightened very firmly, the right way. "Don't leave any slack. That's not the way." [NN:120]

Only context can guarantee how to translate *birriyimi*, which could be “they were saying”, “they were doing” or “they were thinking”, but, had spoken speech (rather than thought) been in focus, NN would have probably used expressions like *ngandimarneyimi* - “they were saying to me”, or *ngandidjawani* - “they were asking me” or *birriyolyolmi* – “they were discussing it”.

So, NN has suggested a process of mental self-management as the children organised the experience internally, structuring their own learning. The teaching session she reports here had taken place a few days before the interview under the auspices of the school, who arranged a group of elders as teachers and brought primary school age children to the community’s women’s centre for the event. I observed most of the session and noticed the way eight to eleven year olds, both Kunwinjku and *Balanda* boys and girls, were totally absorbed in watching her hand movements and trying to emulate each part of the basketry process she demonstrated. Her verbal interaction was noticeably focused, intended to encourage closer attention and approximation as they worked on their own smaller baskets. Children did occasionally ask questions, which were mostly ignored by NN. Her most frequent statement was “Watch how I do this” (*kandidina* – literally, “watch my hands”).

The learning process NN described is a complex interaction between verbal scaffolding of the instruction and the non-verbal demonstration involved, and
between the learner’s self-aware mental processes and the teacher’s behaviours. This episode illustrates at least one model of the processes of learning in the child.

**10.4.3 How and Why Children Learn**

**10.4.3.1 Children are Automatic and Constant Learners**

Kunwinjku people certainly expect that children are constantly learning from their environment. For example, bad language or other unwanted learning is usually attributed to a bad example set by the child’s family, implying children learn automatically whether the instruction is intended or not, or is completely incidental rather than structured.

This sort of automatic learning, without conscious direction, is unavoidable, whether the learning is from other children, TV or the incidental experiences of daily life:

> Well, now this one, I don't know. But with a child, he'll always aim towards doing something, even though his mothers parents might not even be there, he'll see what other kids are doing, and he'll go back and try it himself, that child. If he's really very shy, he won't tell anyone, but he'll just go and learn himself. Sometimes it's like that. So long as he keeps on seeing the example from someone else, or other children. [ED: 68]

**10.4.3.2 Children Learn by Approximation.**

Even the earliest attempts to teach a baby are based on the child’s presumed capacity and willingness to attend to, and to copy the behaviour of the other person. Learning is treated in Kunwinjku practice as a process of approximation, moving through the stages of perception and attempted reproduction, repeated towards complete mimicry of skill or attitude. Whether a child learns accidentally or via deliberate teaching, the assumption is that the cognitive mechanism involved is one of increasingly self-managed mimesis. A further assumption is that children will by and large remember what they are told when attentive, and utilise increasingly deliberate tactics to ensure learning moves towards the goal of reproducing the model experienced. In other words, complete learning is always complex, involving more than a single discrete memory, and is therefore not instantaneous, but necessarily involving organised review and practice.

ED describes the mechanism of adult intervention in what is otherwise an automatic learning process. Adult intervention is here motivated by social goals, and assumes the potential of the child to manage and direct the learning process:
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Yes, it's the same. They copy the adults around them doing whatever they do, and later some of them come and we teach them. Sometimes they'll say, "All right Come on. Let's fight. She and I. Him and me. Come on, let's you and I fight." So I say to them, "Hey, stop that! Have a drink and come back and play. You've been watching some bad stuff." I say to them, "If you want to play properly, then play this way: Maybe you can play going to the shop and asking for things. What I mean is when you go don't just say 'Banana'. When you want a banana speak English. Say 'Can I have a banana?' or something like that." You teach them that way. Well, we try to teach them. Yes, kids imitate. They watch what the adults do and they listen to what they say, and they more or less bring all that into the classroom. But I'll tell them, "No. That's not good." But then sometimes they'll hear things for example from The Old People there telling a good story, and I'll say, "All right, let's talk about that story." [ED: 64]

ED’s intervention is of course social, or relational, rather than cognitive. In fact the automatic learning she seeks to redirect was also socially experienced, sourced in relationships not directed by adults. This points to a parallel assumption about childhood learning: it occurs in a relational environment regardless of cognitive mechanism. ED also acts on the assumption that learning need not be passive. In fact, she explicitly addresses the capacity of the child to become pro-active in selecting and utilising learning experiences. The process of approximation is therefore, potentially, pro-active in its goals and self-management. ED’s intervention reflects a further, moral, assumption in Kunwinjku pedagogy. Since childhood learning is constant or automatic, there is a strong ethical obligation on adults and teachers to provide the good examples which can act as goals for childhood approximation.

10.4.3.3 Children are Self-managing Learners
The internal dialogue ascribed to the child by Kunwinjku adults reflects a process of self-direction or at least of self-monitoring during learning. This process may focus on the social domain of the learning experience or the way in which perceived data is to be handled. Internal self-management is operationally permanent, but these skills in self-management, including self-assessment, are trainable:

We watched what they did. Whatever, what they were doing, as they did this or that. And they talked about it too. When they would finish what they had
been doing, whatever it was, one of them would explain. He used to explain it. And I would think, "Oh, so that's what he's doing. That's what they're doing." We would do that, and then in turn he would explain whatever. I used to think, "Ah, that's what I'll do." I understood why they were doing it. I would say," Please teach me!" So then I would find out, so I know. [JD2: 22]

Pedagogic self-management continues into adulthood. A well educated Kunwinjku person is able to make intelligent decisions about further learning, in contexts outside the Kunwinjku society that provided the educational foundation:

> And that is the fundamental Law, that's what the fundamental Law is. That is what they passed on to us - when we (inc) were small. We all lived there in the one place, and grew up in the one camp. It was only later we went away from there. So we become adults and we have that fundamental Law. That's why we can then leave and go off to distant places - the "wider world" as Balanda say, far away. It was maybe, as the Balanda would say, we went "exploring", to find out whatever for ourselves. We try to find out for ourselves what other people are thinking. [JN: 17]

Children are held to be self-managing, and encouraged to exercise that capacity.

10.4.3.4 Children Learn through Automatic and Self-Directed Practice

The self-awareness and self-management of Kunwinjku children as learners is evidenced in a number of ways. Children ask frequent questions and often request adults explain or teach them something specific. Children also evidence cognitive self-management in providing their own revision and practise processes for newly learned, or nearly learned, skills. Children can often be observed practising newly encountered skills, either in groups or individually. A group of children will walk home from school singing a newly learned song together; an individual child will practise counting aloud flowers, animals, other children or mangoes; some children will make a point of practising with a friendly Balanda adult newly acquired English structures or vocabulary. Sometime children I have regularly spoken with in Kunwinjku will switch to English apparently to practise some new oral skill. The role assigned me by the child in this instance is to provide scaffolding, to reinforce or correct as required, with the child very happy to be corrected and to practise the new acquisition. The rest of our conversation will always be in Kunwinjku. Kunwinjku children appear to enjoy acquiring and demonstrating new competencies of any kind.
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10.4.3.5 Children Learn by Trial and Error

This tendency to, or even enjoyment of, self-managed reinforcement supports the Kunwinjku expectation that learning necessarily takes place in stages [JN: 10] and through a process of trial and error practice:

And, you mustn't, as it were, do everything for him. Just leave it to him, let him do the exercise for himself. You give it to him, and say, "Okay, now you do it." He might get it wrong a couple of times, but that's good. He'll keep trying, he'll keep trying. Kids always make mistakes, just like adults, trying something, we'll make mistakes. But he'll improve later. Why? Because he's doing that exercise as you told him. For example, you might give him a bokko spear to carve. He might muck up carving that point a hundred times, before he can carve a bokko, make a real bokko spear, before he makes that shape. [JN: 36]

In 11.2.5.3 I will discuss the way Kunwinjku teaching anticipates and utilises mistakes in performance, within a process view of learning, looking beyond single pedagogic events.

10.4.3.6 Children and Adults Both Initiate Learning

If the child is encouraged to move towards pedagogic self-management, this will necessarily include a conscious use of social manipulation where the child initiates teaching by adults. In other words, the child is expected to move towards greater control over the social as well as the cognitive processes of learning, exercising greater self-management of his mental world, and a greater degree of social pro-activity in pursuing conscious learning goals. Language is the indispensable vehicle of teacher-learner interaction. Verbal communication in a relevant social and physical context is the overwhelmingly predominant pedagogic mechanism. In other words, although subject matter and the social or physical venue may provide constraints or suggest processes, verbal communication will dominate. This assumption is a predictable result of applied relationality: language is the examinable locus of relationship, the mechanism for mutual mentation and the only means of disambiguating physical acts and processes. This in turn suggests pedagogy can be defined as a species of conversation.

10.4.3.7 Children Learn Primarily Through Verbal Interaction with Adults

In chapter 6 I discussed a range of pedagogic events located in the hearth family, where pedagogy was a function of relationship. In each case, verbal interplay
between the child and the adult constituted the locus of this activity. Whenever Kunwinjku adults and children are together there is a constant level of conversation. Even in the comparatively rare instance of a child playing alone, he or she will almost invariably talk aloud, either adding sound effects to a toy vehicle, or supplying the spoken parts to imagined characters in conflict, or providing a running commentary on the object of the game. More commonly children will be playing together with a high level of verbal interaction, including the episodic involvement of adults. Invariably an adult and child together will be talking, typically via one or other party interrogating the other. In every teaching and learning activity I have witnessed, there has been a high level of dyadic conversation of some kind. The central role of verbal teaching and learning as a methodology is discussed in more detail at 11.2.6-7.

10.4.3.8 Children and Adults Co-construct Pedagogic Relationships

Children are not expected to be merely passive learners either cognitively or relationally. They often express a demand to be taught or at least informed. (See for example MM2: 63 above). They may even articulate distress at not knowing an aspect of the language valued by adults [GN: 29].

Children are expected and encouraged to be interactive learners, using appropriate conversational tactics, for example framing and pursuing answers to questions which transform participation with adults into a kind of learning on demand:

Yes. They listen to us. I mean this is what we did when we would hear them talking to us, and we would ask them, "What did you mean by that?" And they would be talking proper Kunwinjku. "Ah, that's what they meant when they said that." So then next time they spoke, we would understand. [DM: 51]

This expectation moves beyond the cognitive, and reflects a profound respect for children as relational beings, as well as of the core Kunwinjku principle that children learn in relationships. Consequently, as they grow up, the children are involved in the co-construction of educational dyads, with growing deliberation and strategic consciousness. This high view of the child as learner is complimented and limited by Kunwinjku thinking about the limits to the child’s perceived autonomy as a learner, and the self-image of Kunwinjku adulthood, and what this entails in relations with children.
10.5 Adults as Teachers:

10.5.1 Adult and Children: Pedagogic Symbiosis

Kunwinjku people regard adults and children as living in a permanent general pedagogic relationship: children are expected to learn from adults, who are expected to teach children. Children are viewed as perpetual and relentless learners; with a strong desire to learn from whatever source is available, placing adults under obligation to provide appropriate teaching. The nature of the child as a learner and the role of adults as teachers obligate both parties to the process of jointly constructing pedagogic interactions.

10.5.2 Adult Views on Their Roles as Teachers of Children

In 10.3 and 10.4 I presented a Kunwinjku model of child development, but my concern now is to explore Kunwinjku views on the ways adults think about relating to children in pedagogic roles.

Attitudes to adult-child interaction vary across Kunwinjku society. In most families, for example, children are regularly exposed to the gamut of adult conversation and interactions without any attempt to allocate or maintain any kind of children’s or adult’s domains. In other families, children are consciously excluded from at least some adult activities and conversations:

Yes it's true. That's why sometimes when we are talking, we adults, we say to the kids, "Go away! You're too young to listen to this talk. This is just for us to talk about. It's not good you coming and listening to this. Get going." But some of them just go a bit further off [Yes.] and listen - they do this. [They do that.] Then they make a noise, and we turn around and look at each other, "Hey, that kid is listening to us." [ED: 138]

In chapters thirteen and fourteen I will survey some evidence presented in the interviews suggesting pathological changes in the Kunwinjku adult self-image, with the result that many younger parents have renounced or simply never discovered the role of primary carers for, and therefore teachers of, their children. However, this kind of failure to embrace the role of teacher is at odds with the general pedagogy advocated in the interviews.

JN: 66 described parents as analogous to teachers, and implied a general association of adults with teaching roles:

Teachers, I'm talking about Balanda teachers, and our people, Aboriginal teachers, are both the same in this, and it's also the same at home: people are
Chapter Ten: Children as Learners; Adults as Teachers

too soft on the kids. Mothers and fathers...how do Balanda say this? There is no "discipline." So what happens is, the child just goes permanently off the road. He grows up a different way. That family didn't do their job of teaching the child, so he'll amount to nothing......You know we're (inc) talking about this from Aboriginal point of view. The parents have a similar relationship with the child as does the teacher. [JN: 66]

10.5.3 Adult Motivations to Act as Teachers

Despite the criticisms made here by JN, and in some other interviews, of families who have neglected their teaching roles (for example MM: 29; JD: 52; RN: 131), in most hearth families adults can be observed in some kind of teaching, or at least directive and therefore instructional, activity with their children at some point during the day. It is unlikely that most people are conscious of making a choice to act as teacher in the myriad daily contacts with children, but some motivations are suggested by interviewees. I have discussed at 8.6.5.6 the possibility of covert motivations to manipulate a pedagogic role in the teacher’s self-interest, but the following more public and usual motivations are heard generally in Kunwinjku conversation, even though these motives too may reveal a kind of longer term or more defensible forms of self-interest. A number of the points made below may seem axiomatic in lay considerations of pedagogy, and certainly the examples cited from interviews are representative of much more widely held views in the Kunwinjku community. Axiomatic or not, I need to list them because my general intent is to reveal the full range of pedagogic factors working in Kunwinjku lives.

10.5.3.1 Adults Teach So Children Will Develop the Capacity to Look after Their Elders

GN (25) described the way her eldest daughter went beyond learning to become the only (child) who would “help” them (the adults in the family). This might indicate simply a kind of rational self-interest on the part of the adult generation with an eye to the future. In fact Kunwinjku people often spell out their hope of being able to depend on their children in later years; for example:

So then what is in our minds we can put into their minds as we speak to them, putting it into their thinking, their minds, their wills, their hearts. So a child will become useful and work for us. [JN: 57]

However, Kunwinjku aspirations in regard to their children’s learning are certainly not restricted to immediate self-interest. RN for example hopes her children will
“grow up to help people” [80]. JD regards the capacity to care for the “very old people” as a significant goal of pedagogy [JD2: 55].

10.5.3.2 Adults Teach Children So They Will be Agreeable.

Kunwinjku people sometimes describe a child, or tell him or her, that he or she is “well behaved” or “good”. Almost always, this means agreeable in the immediate circumstance. A general attitude of obedience to adult teaching is highly valued. Obedience presupposes some teaching to be obeyed or applied:

There are some who just go on doing this, those who don't, who don't just disregard their mother and father, or what their grandfathers tell them. They hang on to what is taught them, so that's good. They are good (kids). But there are some who just do whatever they like, go along whichever way they like; they don't want to keep hold of the truth. They just want to do their own thing all the time. [PS: 57]

10.5.3.3 Adults Teach Children so they Can Become Effective Adults in their Turn.

There is a general and sometimes verbalised commitment to ensure that children are taught well enough to become the teachers of following generations and to be effective replacements for their elders:

Those kids want to learn so they can do well, so they can work, and take over from us when we die. They'll realise, and they'll say, "Those parents, those older people are telling us, so now we can do what they are saying." They will grow up able to do that. A new generation. Then they'll do a good job running things when they grow up and take over the place. Because we will all be gone - we adults. [JD2: 6]

JD2 echoes the explicit commitment of JM to the transgenerational ethic in pedagogy:

Do we teach them wrong things? No, only what's good we teach them so they'll grow up well. They will operate both in our own Bininj context, and in the Balanda. They'll go along and grow up, then have their own children in turn, have their kids, and teach them, in the same way. [JM: 4]

This conscious doctrine of social reduplication is a powerful motivation for some adults, simultaneously valorising children and tapping into a sense of personal fulfilment for the adults.
10.5.3.4. Adults Teach Children Because Children by their Nature are Dependent upon Adult Teaching

In general adults accept and express a commitment to their roles as carers and teachers, and this accepted model of the adult child relationship is implied in all the interviews. In some cases it is addressed specifically:

*The teacher should take things seriously. Because, when we're handling kids, we need to teach them.* [JN: 33]

Children’s attendance and learning in both in the hearth family and at school, is dependent on structured and intentional adult involvement:

- *It was necessary for me to explain it to them all. They would go to school, but then they would think about what they had learned from me beforehand - what I used to tell them about. If no one explains to them, if their fathers don't - if the father or mother's father (doesn't) - this is what I'm seeing, and I think it's wrong. Some of them going to school are good thinkers and some are just not. And why is this, son? It's because early on, no one gives them the Law - I mean they don't ask them and they don't explain to them: "This is what you do when you paint, when you paint whatever", or "Go and cut some bamboo." "Make a fishing spear.” - "Fit the point on by yourself, you do it." Or "Fix the end on this spear thrower." or "Carve out a shovel nosed spear." or "Make this hardwood into a fishing spear."* [MM2: 61]

- *You're not scolding him for no reason. You might be telling him off for his own good. For his benefit, to keep him out of trouble - from when he is very young. That's the time when you should handle him this way.* [JN: 46]

10.5.3.5. Adults Teach Children Because it is Enjoyable to Teach Them.

JN described his enjoyment in teaching children, reflecting the obvious “fun” that many younger mothers display in teaching their children early language or simple hunting skills:

*Okay. I've really understood what all this is about. Now, for my part, what I mean is, I always wanted to explain things to children. I taught them at school, I taught those children. I would tell them things and make them laugh.* [JN: 35]

10.5.3.6. Adults Teach Children Because the Children Appreciate It.

ED adds a further dimension to JN’s comment on the emotional value of teaching, suggesting children are conscious of their debt to those who have taught them, linking this with the general ethic in Kunwinjku society that it is good to “help” other
people in whatever way, and indicating a long term pride teachers may feel about those they have taught:

In the old days they used to help each other, back then. The old people would get together to take the kids, helping each other, so that those children would grow up in such a way that The Old People would be able to say, "Ah, I taught that child." And that child could turn around and say, "She's the one who used to teach me before, when I was little." This was so that no matter if people were quite distant, maybe Mawah or Morlah, they could always still help each other, so people would say, "It's good we helped them." That's what family was about. Is it okay that I'm using some English mixed in here, when I say "families"? [ED: 3-4]

10.5.4 Teacher and Learners are Motivated to Teach and Learn Together

I have presented evidence that Kunwinjku people regard both adults and children as needing each other as partners in pedagogy – adult dispositions to teach are complimented by the insatiable and dependent nature of children as learners. Both adults and children are motivated therefore to construct relationships essential to pedagogy beyond the merely accidental or automatic learning that would occur without structure.

10.6 CO-CONSTRUCTING THE PEDAGOGIC RELATIONSHIP

10.6.1 Adult-Child Relationships in Kunwinjku Society

A number of factors operate to produce in children, from before puberty, a well worked out view on the relationships between adults and children. Older children are expected to share child-rearing responsibilities for younger siblings. The pressure on girls from puberty onwards to be available as promised wives makes them acutely aware of adult relational calculations. Often girls of this age (say from 11 to 14) have strong views on the desirability of having children. Almost always they express a delight in babies, but this is in contrast to their frequently expressed hostility to the younger siblings under their care. In contemporary Kunwinjku life children often need to negotiate with adults for financial support, and many have a good mental picture of their parents’ budget. Children are in constant conversation with adults over the range of daily activities. In Oenpelli, Kunwinjku children will confidently approach unknown Balanda and initiate a conversation, often with the question, “What’s your name?” Although they are more likely to initiate conversation in this way with Balanda than with an unknown Aboriginal person or a Kunwinjku person.
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not closely related, the behaviour suggests a fairly proactive agency in negotiating with the adult world.

Perhaps Kunwinjku people think of pedagogy as simply another domain for conversation and negotiation, and children are assumed to be capable of analysing adult relationships at a fairly complex level. The natural expectation is that the child will also make appropriate relational calculations in pedagogic contexts, even where the additional relational matrix of schooling is involved:

   *Sometimes teachers find it hard, and they don't go and ask the parents about things, sit down with the parents, and talk with them about the kids. "This is what your child is doing. This is what he's up to. He's giving me a hard time." If a teacher does that, the child learns about (this contact with) his parents, and he'll think, "This teacher, my teacher, goes and talks to my parents, or grandparents or anyway, he tells someone all about it, so I better not be silly, because if I am he'll go and tell someone and they'll growl at me." [ED: 82]*

This assumed ability in the child for relationship management compliments the expectation of the child’s general self-management as a learner. Kunwinjku people have discussed the way in which the adult child pedagogic relationship is constructed, implying an obligation on both child and adult. ED (3-4) cited above reveals the potential for long term mutual satisfaction that may develop from a pedagogic relationship. The mechanisms for this pedagogic “success” need to be discussed. ED’s comments about the pride of the teacher and the gratitude of the learner could be described as mutual appreciation. In fact, mutuality is a useful idea in organising the features of adult-child pedagogic relationships.

10.6.2 Relational Mechanisms in Pedagogic Adult-Child Dyads

10.6.2.1 Mutual Obligations: Children Learn; Adults Teach.

Adults and children each have motivations to form a pedagogic relationship satisfying to both. ED (3-4) described a situation where both teacher and learner, adult and (now grown up) child were mutually appreciative about their pedagogic partnership. JN shares her optimism about the potential for such outcomes but also spells out the shared responsibility of both parties. Successful pedagogy is not guaranteed by the teacher, but also depends on a continuing commitment of the learner:

   *I've already talked about this principle. You can't actually make a child grow up well, to get big and go to school. No, it won't work. At the start, you can*
make him read and write and sign his name, and speak English, and write his own language, Kunwinjku. But, you don't know what he will become in his later "career" - English speakers say "career". When he gets to that stage, he'll have reached his goal, reached that level, having become a real man with an education, with ideas. Our Aboriginal people used to say, and they still say, I mean we who are alive now still say this, "Oh, that man or woman has an education. No need to worry about him, he knows. He already has his ideas." He'll do it. That's what he'll do. He'll arrive at that stage, reach his goal, and he'll have his own ideas when he wants to go his own way, and you won't have to tell him. From there he'll get into a career, politics for example - as the English speakers say, "politics". He might enter politics, go into that area. Or if he's good enough he might become a professor or university teacher, or anything he wants. He can go his own way now. But he'll still think about what happened before. Sometimes he might look back and say, "Ah," - if you are still alive - "Thank you teacher for putting me on that good road." He would say to you. Or maybe he could write you a letter at some stage, or maybe come and visit you. [JN: 47]

Broadly, there is an obligation on the learner to learn and then to apply what is learnt. The reciprocal adult responsibility was discussed in 10.5.2. This intense and specific relationship is realised through mutual cognitive analysis and shared thinking tasks.

10.6.2.2 Mutuality as Mutual Analysis

If the relationship can be conceived of as a partnership of complementary obligations, these are clearly not equally balanced. Children and adults must regard each other with the expectations appropriate to each in a complimentary way.

Children are not expected to carry the same relational responsibility as adults, but they certainly are viewed as exercising a complimentary analysis within the relationship. There are particular obligations on the side of adults, who are considered as the brokers and managers of the pedagogic process with the responsibility to make it explicit:

Don't look upset with him. If you are going to be upset, do it in the right way. And you should explain to him the reason for being displeased with him or being hard on him. Explain it to him. And tell that child the real reason, the underlying idea so he'll understand why you're upset. You're not scolding him for no reason. You might be telling him off for his own good. For his benefit, to
Both parties in the dyad will analyse each others’ motivations and meanings, but clearly the obligation is proportionately greater on the adult who needs to accurately analyse the child in order to manage him or her without being rejected as controlling: 

What sort of ideas do we have, what sort of things to do we know about the Law in our minds. You don't just tell someone else that, especially a child. If you want to tell them, then you analyse that man or woman, and you'll think, "Oh, I see. So I'll talk to him this way, I'll tell him this or that." But you don't just go and tell someone straight out to make him feel better or whatever, definitely not. Sometimes you might make him worse. Or maybe (he'll think) it's as we say, "Oh, he's trying to control me." But you could do something so as to make him talk with you. Somehow you can talk to each other if you want to help him or whatever. [JN: 51]

JN describes the child’s process of analysis in terms of adult interaction, suggesting it applies as well to the child’s thinking:

But of course when we're dealing with a child, we don't explain things to him in the way adults explain things to each other. Of course sometimes we adults don't understand either. Sometimes I notice adults who don't understand things immediately. Bininj and Balanda don't understand each other, and we have to work along a bit before we understand each other. Someone will understand what you mean, follow your thinking, and you follow his thinking. Then we can smile, and say hello to each other and use each other's names. Fine. But deep down inside, you don't really know him, and he doesn't really know you. Even women too will do the same. And you encounter the fact that women and men don't always understand what each other is saying till later on. He'll have to study him, in order to understand what the other person is thinking, what is in their mind. "Oh. That's what he's saying. That's the way he thinks. That's what he's thinking about" [JN: 38]

JN’s implication is that children may be as capable as adults of mutual relational analysis. BG provides a parallel example which supports this, describing how she conceives this kind of analysis from a child’s viewpoint:

You know, you can't just get tired of it and say, "Oh I'll just give up on him. He's going too slowly." In that situation, you have to get used to it and keep
on wanting to teach him. Don't give up on him. Sometimes teachers get sick and tired of kids, you know, they'll say, "Oh, that one is going too slow to learn. I don't want to (keep teaching him)." But some kids will look at you as teacher and say, "Ah, that teacher has given up on me. Maybe he doesn't want to teach me." You know what I mean? "So I'll just stay home. I don't want (to go to school)." [BG: 85]

P and S have also addressed the issue of power or rather of control, implying that an accurate assessment of the child’s perception of the pedagogic relationship is the adult’s responsibility, providing a useful tool in motivating the learner and avoiding the child misreading the teacher:

"It's up to them. They might send them. Yes, that's it. But if they force them, if they pressure them, then he'll find it hard and won't learn any more. He could just force himself. But if they talk it over with them gently at the start, well he'll go, he'll be happy and he'll learn." [PS: 119]

10.6.2.3 Mutual Affirmation and Relational Signalling.

A teacher’s motives will be read, analysed and apprehended, perhaps wrongly, by the child, suggesting adults should consciously seek to disambiguate their pedagogic behaviours. This makes a case for explicitness in pedagogy in regard to the teacher’s goals for the learner. Reciprocally, the child’s self-management is based on data from teacher’s interactional style with potentially serious consequences:

"But some teachers have, you know, patience. Do you know what I mean? And they teach one step at a time. "Oh, this one is teaching us one step at a time. He must want me to learn more, so I'll know." Kids, some kids, nowadays at school, they experience the way you as a teacher act, and how you feel towards them: "What's he on about?". Lots of kids, I've seen them watching the teachers to see what they are like. Either they are patient teachers in their teaching or they just teach you and that's it, they just leave you to it. You know? Some teachers just want to do that." [BG: 86]

This mutual reading of motivation and even body language poses some problems in the school, to be noted at 13.6.2.

10.6.2.4 Mutuality on Task as Mutual Mentation

Teachers and learners share are both engaged in a common mental task. Each has a role but the task is jointly conceived. Conversation and questioning are both mechanisms in pursuit of this joint cognitive task. Kunwinjku advocacy of
questioning between teachers and learners (11.2.7) reflects this view, since mutual questioning allows the most direct access to each others immediate motivations and conceptualisation. Intense conversation and the use of questions as methodological tactics are motivated by a view of mutual mentation that fuses both social and cognitive models of pedagogic behaviour.

10.7 THE AUTONOMOUS CHILD?
I have described the respect accorded children as prospective independent Kunwinjku adults by their teachers, the high view of the child as a self-managing learner, and the propinquity of the hearth family environment, which together may explain the high degree of autonomy reported in children’s behaviour by Hamilton (1981) noted in 3.2.2. Whatever explained the nature of this childhood autonomy, it has become problematic over the last generation and so significantly altered one of the constraints for Kunwinjku pedagogy.

Over the six years my family and I lived in one room of a house we shared as part of a Kunwinjku hearth family we adjusted our child rearing practices as far as we comfortably could to take part in family life. We noticed that children were free to range more freely, both spatially and in terms of their co-operation in household routines, than we had been used to. However, we also noticed that at no point were any of the pre-adolescent children in the household “off the radar”. Adults knew where they were all the time. This was an extended spatial boundary that was as rigorous as it was invisible. Children had long reins but they were not free to go and do as they pleased. We adapted to this with some difficulty, mainly due to the shared nature of the care for each others’ children needing a base of good working relationships among the adults, which took time to develop.

Obedience was certainly required of young Kunwinjku children, but not in immediate conformity to processes, so much as to a commitment to be controlled at a remove from the relevant adults. Children were in fact sometimes punished physically for being somewhere without the parents’ knowledge. Supervision was sometimes via older children or even non-related adults, but was a constant concern. This kind of autonomy was constrained by parental or familial control and regulated by adult initiated activities that demanded children’s involvement, whether in shared food gathering or story times. We could think of this as scaffolded childhood autonomy.
In fact, the whole operation of the pedagogic system described in chapters 6 through 11 depended upon children and the adults who taught them being in close contact for protracted periods of each day, and certainly available to each other at short notice. The desire to develop independence in learning self-management and in life skills must have been finely balanced with the need to involve children in domestic survival chores and in the more extended teaching of language, ritual and stories during later childhood and adolescence. In 13.4 I will argue that this balance has been lost and the form of childhood autonomy now seen in most Kunwinjku families is deeply pathological in terms of their own remembered childhoods, and that this pathological childhood autonomy has profound implications for the continuance of pedagogy in the hearth family and at school.

10.8 CONCLUSION AND LINKS TO CHAPTERS ELEVEN AND TWELVE
I have discussed the relational processes and cognitive expectations involved as children and adults construct a working pedagogic relationship. Both parties depend on each other for effective pedagogy, engaging each other’s minds and seeking to clarify motives and goals. This model continues to build upon the respectful view of children as self-aware and self-managing learners, and the way adults are viewed as essential to children’s learning, and obligated to engage in this task with effective relational skills.

In chapters eleven and twelve I will describe the way Kunwinjku people translate their ideas on curriculum (Law), childhood and the pedagogic roles of adults and children into the organized praxis of teaching and learning.
CHAPTER ELEVEN
OVERVIEW OF KUNWINJKU TEACHING METHODS
11.1 PRAXIS: HOW KUNWINJKU PRINCIPLES ARE APPLIED

11.1.1 Orientation
The design of practical teaching methodologies and the prospects of eclecticism in methodology is limited in Kunwinjku life, as in any educational sphere, by the models of childhood development and cognition in the teacher’s mind and experience, and by social and historical parameters within the immediate circumstances and desired content of the instruction. Choosing a teaching method may be an unconscious process in most situations, but is in any case necessarily constrained by these possibly unexamined parameters.

Previous chapters have examined the content and general aims of Kunwinjku pedagogy, and in chapter ten I discussed Kunwinkju views on how children learn in terms of social and cognitive processes. This chapter discusses how these broad areas of pedagogy interact in the historical, physical and economic realities of Kunwinjku life to produce the nitty gritty of instructional practice. I will use the term “lessons” in this chapter, rather than multiplying terminology. “Lessons” in fact fits well enough since the Kunwinjku pedagogy I observed, and as discussed by interviewees, is intentional, organised and takes place in bounded, if often unscheduled, time frames.

Many of the detailed features of Kunwinjku instruction have been noticed in previous chapters. So, in this discussion I will try to summarise them and bring them into a general explanatory framework for Kunwinjku methodology.

In 3.2.4 I referred to the significant research by both Harris (1977) and Christie (1984a). The summary of features I have made here should be examined alongside the similar summary made by Harris in 1977 at Milingimbi. (I will discuss the need for some further analysis of their data at 14.1.2.)

11.1.2 Sources and Parameters for Kunwinjku Pedagogic Practice
The following factors both limit and generate teaching methods available to Kunwinjku pedagogy. They represent the boundaries to practice formed by real world pressures of time and personal history, and present economics, together with the learned set of expectations about how children operate and how adults should relate to them. These factors can be viewed as the field upon which pedagogy is mandatorily conducted.
Chapter Eleven: Overview of Kunwinjku Teaching Methods

Historic and Economic Parameters
Kunwinjku pedagogy is not based on organised, full time pedagogy. Except for short periods during ceremonies, the Kunwinjku economic system did not provide sufficient surplus or time to allow education to take place in isolation from the constant demand for food production and other daily tasks. The low ratio of children to adults in pedagogic events in the hearth family did not necessitate a category of full time teachers; rather, teaching was a distributed function of hearth family kinship. This meant locating pedagogy within the normal timetables of real life.

Group Size and Time Constraints as Parameters
Kunwinjku pedagogy was highly engaged, with the majority of teaching provided either one-on-one, or in a small group (contrasting with the relatively diffuse interaction between teachers and learners in the larger pedagogic groups unavoidable in schools and at ceremonial venues).

Constant Awareness of the Final, Global Goal of Pedagogy: Forming an Independent Kunwinjku Adult
I have argued through chapter 9 that the broad goal of Kunwinjku pedagogy is the formation of an independent and competent Kunwinjku adult. Adults often make explicit reference to this goal in their teaching. Adults respect children’s capacity as self-managing learners moving towards adult autonomy through a developmental progression. So there is a strong respect on the part of the teacher for the independence and capacity of the child learner, consciously anticipating his adult status.

There are no events or spaces dedicated solely to instruction, but a pedagogic strand is almost inevitable where children are present, as is generally the case. The strong goal of adult independence leads to the constant application of two doctrines:

- Learning must produce active, performance seeking to approximate more and more completely adult competency;
- Adults must provide the individually appropriate instructional and emotional support during this process.

Pedagogy is Enacted within Highly Mutual, Adult-Child Relationships
Adults and children co-construct relationships of mutual mentation where adults assume teaching and mentoring roles generally in life, and children are tuned to learn generally from the adults. Adults are the transmitting authority for, and the ultimate exemplar of, Kunwinjku adulthood.
Learning is Immediately Situated and Requires Immediate Performance
As well as the intimate social situatedness of Kunwinjku pedagogy, it mainly occurs through immediate participation in authentic adult tasks. “Lessons” are part of shared experience and shared performance in authentic adult business and production.

Managed and Motivated Mimesis is Effective Method
Mimetic learning is presumed to be foundational. Children have the capacity, inclination and the need to observe and memorise oral material, physical and social skills and ideas. They are also expected to reflect and explore ideationally through questioning, explaining and other conversational tactics.

Orality is a Key Parameter in Learning
Kunwinjku information is orally transmitted and stored, so that verbal learning and oral memory are de facto limits to methodological preference. If language is the locus of relationship, then pedagogy can be thought of in Kunwinjku contexts as specialised set of conversational frames.

11.1.3 General Principles as Pre-Methodologies
The parameters I have sketched above are the pre-methodological foundations and constraints for the set of general methods of teaching preferred in all non-school Kunwinjku pedagogy, which I will discuss in more detail as indicated in the following list. The general methodologies are:

- in situ, in vivo pedagogy (11.2.1)
- directed observation and imitation (11.2.2)
- mimetic learning and oral memorisation (11.2.3)
- scaffolding of cognition and volition, based on individual needs (11.2.4)
- approximation as the process of learning towards real life, adult performance (11.2.5)
- highly explicit and hortatory teaching as to method, content and goals (11.2.6)
- mutual questioning (11.2.7)
- narrative as the default formal methodology (chapter 12)

I will discuss each of these in more detail, but of course they often co-occur depending on the teaching venue and content, and the relative skill of the teacher in employing instructional tactics.
11.2 TACTICAL PREFERENCES IN METHODOLOGY

11.2.1 “And they would teach us as they made things” - Real life as the Pedagogic Venue.

Kunwinjku pedagogy was highly situated, socially and environmentally. The collegiate nature of some of the adult child pedagogic relationship reflects it being embedded in, and part of, real life productive actions performed by adults. Part of all those activities was pedagogic, with children moving from participant learners to adult competence. No space or time was allocated specifically for instruction per se. Story times may have been organized for children, but these were part of the daily adult routine in camp, and adults regularly listened in. Some of the interviewees have described episodes where the adults organized a particular hunting or fishing trip with the conscious intention of teaching children as a major component, see for example [JN: 20] and [DM: 20-21], but these were nevertheless authentic (and presumably necessary) hunting and fishing trips. We could nominalize this “locatedness” as a kind of apprenticeship learning, or as collegiate learning or as in situ or in vivo learning. I have avoided these terms although they are each legitimate, because they connote larger scale social groups and the more specialized roles they require and support. In Kunwinjku pedagogy these features are unmarked and expected. Within this general venue of immediate relationship and setting, the practical methodologies described in the following sections were applied:

11.2.2 Directed Observation

Participation in adult life is never merely an exercise in passive kin fellowship. Whether instruction was planned or reactive, it was imminent, and usually began when the learner asked a question, or was directed to take note of something, to observe and to respond through assessable behaviours in either imitation or memorisation. Adult pedagogic control expected active learner response and initiative. Immersion in the whole range of real life may require this kind of signalling to “switch on” formal learning. From infancy, when the object attended is a person and the child’s spoken response, through more complex tasks in early childhood, the expectation on the learner’s side is that teaching begins with this kind of signalling question or direction to attend by watching or listening attentively. Often this will involve simply saying, “Look at this!” or “Now, pay attention.” Sometimes this invocation is expanded, for example:
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- When they taught me at the Ceremony, I didn't do anything except I just watched them. That was all. And, they really did say to me there, "You should do this. Watch those other ladies as they do it, and you do the same thing." [JU: 50]

- So now I'm teaching these kids, this later generation who are growing up now. I tell them, "Don't do it this way. Just make it properly. Like I'm doing it. Watch what I'm doing." [NN: 9]

Almost every interviewee recalls having “watched” purposefully as the first stage of learning in a given lesson, whether about gathering food (for example JN: 20; DM: 20; GN: 2), learning ceremonial dances (for example JD: 23; JD2: 14), basketry (NN: 120) or the Law (PS: 55). GN recalls explicit direction and the reliance on oral memory as elements in the process of pedagogic observation:

*We did watch how they did things. We watched what they did, and they taught us, they would say to us, "Do it like this." That's precisely how we kept it in our brains, because we didn't write it down on paper. But still, that's the way we went along and we grew up with it.* [GN: 23]

GN reflects here the pride expressed in oral memory skills noted at 10.3.7 which may drive the intentionality of observation, along with the consciousness that what is observed will need to be memorised or replicated in performance.

**11.2.3 Memorisation, Copying, Drill and Revision**

Children were assumed to have the capacity to make accurate observations and to reproduce behaviours and ideas accurately. Kunwinjku pride in oral memory skills is matched by pride in what we could call “performance memory”. (See 10.3.8.2, and the note on *kurdumak* at 10.3.2). Competence was expected only through a process of performance, correction and refinement over time, with explicit revision, assessment and repetition or drill, considered necessary to mastery, accompanied by explicit exhortation to strive for accurate reproduction. Kunwinjku adults expect children generally to be accurate in emulating the various skills they are taught in any environment, with some impatience and immediate correction where children are inattentive or imprecise. I have seen this concern for careful reproduction when children learn skills as different as bark painting, shaping a piece of bamboo or using kinship terms. Correction is usually gentle but always very immediate and direct. JU reports her insistence on precision in copying at school:

*And I've also said to (the children), "Don't do untidy work, just keep it accurate, do this much of the page." "Be accurate, be careful..." You know*
what I mean? They'll write something and miss the line, then write some more underneath it. "Not like that, keep it accurate." So I show them the right way: "Do it this way," I'll say, "so it comes out neat." [JU: 138]

Language learning exemplifies the process of modelling and corrected practice:

- So I do teach them that, well, I just tell / talk to them in that, you know? I just speak Kunbalak and then I say it over again. If I see that they're not coping I tell them in Kunwinjku. It's the same with Kundebi. If I use Kundebi to talk to them about somebody, someone I'm talking about, they will understand. They'll say, "Hey, we're doing it." Then they'll say it again for themselves, so they'll learn. [GN: 29]

- You (pl) say, "Repeat". Know what I mean? "You repeat just what I say." "I'll say it, and then you say it." Just like The Old People used to do. They used to talk back and forth among themselves. That's just what happened with my father Nabulanj. He spoke, and then I would speak. [GW: 34]

- We used to copy one another's words, or follow each other's speech. That's what The Old People used to do before. They did that...He would talk about hunting kangaroos for example. He would say, "I went..." and I in my turn would say "You went..."."I went" - "I went"; "I went and looked" - "I went. You went and looked." That kind of thing I'm thinking of. That's how it works and maybe even now. The kids think, "We should copy them." Kids think like that. [GW: 37]

Progress in learning through graded approximation depends on explicit feedback from teachers and a high degree of emotional and volitional support, with reminders about self-management and self-motivation. This mechanism is in evidence whether children are learning kinship terms or practising public dances, learning to hunt or fish or to perform important ceremonial roles. Mistakes are anticipated as occasions for explicit re-teaching or review, as described in ceremonial contexts at 8.6.5.2.

Kunwinjku reliance on memory in learning is not intended to be a simple rote learning process. A number of persistent themes in Kunwinjku pedagogy prevent this:

- A strong preference for explicit teaching, including direct explanation about inner or underlying meanings. ED describes her reaction as a child to the lack of explicit and therefore inclusive teaching in a School environment:
As an example, when I was a child, they told me this story, "The King with One Red Sock". I didn't know what it meant, but I still took part in that play, and spoke in English, but I didn't know what it really meant. What was behind the story? Nobody really explained to me...the moral behind the story. [ED: 62]

- Kunwinjku insistence on the child as a self-managing learner (discussed at 10.4.3.3) is based on the perceived capacity to analyse one’s own learning, and even to choose what behaviours to practice, including the expectation that this self-drilling reinforcement strategy should be conscious:

  They copy the adults around them doing whatever they do, and later some of them come and we teach them. Sometimes they'll say, "All right Come on. Let's fight. She and I. Him and me. Come on, let's you and I fight." So I say to them, "Hey, stop that! Have a drink and come back and play. You've been watching some bad stuff." I say to them, "If you want to play properly, then play this way: Maybe you can play going to the shop and asking for things. What I mean is when you go don't just say 'Banana'. When you want a banana speak English. Say 'Can I have a banana?' or something like that." You teach them that way. Well, we try to teach them. Yes, kids imitate. They watch what the adults do and they listen to what they say, and they more or less bring all that into the classroom. But I'll tell them, "No. That's not good." But then sometimes they'll hear things for example from The Old People there telling a good story, and I'll say, "All right, let's talk about that story." [ED: 64]

- The process of mimesis is applied to complex, necessarily long term learning tasks, such as dances, songs, Laws and narratives, so necessitating a long term pedagogic interaction (accelerated uncomfortably only in the ceremonial context) to provide correction, and always accompanied by explicit encouragement and reference to longer term goals of identity formation.

The way human learning utilizes both strictly drill-based mimetic learning and more reflective and analytical modes of learning is part of what Bruner (1996, p.47-48) described as one of the under-researched phenomena in education. Kunwinjku data informs some recent thinking about this. For example, Mageean and Hai (1998), comparing culturally different approaches to tertiary study, have suggested learner self-management as the mechanism integrating both meta-level and mimetic
learning, strongly linking performance automaticity with the ability of the learner to orient his performance to metacognitive reflection and social goals. Kunwinjku pedagogy insists on the development of this learner self-management process, but supports its necessarily lengthy gestation through both long term and immediate scaffolding.

### 11.2.4 Scaffolding as the Natural Method of Relational Pedagogy

For this discussion, I define the widely used term scaffolding as the intentional construction by the teacher of a personalized learning process, providing a safe space for performance at each stage, providing live correction during performance, including explicit assessment, correction and even rebuke, but in a pedagogic relationship of trust. I will note at 14.1.3 the interaction between this usage and Vygotsky’s focus on mediated cognitive learning.

Clearly scaffolding involves more than simply a system for cognitive management in learning. Constant discussion of learner self-interest, and the goal of adult competence inform the necessarily graduated processes of learning. Whereas school based learning isolates itself from other venues of life by structuring preparatory learning and performances in contrived, heuristic ways (perhaps in vitro is an appropriate term), Kunwinjku pedagogy acts “like school” by allowing graduated approximation of adult behaviours through an acceptable process of approximation in vivo.

The earliest stages of performance with its inevitable “failures” are not only tolerated but enjoyed in all human groups - small children in plays or concerts at school in non-Aboriginal contexts are indulged and praised, as are Kunwinjku children participating or imitating serious adult performance in real life contexts (see 1.1.2). There is a tension inevitably between supporting the learner and allowing fledgling performance. Even adults rehearsing for ceremonial performances share the amusement at the failed attempts, indicating that everyone accepts mastery is only through due process.

When instruction is simply of the “copy this demonstration” kind, a cognitively biased, content-focused demonstration and explanation, scaffolding is synonymous with instruction. GN (29) and GW (33) and NN (9) for example have described this subject matter scaffolding observed when Kunwinjku children are formally taught language or manual skills at home, with adults modelling the skill, and assessing the child’s immediate attempts.
But beyond this simple level, scaffolding must provide holistic support, attending for example to the child’s self-esteem, support not related to the subject matter, but operating in parallel to more explicitly cognitive scaffolding. The emotional affirmation provided by instructors in ceremonial contexts was noted at 8.2.5 and 8.6.5.2. Kunwinjku learners are sometimes left upset by their self-assessed “failure” to perform, and this invariably invokes a pastoral response from older adults. In fact, the general atmosphere in Kunwinkju instruction is one of gentleness, with sharp rebukes reserved for failure in attitudes and the willingness to apply what is already learnt, rather than any hiccoughs in the process of learning [GN: 20-21 and MM: 3-4].

The sort of scaffolding I’ve described is a corollary of intimate relational pedagogy, but it can be emulated in the school system by carefully constructed working relationships with individuals. The element difficult to duplicate is recognition of the strong Kunwinjku doctrine of personal autonomy, which applied to the teaching of children allows only the most oblique and subtle pressure to be applied to the learner. Children will accept being made to hurry [NN: 79-80], but can be sensitive to even unintended body language or verbal signals they read as inferring domination or rejection. Scaffolding needs to account for this sensitivity in resolving the tension between graduating the learner’s exposure to challenges, and explicitly moving towards performance independence:

*It's up to them. They might send them. Yes, that's it. But if they force them, if they pressure them, then he'll find it hard and won't learn any more. He could just force himself. But if they talk it over with them gently at the start, well he'll go, he'll be happy and he'll learn.* [PS: 119]

Although scaffolding can be described as technique, its pastoral and affirming behaviours suggest a relational motivation. The prevalence of warm support and collegiality in scaffolding reflect the underlying intent: the Kunwinjku self and his/her potential allegiances is what is reproduced, rather than the cultural content of behaviours, and the independent adult is formed in such a way as to invite high allegiance to his or her mentors. Scaffolding, in other words, needs to be withdrawn by stages. Language learning and painting are iconic of areas of learning that move from hearth, through stages of approximation to performance in more public domains, reflecting a parallel distancing from intimate pedagogic relationships to more adult collegiality.
11.2.5 The Principles of Performance and Approximation in Learning

11.2.5.1 Learning is Over Time

A child’s approximation of adult behavior approaches full adult competence (with its attendant culpability) only incrementally. Teachers employ increasingly formal assessment and critique reflecting the child’s movement towards adult competence over time and through stages. Warm emotional support is also gradually reduced. Kunwinjku consider learning is a process of increasingly accurate approximation, from an authentic model, by a process of trial and error, achieving duplication of the adult model. Without explicit feedback and scaffolding, approximation may not reach a final goal, or even be aware of what that goal or target behaviour is, so the process of complex mimesis (emulating a role or person) over time depends on non-mimetic learning as much as “rote” performance finally depends on constant repetition and refinement. These will not occur without either internalized or externally coached awareness of motive and the value of the learning.

11.2.5.2 Performance and Tactically Limited Scaffolding as Twin Tactics

The natural inclination of human learning, particularly of children universally, is to involvement. Non-narrative Kunwinjku instruction usually invites or demands this involvement explicitly or through its immediacy. Demonstration is invariably in the form, “do it this way”, “this is what you do”, as for example [GW: 40 and NN: 9]. and demonstration is always situated so that attempted performance is instantly available.

- Yes, they taught me. I would be watching what they did. And they would say, "Why don't you try." So I tried it and did it right, that procedure. [JD: 23]
- Yes. They used to teach me so I could make bark paintings just like they made. They used to teach me, and they used to make spear throwers. "This is a spear thrower. This is what you have to do. You use it with the spear", they would say. Or I would go and cut bamboo. "Go and chop that bamboo." I would go and cut it myself and they would teach me and I would straighten it myself...Spear throwers I would carve out, and make just like the adults used to do, just as they used to tell me. "Make it yourself." [MM2: 43]

The corollary to this directed performance is the need to limit evident scaffolding, so performance is experienced by the learner as genuinely achieved at each level of competence. JN has discussed the need for these joint tactics,
And, you mustn't, as it were, do everything for him. Just leave it to him, let him do the exercise for himself. You give it to him, and say, "Okay, now you do it." He might get it wrong a couple of times, but that's good. He'll keep trying, he'll keep trying. Kids always make mistakes, just like adults, trying something, we'll make mistakes. But he'll improve later. Why? Because he's doing that exercise as you told him. [JN: 36]

It is sometimes very difficult to enforce this exclusion of scaffolded “help”. A natural consequence of the high degree of mutual care between hearth family siblings sometimes means older children have to be asked to let a younger child do some learning without their “help”. This phenomenon can also concern school teachers, who need to make clear why a child needs to try something on his or her own.

11.2.5.3 Approximation, Mistakes and Scaffolding

Approximation implies the expectation of mistakes [JN: 36] (above),[MM2: 45], and a scaffolded response to error is expected as well:

   Yes. Yes. If they get it wrong I go crook at them sometimes. That old peoples' business is quite difficult. We must keep that Yabburlurrwa running permanently. We keep it running, but while it’s on we'll say, "Take notice of this!" If I see someone being silly, if I see him, well he'll have to try a second time. We "rewind", we take it back [Yes] so he runs through again. Never mind that he's already seen it, still he goes back again and runs through it. [Mm.] He runs through another time. It's a hard Law, so he does it little by little. [GW: 29]

GW has described here a species of scaffolding designed to expedite mastery, but this is learning at ceremonial level where scaffolding may be less an emotional safety net than a pressure to success that implies confidence and approval, and obviates more direct emotional support.

11.2.6 Explicit Teaching

11.2.6.1 Explicitness Explained

To those who have grown up in a scholastic teaching environment, the most striking feature of practical Kunwinjku pedagogy is its highly verbal mode. Apart from the necessary silences of some hunting and fishing activities, Kunwinjku teaching and learning is a constant conversation with frequent mutual questioning between teachers and learners, and a constant stream of direct and explicit instructions and supportive or directive commentary. As a general rule, adults do not modify their
speech grammatically to suit children, which might accelerate and scaffold language development. It means that children are tuned to hear adults as teachers in circumstances which the adult may not have designed consciously as pedagogic.

Kunwinjku pedagogic discourse uses “explaining” (yolyolmeng) in a particular way. Its unmarked use in normal Kunwinjku is to explain something to someone, not as a teacher but in general conversation. In pedagogic discourse, it can be a synonym for teaching generally (see 10.2.2) and has the permanent connotation of communicating something to someone effectively. Complementing this is the assumption that children generally will learn if they in fact listen to someone explain [NN: 122]. This suggests, in a rather circular way, that explaining means effectively communicating in whatever way, i.e., if the learner listened and learnt, you must have explained, suggesting in turn a definition of teaching as effective interaction in moving a child ahead educationally.

In fact, good teachers are usually described by Kunwinjku people as those who communicate effectively, meaning they teach so that children learn, attending to their individual capacities and testing the communication and moving step by step, so that children “understand” as well as simply remembering the wording or skills taught [ED: 60; BG: 81; JN: 49].

Okay. I’ve really understood what all this is about. Now, for my part, what I mean is, I always wanted to explain things to children. I taught them at school, I taught those children. I would tell them things and make them laugh. And I also taught them hard things, facts. But I didn't make it too hard. We don't give a child something too hard when we teach. It's as I said about food, about meat, whatever we give the child, he has to taste it and keep asking for it, and that's how he'll get the meaning, and then straight away we will understand that, yes, he wants this. So then we can really give them good teaching. So if you teach him good things, then he'll want more. [JN: 35]

JM (44) similarly prescribes the need to be explicit and present “little by little, if we tell him, if we explain to him…” adding the element of an interactive syllabus of presentation to the preferred verbal instruction approach. This immediate individualisation in pace is more manageable in very small group pedagogy than in larger groups at ceremonies or in school, but the insistence on individualised explicitness is all pervasive in Kunwinjku practice. Some children need more direct explanation than others:
Instead of (the fast learners) just overtaking the others, they should explain things to them so they learn about whatever it is. If they explain things to them, those who get ahead I mean, then they won't be competing with each other. If they talk to them so they'll learn things, when they are being taught. The (slower ones) can copy them. [RN: 108]

11.2.6.2 Explicit Teaching is Part of All Methodology

Explicit teaching co-occurred with every other methodology of instruction and scaffolding. It informed and added the essential oral memories to shared experience in any venue [DM: 23-25; GN: 23; JN: 20]. It was intended to avoid the risk of misunderstanding [GN: 19] regardless of venue or subject. The following citations are a small sample only for each category mentioned by informants:

- Directing attention or activity in situated teaching was explicit [GW: 40-41].
- Explication always accompanied demonstration of the kind: “this is what you do”, “do it like this” [BG: 5-6, 79; JU: 54; GN: 3; NN: 9].
- Language was taught by explicit modelling [JU: 106; JN: 13].
- Short term goals and the mechanics required of the learner as methodological procedures were made clear [JU: 138; BG: 37].
- Short term benefits of learning were made clear - “pay attention so you will know this” [DM: 37].
- Explicit instruction accompanied the more subtle and indirect pedagogy of stories [BG: 36-37; DM: 37].
- The processes of assessment, feedback and correction were explicit [JN: 46; MM2: 30, 48-49, 63] with both teacher and learner checking with each other on effective communication [GN: 3-4].
- Teachers explicitly exhorted correct performance [NG: 9, 38].
- Longer term goals were made explicit: for example, becoming an adult teacher of the skills being learnt [NN: 9; NN: 38] or even the very general rationale “so that you’ll grow up” [JN: 13] and become a competent adults [BG: 36-37; JN: 13; JM: 44].
- Rationales for learning were made explicit, whether learning the Law or learning during Ceremony, or learning in order to manage in the Balanda world [MM2: 58], including the value of attending school [MM: 14].
Moral thinking and action were taught explicitly [GW: 40-41; MM2: 58], with explicit directions as to required behaviour; acting appropriately at your age and other issues of self-control [NN: 78; RN: 80].

Explicit directions were given about the self-aware development of self-managing learning skills [ED: 64,76] and skills in self-directed learning [JU: 138; NN: 9].

Explicitness also reflects the general Kunwinjku preoccupation with ensuring learning at a deeper level than simply memorisation or encounter [ED: 60; JN: 49]:

>I explained to them what every part was about, the ideas and meaning, what Balanda calls "meaning" - the ideas of that Law, so that your sisters and brothers wouldn't be ignorant. [MM2: 60]

MM here echoes a general concern in Kunwinjku communication. The desire to be informed, to be brought into confidence and not mystified, is part of the Kunwinjku social doctrine of not being forced, and the global goal in pedagogy of consciously teaching towards independence in children (JN: 49) and treating them in a collegiate way in communication. A relational explanation for preferred explicitness could suggest it as a kind of tangible inclusiveness providing relational comfort, during the other necessary discomforts of learning.

### 11.2.7 Questioning

The preference for explicitness and mutuality are also expressed in the use of questioning to provide monitoring to the teacher and to allow the learner self-assessment and ideational exploration. Questions are invariably designed to obtain new data. Hypothetical questions, rhetorical questions and even questions as to personal motive certainly occur in normal Kunwinjku conversation and in pedagogy, but Socratic forms are unused, perhaps because this undermines the mutuality between teacher and learner. Affirmative signals can be disguised when Socratic type questions are used, and the consequent withdrawal of the learner from relational riskiness makes this style counterproductive for questioning. Whatever motivates this avoidance, questions of all other kinds are encouraged in pedagogy. Both teachers and learners need to ask questions for a range of reasons. Children are expected to ask questions generally, and teachers are encouraged to provoke them to do so when learning, and the behaviour is quite common, with some children even prepared to interrupt a story teller with questions.
MM remembers questions as a key strategy in hearth family learning, with both teacher and learner working for complete mastery through revision and clarification:

*Those Mawah would explain things to me. They would say, "Well? Have you understood this?" They used to ask me that. Those Mawah would ask me when they had told me things, they would ask, "Did you get that?" "Yes," I would say, "I understand. I got it." I would stay there in the morning and afternoon, and he would ask me questions and explain to me everything. He would say, "Do you understand?" "Yes, I understand that stuff you talked about yesterday. Yes." "Oh, I see. Good. You understand." "Yes," I would say, "I got that meaning. I understand what it means." I would do that.*

*They never just talked to me and just left it at that, and just left me alone. No. It was necessary for them to question me. Mawah, Makkah, Nakurrng, Ngalkurrng, Doydoyh - they used to ask me questions when they explained things to me. They would ask me questions, they would say, "Did you understand that?" Sometimes I would say, "No, I didn't get it. I didn't really hear you properly. In this case I didn't hear you and didn't understand properly what was behind what you were talking about." So I would ask Mawah some questions myself, and he would explain things to me, "It means this. This is what I'm telling you." He would explain it all. "Oh, I see! That's it," I would say. "You got it?" "Yes," I would say, "I got it." That's what I did.*

[JN: 30]

JN also articulates some guidelines for the pedagogic use of questions:

*You give (the child) something good it’s just like giving him food or meat and you'll make him, you'll make him start asking you questions. When you see that happen, you'll be thinking, "Ah, I've given him something now that's made him ask questions, this child." So then you give him a little more of the good stuff... Then, as he develops and grows up with it, he'll have understanding and he'll say, "Oh. Thank you teacher for helping me. I could ask you a lot of questions, because you started me off" That's what he's thinking in himself.*

[MM2: 48-49]  

So then, in this matter, you work with them so as to make them ask you questions. Now, what if you notice a child who won't ask you questions? Why doesn't he? You didn't make him ask you. Every time you give him something
too hard, he won't have a question for you. Or every time you have something for him he already knows, something easy for that child, well, he or she won't ask you questions about that have something for him that he doesn't know, well he'll ask about that. because he or she already knows. He'll say, "I won't ask him because I already know this." But now if you have something for him that he doesn’t know, well, he’ll ask about that. So then you start cooperating with each other. Well, you might see him maybe next time ask a couple of questions, or three or four the time after that. Then you can say, "That's working. I've got this one interested." So you can keep on working together. [JN: 32]

JN has described the mutual construction and management of the working relationship of pedagogy over a long term, reflecting the mutual regard between teachers and learners with questions used as relational as well as cognitive tactics.

BG (79) argues that questions allow the teacher to monitor and pace learning in the school context:

(The teacher) should ask us questions. I think this because a teacher...I want the teacher to explain it to us then ask us, to give us ideas, in order to teach us. We write it, and we can read it, so he can explain to us, do you know what I mean? It might be just roughly (at first), but we study it to find out the meaning of what is written there. But the teacher always teaches us, and explains. [BG: 79]

DM remembers the questions from both teachers and learners as strategies to provoke both to satisfy learning of detail:

We would go and we would wait for them and watch them getting fish and as they put them out they would say their names for us: "This is a nail fish, this is a Saratoga, baby bream, bream, baby nail fish, and this is kalarlbbra." "What do we call this one?" We didn't know. And we would have a good look at whatever animal or fish they were catching, whatever. And we would ask them, "What's this called?" we would ask. And they would name them for us. [DM: 20-21]

Learners were expected to consciously monitor their own learning, using questions to clarify when necessary:

I didn't just disregard what they used to say to me, your grandfathers, my fathers. For my part, I've kept hold of what they said. "Oh, yes," I would say,
"I see!" I didn't just think, "Oh, what does he mean?" If I hadn't understood then I used to ask him, "Dad, what do you mean?" and he would go back and explain to me again. "Ah!" I would say, "So that's it. That's what it means." "Yes. That's what it means. What (you and I) talked about before is different.” [MM2: 63]

MM’s example implies a corresponding adult willingness to provide this kind of answer, given the high expectation that explicit instruction would co-occur with questions and any of the other tactics listed here.

11.2.8 Stories
The strong Kunwinjku preference for narrative as teaching method is discussed in chapter twelve.

11.3 SAMPLE LESSONS

11.3.1 Is there a Prototypical Kunwinjku Lesson Plan?
These preferred tactics for practical teaching, or general preferences in method, co-occur across the range of pedagogic events and processes, with each lesson utilizing one or usually more to create the nitty gritty of instruction in situ first presented as snapshot examples at 1.1.2. The “choice” of method is probably automatic, whether or not it is conscious. Some interviewees described methodologies remembered in action and I have selected some of these, and made some very brief comments after each, noting the interaction of the methods they evidence.

11.3.2 Seven Sample Lessons and Comments

Sample Lesson 1

Sometimes when I got up in the morning, they would say, "Let's go hunting." So we used to go hunting. As we went along hunting, they used to teach me...That was when I was still fairly young, so, in the meantime, I would go with my mother and grandmother to get pandanus leaves. Sometimes they used to go after yams. I used to watch them digging up yams and they would tell me the names: "These are mankodbe." "This one is mankongkong." "This one is mankurrrkkeb." "This sort is karrbarrda." "This one is mankinjdjek, kamarn, morlkalk, mandem..."

This is our Aboriginal food we've always had from earlier times there in the bush. They taught me about that, and the food growing on trees: mandudjmirr, mandjulkurlmarlba, manmorlak, manmobbarn,
djalamarddowk. All those… all that food of ours. they used to teach me all that so I know them all. [JN: 20]

JN’s detailed memoir illustrates the socially and environmentally located nature of pedagogy, the immediate curriculum learned in the domain where this knowledge will be applied now and in future. The teaching is explicit and directive, and relies on oral memory often celebrated in Kunwinjku speech, sometimes through long lists of items recited.

Sample Lesson 2

They would tell us the names of the foods, the sort that grew on trees, and the sort that was under the ground, like long yams, cheeky yams and bush potatoes. They would show us the vines. "This is the long yam. And this one has the cheeky yams. This one has the bush potatoes." They showed us the underwater yams. They would tell us the names of things and at the same time point out the vines to us, as we looked at the vines. "This one. Come and have a look at this vine. This is what the vine from this food looks like," they would say, "So if you dig down under, you'll see it and you can pull it up for yourself." They told us that. We would dig and bring up that food. We used to go and they would teach us about bush honey. "Look there and you'll see the bees flying where there is honey." Then they would chop into the fallen log, get the comb and put the honey in a container. [DM: 21]

DM has described participation in adult production as a venue for learning through explicit instruction as to observations, naming and technical skills taught in a collegiate manner. Longer term goals of learning were taught explicitly. Adults and children both used questions to structure the pedagogic conversation.

Sample Lesson 3

In fact, I didn't go away from what my grandfathers (Mawah) talked about. I paid attention to what they said. "Okay, that's all. Now go to sleep until this afternoon. In the afternoon I be there, and then they would say, "Don't argue against these ideas you're hearing. This is the right way to think. Listen to what we explain to you as you grow up you will have the Law." So I would just sit. I didn't go on talking, but I just stayed there, just sat there while Mawah was speaking. It was either him or another man who would tell me things. They told me everything...I mean that Nakurrng used to tell me things when I was only small, and I would keep listening to him. When I felt I
wanted to go to the toilet, I would tell him, "Hang on. Stop so I can go. I'll just go to take a leak and come back then you can talk." So he would stop and I would go. In that situation I never just got up without explaining. If I had just got up and gone without reference to anyone else, without saying anything...no, that would have been inappropriate. I probably wouldn't have learnt things properly, not got it properly. That's why I used to just sit there while they talked about things and then I would say, "Hang on. Stop while I take a leak. Then I'll come back so I can learn the Law." I used to say that and I was thinking, "I'll really get hold of the Law." [MM2: 30]

MM remembers jointly managed formal learning in the hearth family, with both the learner and teachers acting intentionally managing the pedagogy. The teachers were highly explicit as to content, to assessment of progress and in exhortations as the attitude required in the learner, whose internal self-management was conscious.

Sample Lesson 4

Yes, I teach them. So our son and I talk together using Kundebi. Sometimes he says to me, "Teach me some more." I teach him that. He wants to sit with me and have me teach him. So I tell him, for example, "Nakeywurd", "Nababba", what else? Whatever else. So I teach him, but he also wants to learn Kunbalak. So I do teach them that, well, I just tell talk to them in that, you know? I just speak Kunbalak and then I say it over again. If I see that they're not coping I tell them in Kunwinjku. It's the same with Kundebi. If I use Kundebi to talk to them about somebody, someone I'm talking about, they will understand. They'll say, "Hey, we're doing it." Then they'll say it again for themselves, so they'll learn. But I've heard some who say, "We're ashamed because we don't know that (Kundebi)." And I've said, "It's so we won't be ashamed. That (language) is so you (s) won't just call people by their name, do you know what I mean? When you (pl) use peoples' names, you're doing the wrong thing."[GN: 29]

GN reports her teaching of language in the hearth family, responding to a demand by her children. Teaching was graded, responding to assessment of learner progress. Social and personal rationales for learning were explicitly taught.

Sample Lesson 5

So how did they teach us, those people, our Makkah, Kakka and Mawah who used to take us hunting? It was so we could learn more and more, yes.
Ngalwamud, my own father's mother, she's died now, but I used to follow her from birth... Well she was the one. We would go along together and she would teach me and explain things to me all the time. We would go collecting file snakes. "You grab them as I show you so when you grow up you'll know how to gather things for yourself, animals or plant food. And you won't have to go to another man and hang around begging, or have other women giving you things. If you know how to collect things, you'll have plenty to eat. If you go begging they won't give you anything, they'll refuse you and there'll be no food. So you've got to learn for yourself how to collect things so you'll have plenty to eat."

So we would collect file snakes, wading in the water. We were scared. They used to hold our hands, Ngalbangardi, Nakamarrang, so...[[Laughs.]] We would be collecting the filesnakes with them holding our hands. "It's all right. You grab them so you'll know how, so you'll learn," they said... They taught us and we went to the paperbark trees and stripped the bark because we got so many filesnakes. They said to us, "Let's go. Where's the paperbark you've prepared?" [DM: 23-25]

DM described a complex methodology based on scaffolded in vivo performance, with explicit teaching from the immediately situated task and context, and with regard to long term goals. The “running commentary” and apprenticeship style teaching of the Old People is remembered as having been highly intentional and directive, with children deliberately involved in real life activity in order to learn. DM isolated one older lady as a principal dyadic teacher.

Sample Lesson 6

Yes. In the old days when The Old People used to do things, we would watch what they did including whenever they went hunting or gathering food, and they used to teach us, for example when they were cooking. We would go together gathering food, and sometimes they would show us the vines. We would collect food and carry it along, and we used to ask them, "Can we eat this sort raw?" "No," they would say, or sometimes they would say, "Don't eat that sort, don't eat that one." We would go along and they find a place to camp, make a fire and they would cook. They would show us long necked turtles, goanna, all kinds of things, whatever it was, maybe djanay. Whatever they decided to eat (from the turtles) whether it was pulling out the intestines
or opening up its throat, they would talk about it. "When we do this, we pull the insides of the throat out." When they removed the guts, they would show us what they were doing as they roasted it, cooked it one side then turning it over to cook the other side. And they taught us why they used to slice along the backs of goanna or any kind of djanay, and about other things too. They would do it all, cutting the animal in half, we would have expected it to stay as one body, but they would halve it, cutting right down the middle.[GN: 2]

GN described a “hands on” session with mutual questions framing the explication of what was demonstrated. She recalled her interest at learning something counterintuitive

Sample Lesson 7

They used to say, "Make a fishing spear. You go and do it yourself." And I would make a fishing spear. I would go and chop the bamboo, come back and peel it and straighten it myself, the lot. "Go and spear something. Go and do some burning. Go and spear karrkanj." They would say to me, "Go and spear some birds - korlobock, kernalk, and karrkkanj. Go and spear them, stalk them." So I would break off a bunch of leaves and then, whatsaname, I would cover myself with it and take it along and spear the kernalk or whatever, or karrkkanj. I would spear them. Sometimes too I would make a mistake or wonder what I'd done. [MM2: 45]

MM remembered the managed independence of his performance learning, and the inevitable mistakes it involved, all in parallel with adults engaged in authentic tasks.

11.4 TWO NOTES ON THE LIST OF TEACHING METHODS

11.4.1 Pedagogic Method is Contingent

This chapter has added some ideas about teaching praxis to the previous chapters’ discussion of other factors constituting Kunwinjku pedagogy and which generate those methods. The methodology is contingent. Individual human learning is essentially contingent upon other people. We have to learn from and through them, even if they write the book we read in isolation. Childhood dependency gives way to adult “independence” in pedagogy, but this adult functions within the affirming social and cognitive spaces whose boundaries are fixed socially. Only at this level is the term socialisation reasonably applied to education or the goals of pedagogy.

From birth, it is much more a process of personal reproduction, the gestation process
of reproducing the internal and social world or identity of the teacher. Pedagogic method is invariably subsumed to these goals.

We can summarize Kunwinjku pedagogy in terms remarkably close to those of John Dewey (1897, Article 1): Kunwinjku teaching method is the practice of reproducing a Kunwinjku person through cognitive and social processes, firstly in the image of the learner’s hearth family teachers, then through an expanded set of relationships, in the image of a competent and independent Kunwinjku adult. The methods used depend on these relationships and the physical and historical settings and economic drives in which they are lived out. The key method is the immediate meeting of minds - linguistic and mental dyadism embedded in real life, lived-in relationships.

11.4.2 Parenthetical Discussion: Comparing Kunwinjku and Yolngu Pedagogies

Even a cursory look at the pedagogic tactics discussed in 11.2 will suggest there should be no insurmountable difficulty for either Balanda teachers or Kunwinjku children cooperating with each other, at least in terms of teaching praxis. I will argue throughout chapter thirteen that Kunwinkju children fail to thrive in school-based learning largely because of factors other than their experience of hearth and other out of school pedagogies. The seriousness of their schooling failure however invites some triangulation of my findings with similarly motivated and situated research.

Can a case can be made to predict school failure on grounds of culturally different teaching and learning styles? Harris (1977) provides a particularly valuable basis for this kind of mental experiment. In his PhD thesis, Harris presented a set of what he called “informal traditional learning strategies” (1977, pp. 247-313). I will link his categories with those I have used above, noting the significance of any differences. Harris expressed the broad features of these strategies in adversarial terms (1977, pp. 247-294), suggesting the kind of rapprochement needed in classroom contexts:

- Learning by Observation and Imitation Versus Verbal Instruction;
- Learning By Trial and Error Versus Verbal Instruction and Demonstration;
- Learning in Real Life Settings Versus Practice in Contrived Settings;
- Context Specific Learning Versus Generalizable Principles;
- Person Orientation Rather than Information Orientation;
- Absence of the Institutionalized Office of “Teacher”.

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Within these broad sets of antitheses, he presented a set of learning practices which he supported from fine grained observations, and most of which match with categories I have used in this chapter. For example:

- Learning by Observation (pp. 248-252)
- Learning by Imitation (pp. 252-256)
- Learning from Role-Playing (pp. 256-258)
- Trial and Error with or without imitation of a model (pp. 272-275)

Learning is Most Efficiently By Doing (pp. 275-277). Harris notes (p. 275) the universal constraints on verbal when demonstration would be more communicatively efficient.

Activities are Ends in Themselves (p. 278f). Harris actually suggests (p. 285) that the Yolngu experience the act of practicing a skill as and end in itself, without any necessary awareness of any final performance or future application. This differs slightly from my own conclusions (see for example 11.2.3) but of course, in both cases there must be differences within any group of learners as to their self-awareness of their reasons and expectations in drilling themselves. Nor does lack student self-awareness preclude practice being effective preparation for something beyond itself. This proposed constraint in Yolngu pedagogy is related to another of his categories:

Learning is invariably context specific (pp. 290-292), meaning the learning is done where it is to be applied, which may predict some problems in school based learning unless a teacher is capable of creating with the child a future application for learning – presumably a universal pedagogic requirement.

Children learn social, language and practical skills precisely so these can be applied without the immediate teacher and environment.

Finally, Harris has distilled a set of learning strategies that are predictable in terms of the dependence of pedagogy on relationship:

Learning is Person Oriented (p. 292f.). Harris speculates this reflects longevity and range of shared experience (p. 296) and the child’s socialization and acceptance of kinship “authority structure” (pp. 298-299), exactly the constraints I have suggested throughout chapter six which create the relational intensity of hearth pedagogy.

The idea of an intense even if unconscious focus on the person rather than the content or occasion of learning suggests a further aspect of the way pedagogy and
relationality are linked. It may be a universal tendency in learning on the part of either teacher or learner to use the learning process to affirm or manipulate their relationship. At one level, “making the teacher happy” may be a non pathological response that younger students need to be taught to consciously avoid in the interests of pedagogic effectiveness; at a pathological level, it may be that this response is a tactic for accommodation or acquiescence which I have discussed as part of the pathology in school pedagogy (see 13.6).

Harris proceeds from these observation to discuss the way Yolngu perceive the role of teachers in the school, given the informal and very limited operation of Yolngu people in what he describes as the “semi-institutionalized office of ‘teacher’” (p. 302ff). His examples include men providing ceremonial instruction, fathers teaching teenage sons particular hunting skills and both men and women instructing younger family members. Harris implies the adults these roles may be consciously seen by Yolngu children as well as by themselves as “teachers”. I suggest this is far from a limited model in Yolngu thinking for “teachers” and would allow Yolngu children to view a Balanda adult performing similar instructional tasks as someone to be accepted as a teacher in the same way.

However, Harris seems to limit any self-aware pedagogic roles on the part of adults. For example, he describes story telling... “where the act of verbalization unconsciously places the speaker in a teacher role” (p.267). He implies narrative as pedagogy (my theme in chapter twelve) but seems to limit this domain of pedagogy to explicitly “moral” tales. In contrast, he suggests (p. 303) men providing ceremonial instructor may be conscious of their pedagogic role. The need to reconcile these apparently different appreciations of adult self-awareness as teachers is a significant motive to further research. If, for example, Kunwinjku adults are not usually aware of themselves as “teachers”, does this impact on the way they cooperate with school staff in their children’s school career? If they are self-aware, or have a well thought out kind of model for their own experiences as teachers, how does this shape their interaction with their children’s teachers either directly, or through their supervision at home? This could in fact be another aspect of a general human pedagogy which is the subject of my speculations (at 14.1.3-4) acknowledging some teaching experience as a universal human experience which
may, in a probably unexamined way, shapes all our expectations of school based pedagogy.

Harris noted the extensive use by Yolngu of “Learning by Rote” (pp. 268-270) which parallels what I have described from Kunwinjku data at 11.2.3 but is limited by Harris to the teaching of songs and stories (p.270). He makes the interesting point that in this kind of rote learning, “learners are not learning about anything verbally, or being actually instructed through verbal teaching methods” (p270). This concedes the necessity for memorization as a learning strategy for certain kinds of behaviour and knowledge, but does not comment on, its relationship with other kinds of learning.

In fact, Harris has described a significantly limited role in Yolngu pedagogy for explicit verbal behaviour generally. For the most part, Harris’s descriptions of pedagogic strategy agrees with mine, but the very minimal role he assigns in the Yolngu repertoire for explicit verbal instruction (pp. 259-267) constitutes a crucial difference between our findings. He argued “it is probable that teaching by verbal means does not predominate in Yolngu society both because of the nature of the skills Yolngu children need to learn, and because of the length of time available to master knowledge.” (p.264). This disparity certainly invites some further research since the role of oral language in both Yolngu and Kunwinjku settings has such potency in relationships of any kind, including pedagogic ones. (I have noted some further aspects of Harris’s exploration of language in pedagogy at 14.1.2).

11.5 LINK TO PEDAGOGY OF STORY AND DISCUSSION OF SCHOOL

Harris has provided us with the opportunity to look at the pedagogic features set out in this chapter from the viewpoint of their potential dissonance with the demands of schooling. These descriptions will allow us to analyse the way Kunwinjku children have coped with the pedagogy of school, and vice versa. However, before exploring school based pedagogic experience, I need to report on the cluster of teaching and learning practices Kunwinjku people talk about as their favourite pedagogy – telling and listening to stories.
Chapter Eleven: Overview of Kunwinjku Teaching Methods
CHAPTER TWELVE
NARRATIVE AS PEDAGOGY
CHAPTER 12: STORY TELLING AS CORE PEDAGOGY

12.1 NARRATIVE AS PEDAGOGY

12.1.1 Scope of this Chapter
This chapter discusses stories and their telling and argues that they constitute the core of pedagogy in Kunwinjku thinking. I begin with some necessary discussion of Kunwinjku terminology, then report on the remembered story times of Kunwinjku adults and discuss the way narrative functions as pedagogy. I then discuss some particular areas of concern to Kunwinjku people that involve their stories, especially the world of commercial art and the school. I suggest throughout this chapter that story telling is fundamental methodology, relationally motivated, cognitively aware, and carrying within its practice and content the core curriculum of Kunwinjku personal values and identity.

12.1.2 Theorising Story Telling?
There are two necessary caveats to any theorisation about stories. Firstly, terms like “narrative pedagogy” are almost always associated in contemporary academic discourse with pedagogies that utilise participant oral histories. To avoid confusion as much as to salute the Kunwinjku usage, I have tended to talk about “stories” rather than use the term “narrative”. Secondly, this is not a discussion of Kunwinjku narrative as literature or a literary performance, either of which would warrant a monograph in its own right and need to explore an enormous body of oral literature and its analysis in terms of ideology, structure, characterisation and the like. I have necessarily restricted my commentary to the general arguments exploring how stories operate as a teaching method.

I will argue in the next sections that stories and story telling can be thought of as intimate social events, where participation in telling and listening are the focus, rather than the content or the precise kind of speech acts embedded in these relational events. Story telling from this point of view is valued as a process as well as for the content transmitted. A significant part of the curriculum content transmitted through stories is the sense of community and continuity expressed and strengthened by participation. The general goal of Kunwinjku pedagogy is pursued here: enjoyed participation acts to incorporate the Kunwinjku learner within the society, as much as to internalise in the learner whatever ideas or moral protocols are presented in the narrative content.
12.1.3 Stories as Pedagogy

There are two broad reasons for discussing the use of narrative in Kunwinjku pedagogy as a distinct category within teaching methodology:

[1] The subheading above is deliberately ambiguous. Stories are a significant part of the curriculum content, but also constitute the most significant strand of teaching method, and are used in two broadly defined ways. Firstly, there is a large corpus of formal stories which are taught in the sense of being passed down, as entities, transgenerationally. Secondly, ad hoc stories are used as the mode for teaching a broad range of curriculum content. I will argue here that Kunwinjku people think of stories and story telling as the prime methodology of teaching and learning, with the daily story time in hearth pedagogy regarded as the primary formal strand of remembered Kunwinjku pedagogy. Comments in the interviews reflect the sorts of viewpoints that emerge in ordinary Kunwinjku conversation and support my observations that story telling is a highly valued part of daily life. Story times constitute the kind of pedagogic episode most fondly remembered and always associated with ideas of teaching and learning.

[2] Kunwinjku terminology about stories suggests a view that all teaching and learning can be described in terms of a narrative based pedagogy.

12.1.4 Narrative Terminology in Kunwinjku

There are two main issues in the terminology of stories and story telling that emerge in the interviews.

[1] Telling stories almost invariably means “teaching”. The terminological overlap needs to be analysed.

[2] The need to analyse the way Kunwinjku people use the English word “stories”.

12.1.4.1 “Stories” and the Terminology of Other Kinds of Teaching Acts

The act of story telling is most commonly marneyolmeng – “told stories (to someone)”. This verb is based on yolyolmi, which can be glossed, “talked about (someone)” or “told stories about (someone)” or “told stories to (someone)”.

MM (2-3) uses yolyolmi almost interchangeably with the usual verb to teach (bukkang), and links the transmission of Law with stories:

The Law instructs you (ngunbukkan) as it explains to (kayolyolme) you... We ourselves say that white business is teaching you (ngunbukkabukkan). In fact, that Law is the same as when Aboriginal people explain things (kayolyolme),
your father, mother, grandfather, grandparents or those you call your great-grandparents. I call all that the Law. [MM: 2]

Although the distinction MM makes between “teaching” and “explaining” in the first sentence may suggest a distinction between cognitive and linguistic processes, it is unlikely this kind of lexical precision is generally intended when talking about stories. NN uses the same two verbs, but whether they are meant as synonyms for each other, or whether one is seen as a realisation or example of the other, is unclear:

SE: And you teach them things (yibenbukkan)?

NN: I’ve told them stories (ngabenmarneyolyolmi). I’ve taught them (ngabenbukkan). [NN: 17-18]

In many cases marneyolyolmeng can be glossed as “teaching”, “telling” or “telling them stories”. For example:

I still think about them, and now I’m teaching (ngabenbukkan) my children, daughters and sons, as I raise them I’m telling them (marneyolyolme) what their forebears were like, who they refer to as Mawahmawah. [JN: 48]

The verbs to teach, to explain and to tell stories are tightly associated. Sometimes, however, a distinction in meaning is clearly intended:

Yes, they teach them (kabindibukkabukkan). They tell them stories (kabindimarneyolyolme) and explain to them (kabindibengyolyolme), to the ones, as you know, who send their young sons up to the ceremonial area - all the mothers. [BG: 37]

The first verb is the most general term for teaching and in this context subsumes the next two: marneyolyolmeng - telling stories; bengyolyolmeng – explaining, giving explicit and detailed instruction. GN [54-58] takes the verbs to teach and to tell stories as synonymous in the context of learning about country, perhaps because historical and ideational issues are both in view which might be best taught in narrative ways. She uses the complex verb bolkyolyolmeng (“told stories about a place”) which combines yolyolmeng (to talk about or tell a story) with the incorporated form of kunbolk (“place”).

Yes. A long time ago they used to do that, and they also taught us (kandibukkani) about djang. They would tell us stories (ngandimarneyolyolmi) in the late afternoons when they made fires. They would tell stories (birriyolyolmi) about djang, and sometimes about what the first people did.
SE: Did they teach you (ngundibukkang) about the country? GN: Yes. And they also told stories (ngandibolkyolyolmi) about where the djang were, and where it came from and where it went and put itself. They told us about all of that. [GN: 57-58]

Instruction and warning given in Ceremony could be in the form of stories as well as direct instruction, stretching the range of expected content and text types associated with the standard story telling verb, as for example in BG(37) above.

RN uses the terminology of story telling to include direct instruction:

When we (inc) were living at Wurlwunj and those old people used to tell us stories. They used to teach us to dig up those little things to eat. [RN: 80]

Sometimes marneyolyolmeng clearly means something like “exhorted” or “made some explicit statement of educational goals”. JN for example used it in this way about teaching moral or social precepts:

And some other stories too we tell the kids, for example, "If you go hunting, I mean if the grown ups go hunting, or whatever, well, don't touch their things while they're away”... "Play somewhere a long way away!" So if we saw them asleep we would go a long way off to play. [JN: 114]

GW used marneyolyolmeng to describe exhortations to his family to learn Kundebi:

Now, for example, my family, my children and I live with their grandmother, my mother. I tell them stories (ngabenmarneyolyolme), and I say to them, "Learn Kundebi. Yes, you make sure you get that Kundebi and keep it. [GW: 9]

Context usually isolates the local meaning of the yolyolmeng verbs, but Kunwinjku speakers have also utilised a word appropriated from English to disambiguate.

12.1.4.2 “Stories” as a Special Word

Kunwinjku people very frequently use the English words “story” or “stories” in a range of collocations with Kunwinjku terms, which is the normal Kunwinjku pattern in borrowing a range of English nouns. However, the unusual frequency of this tactical use of “stories” invites the question of precisely what has been nominalised. In its adopted Kunwinjku role, “story” is often moved away from its unmarked English association – the story as an object or a text, and instead becomes strongly associated with the social and pedagogic process of story telling – the story telling act perhaps thought of as a social object. The absence of any generally used
Kunwinjku noun could be taken as evidence that the story as object or text is subservient in Kunwinjku thought to the action of story telling as a social and cognitive process or event. This possible motivation is however only one of several apparent tactics. English “story” is in fact, used in a range of ways:

*Now in these modern times, there are two Laws, because the Balanda way is in force. There's the white way and the Black way. That's what operates now.*

*In the past there was just that one system of Law, the black system was operating, the one The Old People used to talk about. That's what we used to sit around and listen to that story (ngarribekkani story). That's how we learnt it.* [JD: 4]

JD’s English here suggests story as an objectified meta-narrative, parallel to his use of Law (*mankarre*) in the same sentence. JD continues his discussion of this learning process using the unmarked Kunwinjku terminology for storytelling later in the same paragraph:

*My Kakkak, way back then, my Kakkak, used to say to me, "Come here and sit down, and I'll tell you a story (marneyolme)." Or my mother, or her grandmother. They used to say, "Come and sit down. Come here kids, come here and sit down." This was me and my brother, my older brother - I was smaller. They would tell stories (birriyolyolmi). We didn't tape record them. They would just tell stories (birridjalyolyolmi), and we would get drowsy listening to them telling those stories (birriyolyolmi). And we would go to sleep.* [JD: 4]

The English noun is sometimes used with Kunwinjku adjectives:

*And stories, we had lots of stories (story manwernni), Aboriginal stories (Bininj story), our own, we were told (ngandimarneyolme) as children.* [JN: 54]

JN could have carried the same meaning without using the noun. For example “Bininj story” could have been “Bininjkenh ngandimarneyolme”.

The English noun is often used without any apparent role in disambiguation:

*That's why we're just getting overwhelmed ourselves, so kids are not being told stories (minj kabindimarneyolme story). Some people tell them stories (kabindimarneyolme) and some don't. Sometimes I see kids just wandering around between camps. It's as if they have no mother or father - that's what it's like.* [JN: 72]
In fact JN seems to use “story” as part of a stable, if optional, collocation, as part of the phrasal lexeme, which in this paragraph seems to be synonymous with “teaching” in a generic way - the issue addressed being the failure of some families to teach children generally, rather than tell them stories in isolation from other pedagogy.

PS use “story” to mean system or even state of affairs, paralleling its role in English expressions like “What’s the story?” perhaps reflecting this couple’s knowledge of informal spoken English (which is significantly greater than the average among Kunwinjku adults):

- We went to Kormilda, and...it was okay with them teaching us. But at the same time it didn't work for those who couldn't understand, who didn't really know the story, or understand our reason for going there to Kormilda. [PS: 14]
- When other children come here, and the others turn up, they distract them. I mean they interrupt them so they don't know the story on how to do things the right way...[PS: 81]

PS’s use here suggests a similar meaning to “the Law”, rather than either a story text or a story telling process.

It is also becoming acceptable Kunwinjku usage to use “story” to mean “gossip” or “reported news about someone”:

You don't spread stories about a man and woman having an affair." And sometimes they would then warm their ears. They would smoke their ears, saying to them, "You should listen carefully but not hear any bad stories. Just listen to good things. [ED: 6-7]

12. 2 KUNWINJKU EXPERIENCES OF NARRATIVE AS PEDAGOGY

12.2.1 Story Times

Kunwinjku people have recalled childhoods saturated with stories. These remembered episodes are typically associated with life in the hearth family, living in the family’s country, with stories told by the family’s elders, located their content in the family’s physical environment. JN remembers this rich experience as fundamental to his childhood learning, declaring the crucial pedagogic function of story times:

This is how it is. As I went through life growing up to adulthood, it would have been pointless if the elders in my family hadn’t told me stories. I probably wouldn’t know anything. I’d be just going along without anything in my head. In other words, in ignorance. But as it is now, well, they made me so that I do
have an adult’s education. For example my mother’s father, I called Mamam, used to tell me stories. They used to tell me stories every night until I went to sleep. Some of those stories were short, and some long. They were about djang, about what happened to people who did the wrong thing with those djang. Some were about animals who were actually people. Some were about evil beings, like Namorrorrodo. There were a lot of them: Mimih, Marlwa. They told me about all of them. When the sun would set, they used to tell me stories until I went to sleep. I would sleep and next morning when I would get up, they would tell me things. [JN: 19]

Others share his nostalgia about their childhood memories of being told stories and note the value of stories to their personal development.

- Yes. The old people told us about it. In the afternoons, for example, we would come back from hunting, we'd be tired, and so we'd say to them, "Tell us a story so we can go to sleep." They would tell us stories, and they would say to us, sometimes they would say to us, "You pay attention when we tell you this so you will know it." The old people used to tell us stories, and they would say, "This is the really important Law.” [DM: 37]

- My Kakak, way back then, my Kakak, used to say to me, "Come here and sit down, and I'll tell you a story." Or my mother, or her grandmother. They used to say, "Come and sit down. Come here kids, come here and sit down." This was me and my brother, my older brother - I was smaller. They would tell stories. We didn't tape record them. They would just tell stories, and we would get drowsy listening to those stories. And we would go to sleep. [JD: 4]

- But in the old days, when I was at school, the adults, The Old People used to talk to us about things at home. They would tell us stories, and sometimes when we came home from school, they would take us places, maybe they would take us for a walk. They used to combine the religious teachings - from both this world and from heaven. [JN: 64]

These remembered story times reflect the core elements of Kunwinjku pedagogy: story times were situated in real relationships and within the real patterns and timetable of daily hearth family life. This diurnal and familial rootedness made stories the most constant and accessible of formal pedagogic episodes. This diurnal teaching pattern was also immediately vulnerable to any change to the family routine or timetable noted below in 12.5.3.
12.2.2 The Story Tellers

Telling stories of whichever variety is part of Kunwinjku conversational competence, so stories were told by all adult family members [JN:8; 41, 43-45, 64; RN 6]

*The adults in my family, my father’s mothers, my father’s father, my Doydoy (mother’s mother’s mother) they all taught me, they used to tell me stories.*

[DM:16]

Grandparents and the family’s Old People in general, are remembered as storytellers [JD: 4; RN: 79] and as the source of the stories told:

*...well it was those old people - I used to watch what they did... And with the stories, the stories, came from them too. [JN: 41]*

The same significant kinship dyads mentioned as hearth family teachers in chapter 6 are also remembered as storytellers. For example: mother’s fathers [JB: 43; JN: 19]; father’s fathers [JM: 18]; mother’s mothers [JD: 4; RN: 156] and mother’s eldest sisters [RN: 79, 156].

Some interviewees also affirmed their own adult roles as story tellers [AN: 2, 23; GW: 9; JB: 47; NN: 18; RN: 5, 79, 151-156; TN:27]

*Story telling is in fact a significant strand in Kunwinjku language competence. In any informal assembly of Kunwinjku people, whether adult or children, there will usually be someone telling a story. Kunwinjku children (and adults) habitually tell each other stories of this informal reportage or real life anecdotal kind. Whenever a group of primary school age children gathers a kind of formal turn-taking event will often occur as child after child narrates an incident, often involving the supernatural or an amusing incident from real life. Someone in the group will nominate a successor, who will then have the floor, perhaps till the end of his account, or until interrupted by another raconteur. The skills needed to tell the various kinds of stories, whether formally or informally in conversations, are automatically learnt through participation in adult conversations or engaging with the narrators in story times. As an adult learner, I can testify to the complexity of the task of learning to tell stories. Apart from the grammatical skills, the raconteur needs to know the interactional protocols among members of his audience and between himself and his audience members. He also needs to know what his audience knows as part of their general knowledge about the substance of the story. In other words, narration brings together most of the core strands of the Kunwinjku curriculum: social performance, environmental and social knowledge and linguistic competence.*
12.2.3 The Story Repertoire

Since stories were such a significant strand of routine pedagogy, it is not surprising that they are associated with the whole gamut of topics within the Kunwinjku curriculum, and that the formal stories constitute an extensive library of oral texts. Most older Kunwinjku adults can nominate a list of their favourite stories from childhood. A number of interviewees have listed some of this richness, sometimes with a hint of pride:

- *We northerners have a lot of stories. I mean from Wurlwunj. I tell them those stories so they'll know what I was told by Nakangila and Ngalngarridj. So I'm always telling them stories...*[RN: 79]

- Some of these stories were short, and some long. They were about djang, about what happened to people who did the wrong thing with those Djang. Some were about animals who were actually people. Some were about evil beings, like Namorrorrddo. There were a lot of them; Mimih, Marlwa... They told me about all of them. [JN 19]

- *Yes. A long time ago they used to do that, and they also taught us about djang. They would tell us stories in the late afternoons when they made fires. They would tell stories about djang, and sometimes about what the first people did.* [GN: 54]

- They were our favourite stories, our stories, the two boys who killed their grandfather's dog, and that other one about Yirrbadj, the other one who burned them all, the little one who played all the time. The one about Namorrorrddo who fought with the baby stealer, lots of stories. [RN: 156]

- *Creation stories for example, sometimes my grandchildren want that, and they'll say, "Tell us a story while we go to sleep." So I'll tell them a story, maybe something like the Ngordyabok story, a funny one, so they can go to sleep, they can laugh and go to sleep. Sometimes. Sometimes they just keep playing.* [JB: 43]

There was a striking diversity in both genre and content. Some texts are meant to be funny. Some are regarded as pornographic and are usually funny as well – for example Nawarlabik. Some of the more explicit stories were not intentionally told to children – a restriction that also applied to some elements of long story cycles associated with ceremonies, for example the Yirrbardbard cycle associated with the Wubbarr Ceremony. Children were however told serious and complex myths like...
non-secret parts of the *Yirrbardbard* cycle [RN 79, 151-156] and thought-provoking stories like “The Native Cat and the Moon” (*Djabbo dja Dird*), mentioned by TN (27), in which the subject matter is a debate on the possibility of re-incarnation.

*Interviewees mention a range of other story topics, such as “the first people” [GN: 54], the “Law” [JN: 9], stories about “long ago” [JB: 47; AN: 2] and “our own” stories [JN: 54] that is, stories uniquely about our identity as Kunwinjku people. Stories were often told about djang, the sites were mythical beings turned themselves into either rock paintings or physical features of the family’s country:*

Yes. And they also told stories about where the djang were, and where it came from and where it went and put itself. They told us about all of that. [GN: 57-58]

Carroll (1995) has collected 40 short versions of stories associated with bark paintings by Kunwinjku artists. R and C Berndt’s The Speaking Land, (1988), anthologised 195 short stories collected mainly in Western Arnhem land, and including contributions from two dozen Kunwinjku speakers (the majority of whom are members of MM’s extended family). Inevitably the collection process means these stories are much abbreviated but the range of genre and topic in the collection reveals some of the Kunwinjku narrative universe.

Not all stories are known across all the Kunwinjku clans, and there are restrictions about who can transmit some stories even when known. In fact, both at ceremonies and in everyday Kunwinjku life, people sometimes express pride in the songs and stories “owned” by their family or clan. The use of these stories or songs in visual art or in ceremonial dances or other performances is rigidly restricted. Artists for example will not knowingly breach these copyright boundaries, preferring to base paintings on their family or clan owned corpus. Nevertheless there are some stories or even story cycles that seem to be known or known about and narrated by all Kunwinjku speakers. Firstly, stories associated with the Wubarr Ceremony have wide circulation (providing indirect evidence of earlier pre-eminence of this now defunct Ceremony in Western Arnhem Land, since stories directly related to Mardayin and Kunabibi are less widely known). Secondly, there is a set of children’s versions of stories that are told in all families, especially various versions of “The Turtle and the Spiny Anteater” (*Ngalmangiyi dja Ngarrbek*) and “The Crying Orphan” (*Namarladj*) – one of the many stories associated with the Rainbow Serpent
series. These may have had their origin in once sacred or restricted domains, but are now considered quite public.

12.3 NOTES ON GENRE AND THE TEXTUALITY OF STORIES

12.3.1 Genre and Taxonomy

Kunwinjku discussion of stories and their telling of stories involved clearly recognised distinctions between kinds of stories. Genre is a problematic system of taxonomy here, since Kunwinjku people have not volunteered any formal categorisation along these lines. “Stories” do not, however, constitute one undifferentiated genre in Kunwinjku thinking. I did not ask questions about text type and no interviewees discussed the issue directly, but there is some evidence that some Kunwinjku individuals pursue this kind of analysis, without it having (yet) become a shared intellectual interest.

I will argue that Kunwinjku people talk about stories as being in one of two very broad categories, with two distinct pedagogic roles: [1] formal texts, told as stories with or without an explicitly revealed “lesson”; and [2] short stories embedded in teaching about any topic, with these exemplific or illustrative narratives covering matters that might also have been explained by direct instruction or descriptive genres. Story content in either category reflects the whole of Kunwinjku life and ranges from highly stylised formal performance texts, where listeners will not tolerate a departure from the text, to ad hoc anecdotes arising out of daily events.

This was also the pattern in hearth family life, where story telling and listening behaviour was learnt, particularly in the late afternoons or evening, a pattern continuing in a minority of families. Formal stories were also told at this time, generally by older adults. The motivation was understood by narrator and listeners to be pedagogic.

12.3.2 Stories as Formal Oral Texts

There is a closed corpus of oral texts, of whatever content, where the narrative is broadly fixed, and which are expected to be transmitted intact to listeners. Children and other adults listening are expected to remember these stories and eventually to be able to retell them to others. The story telling process is formal, though it can be initiated by either adults or children. Formal story telling tolerates only minimal interruptions from listeners apart from the expected questions for clarification, and reminders to the narrator of details he or she may have omitted.
Pro-active audience participation skills are a significant part of the curriculum, involving the development of oral memory and social behaviours.

Although the text of these stories is “fixed”, it is accepted that various people will have and tell their own versions of it, but these versions are also regarded as stable (apart from the inevitable accidents in re-telling). The narrator also reserves the option of omitting or inserting parenthetical episodes or explanations which are part of the established text but not central to the narrative. Listeners may negotiate to hear or re-hear various episodes or parenthetical additions within longer stories – which are often shortened depending on circumstances. I have recorded or simply listened to MM retell stories from the *Ngalyod* (Rainbow Serpent) cycle a number of times. On each occasion, although the storyline remains the same, MM has added parenthetical material, sometimes after requests from adult or child listeners. Sometimes the story overlaps other stories set in the periods both before and after the more commonly told version. The “story” realised through these performances cannot be confined to a single text without distortion.

12.4 PEDAGOGIC FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVE

12.4.1 Transmitting Story Content: “The Moral of the Story”

Story telling to children was pedagogically intentional. Stories were meant to give children “ideas” [RN: 6] and to teach them “Law” [JD: 4]. There was a strong expectation that children would apply what was taught in stories [RN: 159]. Formal stories were passed on because of their intrinsic value as cultural objects to be learned and preserved. In transgenerational terms, the curriculum content of the formal story is the narrative itself, its covert or implicit moral intention as well as the mode of its transmission in formal story times. This contrasts with the other transgenerational responsibilities to teach morals or technical skills, where stories are not the content of the teaching but “merely” the mode. The majority of Kunwinjku story telling is in fact a means to teach something other than the story itself. Stories used in this way are the method in a wide range of contexts: for example, providing family-historical information about the Old People themselves:

*We used to tell them stories, from the olden days, what The Old People used to do back then. [AN: 2]*

Stories as pedagogic mode included the range of social concerns and other content adults wished to teach children. Stories were used to teach about the *Balanda* world as well as *Bininj* matters. AN, for example, used stories to teach children at school
about *Balanda* matters [AN: 2]. AN provides an additional insight into the general pedagogic function of stories:

> Who, my kids? Yes, we would teach the kids - we would take them fishing, and we would teach them sometimes as we went along, or their mother would take them collecting things like maybe waterlily stems, that kind of thing. I used to do that, teaching them so they would know our way of doing things. I would show them things and tell them stories about it. That's how I was brought up, with them telling me stories about grown-up things. [AN: 23]

His characterisation of stories “about grown-up things” (*nawu dborahrabbolkkenh*) simultaneously and neatly suggests stories from two viewpoints: firstly the child’s viewpoint, where stories are an entrée to the adult world, and secondly as the means towards adult empowerment. The narrator is engaged in the general pedagogic function of reproduction of the adult world, transmitting the equipment of adulthood through stories. JN (19) testifies to the ideational impact of a childhood rich in stories:

> This is how it is. As I went through life growing up to adulthood, it would have been pointless if the elders in my family hadn’t told me stories. I probably wouldn’t know anything. I’d be just going along without anything in my head. In other words, in ignorance. But as it is now, well, they made me so that I do have an adult’s education.

### 12.4.2 Stories, Moral Values and Truth

Some interviewees have described the equipment for Kunwinjku adulthood transmitted to them in stories. JM’s concern for transgenerational teaching is focused on the reproduction of core identity:

> But those kids of mine are all going. They like school. They really like it very much. They want to learn Balanda stuff, but then still come back, and that old man, their Mawah still talks to them and tells them stories about Aboriginal things about our (inc) Aboriginal culture. He’s their Mawah and they still come back after school and we (exc) go and we take the kids to that old man, and he tells them stories. So when those kids grow up they probably won’t drink, or sniff petrol or smoke grass, no way. They won’t do that, never. These kids of mine. I don’t know about other kids. But mine are well behaved. I only have to tell them something once, and they just obey me, and they don’t answer me back. Okay. [JM: 18]
This kind of hearth family story telling includes semi-formal texts by which real family history is passed on in narrative form, so that identity is not firstly based on race or even clan, but is highly personal to the hearth family. JM’s values narrative as a mode of teaching a curriculum of identity and the moral behaviour that is part of it; mandated by that identity. These transgenerational concerns are shared by other interviewees: For example, RN: 79-80 links both family history and explicit moral training with teaching of and through stories:

*Ri:* And we warn about that what'sit, so that in everything, as they grow up, they won't, for example, have sex too early as it were. Well, we (exc) warn them about that too. If they just go off and do anything, with other men and women, and they take someone's woman, and he'll kill them. They'd die too young. And I do the same, warning those women, I mean my (family), where I've got quite a lot of women, and only the one man, and also just that one uncle. So I give M____ a hand too, warning those children about things. And also I tell them stories from the old days when Nakangila and Ngalngarridj used to tell me stories. That one about the woman attacked by Yirrbadbad, and also the one about the two young men who killed their grandfather's dogs. We northerners have a lot of stories. I mean from Wurlwunj. I tell them those stories so they'll know what I was told by Nakangila and Ngalngarridj. So I'm always telling them stories, I mean N__, the two older ones, N___, D____, R____ and R____. [RN: 79]

R and N describe the childhood moral teaching through stories, touching on the theme of the children’s responsibility to apply the content of the stories as the alternative to moral disaster:

*But the kids, we give them...when we tell them stories, the kind so that they will know, so they will understand, then they will apply it. In the past they didn't just stay put, and neither did they do those (bad) things. The mothers used to take them along, In fact fathers, mother's mothers, mother's fathers...*  
*N: Back then they also used to take them along and tell them stories, we would, they would look after them, the kids were in our care, and I mean wherever we were, out in the bush, I mean The Old People used to tell them stories, and in the same way we used to tell our own children. They (my parents) would tell them stories, Nabangardi and Ngalkamarrang. It was about giving them ideas... They were trying to give them ideas, to teach them. Now in fact, it's all come}
back to us here now. They've forgotten what they were told, what was explained to them. So consequently those children have just gone off on their own different way. They haven't thought about what they were taught, unlike what we did when we were children and they would teach us, and we really hung on to what they taught us. We didn't just dismiss it like they do now when we explain things to them, the kids. They just disregard what we say. They don't do what we say. [RN: 5-6]

ED (62, 64) has described the difficulties of learning morality from narrative in English as a foreign language, where the moral principles behind the stories may need to be explicitly revealed to the children. This principle may well apply in Kunwinjku and explain why the boundary between formal and informal stories is so fuzzy – in other words teaching through formal stories, and teaching through narrative styles of explanation are both be necessary strategies to ensure the intended moral learning takes place.

JU (114) described the way she used stories about her own childhood experiences at school to teach contemporary students the behaviour required in class. Here the narrator was the subject of her own story, as is often the case when Kunwinjku adults tell stories, hinting at a level of intimacy about story telling that may be part of the warmth with which it is remembered in adult life.

The sense of intimacy may be a factor in making narrative peculiarly suited to teaching religious ideas, morals and other “values” content, because of the relational authority and personalised way it can occur. It allows the recitation of good and bad examples from fiction or family life, or even the narrator’s personal history, which can provide a strong authorisation and explication of ideas and principles. This instructional potency is matched by the fact that Kunwinjku children as well as adults take a keen interest in the truth status of stories of both formal and informal kinds. The English expression “True story!” is sometimes used to assert the validity of a report instead of the standard Kunwinjku expression Woybukkiih! (“It’s true!”). There is a strong interest in the historicity or factuality of formal stories which may be motivated by the association between stories and the mandated moral patterns they teach – perhaps reflecting a child’s need to test the authority of the teaching - its bindingness on him or her.

Adults also pursue this concern. For example, MM’s mother, then in her seventies, lived as part of my household for six years, often caring for our three small
children and telling them Kunwinjku stories of all kinds. On one occasion she was looking at some very lifelike illustrations in a children’s’ book of Bible stories. (She could neither speak nor read English but enjoyed books.) She was intensely interested in establishing the historical truth of the stories and asked me, using the English word “stories”, whether these events had actually happened or were merely “stories.” Kunwinjku children are perennially interested in this question about any kind of narrative. I have heard interchanges where parents need to explain to children whether stories are fictitious or factual, particularly in regard to stories like those involving the *Mimih* or other invisible characters. Distinctions about truth and factuality are part of a larger mapping of narrative in Kunwinjku life.

### 12.4.3 Narrative, Country and Visual Art

There is also a hierarchy of contingency in Kunwinjku art: the visual is contingent upon the oral narrative, and this is paralleled by the way the value of land is contingent upon the history and theology preserved in the oral library associated with Kunwinjku experiences of a particular place. In Kunwinjku pedagogy, narrative is fundamental to understanding either land or art. A number of interviewees discussed the association between stories and paintings on rock and bark. This association is complex, and has been distorted by the pressure of *Balanda* interest in, and commercial pressure upon, Kunwinjku visual art, which has driven the professionalization of art in Kunwinjku society.

The Injalak Arts and Crafts centre at Kunbarllanjnja, along with its counterpart in Maningrida, have become significant economic resources for Kunwinjku people. I have observed the work of artists in the Kunbarllanjnja numerous times, as well as the artistic work of children in my classes at the school (some of whom are now adult artists). Bardyal Nadjamerrek is one of the better known of the Kunwinjku artists. In 1990 he asked me to film him singing a song that constituted portion of the narrative upon which he had based a recent, large bark painting of a single kangaroo without any visual clues beyond that one figure. He sang for forty minutes - a complex narrative song. The bark was saleable without this story, in this case a sung story, but in the artist’s mind the bark was inaccessible to Kunwinjku people without this narrative. The bark could at best remind people of the narrative, or symbolise something from it, act as a mnemonic for it, or, as in this case, provide a point of departure from the painting to the world of oral literature.
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I have watched and taken part in gathering and preparing the materials for painting on bark, and in the act of painting, which was and is sometimes a corporate activity, with some younger relatives involved in the tedious and exacting process of painting the *rarrk* – the fine parallel lines used in a number of ways in Kunwinjku art. The whole production process was often accompanied from time to time by the artist, or someone older, telling the story represented in the painting:

*The old people, yes. They'll tell them stories about what they're painting, whatever picture they're painting they'll tell the kids stories, and the kids watch how they do the painting and they want to hear the old stories, and that's quite true. They want that because they don't really know our history. No.* [ED: 97]

P reports that he was asked by anthropologists about the intentions of his ancestors in painting on rock at a particular place:

*So they asked about it. They asked, "Who painted these originally?" "Well the Aboriginal people who lived here back then painted them", I said, "On the rock." They may have simply painted them for their own reasons, or maybe they were telling stories. Yes, that's it. I mean, some, some places have a djang, some place they've painting djang on the rocks. And some other places they've just painted what is just a hunting story for example, or they've maybe painted Mimih. There could be a Mimih story there. Or it could be there is a message in the painting. Actually no one just puts a Mimih there, if it doesn't put itself there. Maybe something just puts itself there (as a painting). I don't know.* [PS: 66]

His obviously speculative mood may simply be the result of being invited to comment by his interrogators, but he was also willing to speculate about the motivations for painting on bark:

*Oh, and the bark paintings, as time went by, all the stories ended up on bark. Some, there are some, just ordinary ones, with ordinary stories, and those maybe they just, they just talk about them, maybe or, they may have been thinking, "This is what I've painted. My descendants can look at this in the future, they'll see what I've painted, I'll hang it up on the wall." Yeah, that's it.* [PS: 68]

This suggestion of a personal mnemonic role for painting is paralleled by MM’s remembered experiences of learning how to paint on rock.
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Or with barks for painting too, I used to paint those barks. They would say, "Paint the bark or paint the rock." And I would paint that rock there where we were staying. When we would live there in the rocks, like there [[pointing]] the painting is there, but it’s a long way, maybe we should drive there. I did that and I painted it. Then we went back. Mawah said to me, "This you've painted is the way I did it." When I had turned 18, Mawah took me back and showed me, he said to me, "This is what you painted when you were small." It was a kangaroo I painted there at Tor Rock, on the western side in a cave where we camped. He had said to me, "Paint it." Mawah told me and I painted. They used to show me, so when I used to paint I didn't depart from that. [MM2: 44]

MM’s experience suggests that art may be at least partly motivated as a mnemonic. If so, there are profound implications for pedagogy: Firstly, mnemonic art depends on the transgenerational narration of personal histories, paralleling the way other paintings depend on mythical stories. I have accompanied Kunwinjku people on journeys through their own countries on many occasions, and often been told about who painted certain rock art. The landscape is animated by personal human activity, and its features are sometimes held to be contingent upon people whose activities are preserved in the stories and the paintings that come from those stories. In pedagogic terms, learning about land or country is learning about the history and motivations of people. The land is in fact mute and passive, receiving and acting as a repository or framework for the human behaviour and lives narrated. But the land is contingent upon people in another way also hinted at in the citations from PS above.

Kunwinjku people teach their children that some of the beings (human and otherwise) in the formal stories turn themselves into, or “put themselves” (bimkurrmerrin) somewhere as paintings on rock walls. These objects are sometimes significant enough to be regarded as djang – evidences of supernatural or very ancient beings, or sites associated with the continuance of natural processes. Djang then become the triggers for teaching the stories they signpost. The land does not speak, but is spoken into relevance by the way people have formally associated stories with their decorations on it and familiarity with it. I speculate that the process in which a living being becoming a permanent piece of art may reflect some view of immortality attaching to paintings on rock, a sense which doesn’t transfer to bark, let alone the paper now widely used for its saleability. It is certainly evidence that
deeply challenges common non-Aboriginal conception that somehow Aboriginal people are contingent upon the land. Here it is the reverse: the land is valorized by Bininj actions.

PS, continuing in his speculative mood, has suggested that a sort of theology of djang exists in parallel to Christian beliefs, by which Bininj created a system for manipulation of the natural world:

*But if a man wanted to paint something, it may have gone like this: he may say, "Hey, I'll tell that story, so then this painting will have a story." This is the first man (to do it) maybe. For example the story about Nawarlabik. They painted it and then others would copy that when they painted it. Yes, a joking story, a fun story. To make people laugh. Yes, that's it. But other kinds of things, like anteaters, kangaroos, ah, emus, maybe fish, barramundi, file snakes, swamp pythons, they would paint them in connection with...well, those ones, maybe they painted them because they lived here on this country, I mean we have them. And the djang are here too. Djang. [SE: The animals linked to the country?] Yeah, that's it. What I mean is...Its as if God made everything so it would go reproducing, but, I mean the elders back then, put the djang there, they made djang, so that um, instead of asking God to make more (game animals), they would ask that djang so the animals would increase. [PS: 67]*

In terms of pedagogy, this high view of Bininj control over nature imbues the stories related to the various species, and the djang sites connected with them, with extraordinary survival and social value. It also underlines the extent of the loss to those who have lived by this system when the transmission of narratives is threatened, as many interviewees have claimed.

There is a further pedagogic consequence of Balanda involvement in Kunwinjku art. Carroll (1995, pp.167-180) explored the relationship between art and story, citing Morphy (1977, 1991) and Taylor (1987). A major theme in his discussion was the way visual art and its associated narrative operated together as the mode for revelatory pedagogy. Carroll notes the role of learning visual art as part of “progressive socialisation” towards Kunwinjku adulthood (p.177), through the ceremonially restricted, advanced pedagogy building on the way younger men are taught visual art publicly, at home or more recently at the Arts and Crafts Centre. The decline in ceremonial participation noted in 8.9 is paralleled by present day artificial separation of art from ritual as well as from familial venues, reducing both
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control over the required secrecy and the gradation of revelation, and the likelihood
that participants will timetable for these special narrative events.

12.5 THE DISPLACEMENT OF STORIES AND STORY TIME

12.5.1 Stories, Art and Balanda.

Kunwinjku people are sceptical about the role of their professional artists in
maintaining culture by using their paintings as a platform to tell stories. ED has
articulated a representative viewpoint:

Some of them still tell the stories, especially the ones living in the bush, yes,
they tell them stories. But the ones here, they don't. They just make them (bark
paintings) for themselves, to take and sell. [ED: 95]

GN (49-56) described the decline in story telling about djang, remembering from her
childhood a time when stories were told based on bark paintings.

It may be inevitable that the operations of a central buying agency for art, like
the Injalak centre in Kunbarllanjina, will distort the relationship between art and
narrative. Art can be sold, whereas there is no market for Kunwinjku narrative. The
art centres will inevitably attract people to work close by the people who supply
resources and buy their art, reducing the hearth family contact time of the
professionalised painters. It is impossible to determine whether any Kunwinjku
people paint for pedagogic reasons, or for pedagogic reasons alone, because
everyone who paints for whatever reasons tries to sell their artwork. More seriously,
the mainstream Balanda world now effectively dictates acceptable forms of
indigeneity, including an apparently race-based expectation of artistic ability, and has
valorized the physical objects of Kunwinjku art without including the narratives or
other pedagogic functions that may have attached. The inclusion, increasingly, of
women in this commercially driven art world reflects both mainstream ideational
taste and the reasonable desire of those women for financial participation. It is
simultaneously an index of a desperate desire to move outside an isolated and
separated micro-economy and a guarantee that it may continue to hold them shackled
for the near future, since the needed commitment to one source of funding makes it
unlikely that people already poor will have the leisure of skills to find alternative
employment, or even alternative ways to be creative.

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12.5.2 Crisis in Story Telling

Regardless of any interdependence with paintings, interviewees expressed concerns about the way children in recent times react to stories generally. BG claims children are not demanding stories as they should be:

_They don’t want to learn. I mean…they should sit with the adults, because then they would watch the adults and say, "Oh, they’ll tell us stories." But they would rather play than sit down and listen to elders talking. But, [But if...] they listen! I’ve just thought of this: if they want to learn... [BG: 53]_

JU claims parents and Old People are not telling the stories to their children – nor teaching them generally [JU: 30; 66]. JN agrees with this assessment and sees the collapse of narrative transmission as a failure to teach and learn the most basic curriculum:

_So it was very different then. And stories, we had lots of stories, Aboriginal stories, our own stories we were told as children. I see that this is not happening now. I’m talking about kids growing up without any fundamental Law. [JN: 54]_

R’s sister-in-law A. describes a failure on the part of children to learn from the stories when they are told, implying a more general problem than the failure to tell the stories:

_Back then they also used to take them along and tell them stories, we would, they would look after them, the kids were in our care, and I mean wherever we were, out in the bush, I mean The Old People used to tell them stories, and in the same way we used to tell our own children. They (my parents) would tell them stories, Nabangardi and Ngalkamarra. It was about giving them ideas, but, no, the kids would disregard what they explained to them. [RN: 6]_

12.5.3 The Displacement of Story Times

I have suggested that the professionalization of art has led to less time for story telling by artists in their hearth family roles. Other factors have been cited to account for the decline in the telling and hearing of stories. Kunwinjku people often blame the ready supply of alcohol in the community for specific problems, and this has been applied to stories too:

_N. The alcohol, for some of them, has changed the way they think. [SE: Really?] [R: Some of them nowdays.] N. So they don't tell them stories. [RN: 159]_
JN doesn’t disagree with this, but makes a more general assessment of what has impacted stories, listing alcohol alongside the displacement of personal timetable by the demands of mainstream incursions:

> There are new ideas every year. I mean, in the past, in the forties and fifties, back in the forties, it was slow, everything was slow. But now there are new buildings here, the club is here, but there are no jobs, [And we're all talking fast.] Yes, it's all fast. That's why we're just getting overwhelmed ourselves, so kids are not being told stories. Some people tell them stories and some don't. Sometimes I see kids just wandering around between camps. It's as if they have no mother or father - that's what it's like. [JN: 72]

Despite the ongoing pressures on family life, many families still have active story tellers. JB (43 and 47) and RN (5-6) have described their continuing efforts to tell stories to their families, and some families can be observed where story times still continue. Nevertheless, in most of those homes it can also be observed that the availability of DVDs and other mass produced entertainments constitutes the largest challenge to systematic narrative instruction, with children watching videos at any hour of the day or night.

Against these pressures to displace story telling from its crucial role in pedagogy, the school has been a resource for some Kunwinjku people in attempting to compensate for the narrative deficit of many of the students, but this effort is distorted by attempts from the non-Kunwinjku staff to rescue Kunwinjku narrative.

**12.5.4 Stories at the School?**

This discussion will supplement a number of issues raised in chapters 13 and 14, but will allow us to look at the comments about the pedagogic use of Kunwinjku stories by interviewees with experience of teaching in the school. The school has a long history (see section 13.3.3) of inviting “elders” onto the campus to tell stories on special occasions, such as “Culture Week” [JU: 19, 23, 51], and to use formal Kunwinjku stories to teach translation and other aspects of literacy [JN: 64, 74]. One of the interviewees, N, was involved in telling stories in both English and Kunwinjku at school, and reports that children demand stories at school just as they do at home:

> A: Yes. I used to take some of them here, some of the kids. In fact when I was working there, teaching, the kids wanted me to teach them, and they wanted me to tell them stories. [SE: They would listen to you?] Yes. These kids I was
looking after here, and when I took the outstations kids too, they liked it when I actually read from some of the books in English. With that group, I didn’t teach them Kunwinjku. [RN: 177]

ED (60) mentions the teaching of genre in the school’s English syllabus, and JU, also speaking about the school, has borrowed the English term “Dreamtime stories” [JU: 66, 72, 74] to describe the formal Kunwinjku stories she has been teaching to older students. (The term “Dreamtime” doesn’t translate any Kunwinjku term, but is widely used by non-Kunwinjku staff at the school, along with terms like “dreaming”, which have also now been borrowed by some Kunwinjku speakers to use in conversation with Balanda).

There are limits on what the school can do with Kunwinjku stories, partly because of the lack of involvement of sufficient Kunwinjku adults. I have often heard Kunwinjku staff at the school complain about parents “leaving it all up to them”. ED cites a number of her efforts to involve parents in the schooling process [ED: 11, 12, 25]. JU’s comment is representative of the Kunwinjku school staff:

*Maybe people just think that school is only for children. So they just leave the kids in our hands, so it’s up to us to do it all, to talk to them and tell them stories. Or maybe they're just too lazy to come to school. Yes, that's right.*

[JU: 65]

JU’s remarks may be motivated by some frustration at the way parents have transferred to the school all their pedagogic responsibilities—a possibility explored further in 13.3. In fact the school has only a limited capacity to “tell stories” even with substantial parental involvement.

**12.5.4.1 What Happens to Stories at School?**

The school can only manage and teach Kunwinjku narratives in ways that significantly impact the narratives as texts, and more significantly, displace the hearth family as the locus of their transmission. Scholarisation of Kunwinjku oral narrative works through the three intentional processes of writing, authoring and technologizing. The result, which is not intended, is the effective deracination of the formal Kunwinjku stories.

**12.5.4.2 Literization and Technologization**

The two things most Kunwinjku people automatically associate with the school are the Balanda world and writing—specifically, written English. PS (91). GN (62) expects the school to teach children how to write stories in English, and this is a
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general expectation in the community. I have discussed (at 9.7.6 and 9.7.7) MM’s strategic plan to have his son learn Kunwinjku literacy at the school, as a tactic to preserve Kunwinjku outside the school. Nevertheless, the missionary-initiated Literacy Centre and the School-based bilingual programme both encountered some serious issues around literization of Kunwinjku. Firstly, writing down stories told by Kunwinjku adults is not simply a matter or enscripturation as it is within English speaking society, which recognises the canonical authority of a written text as derived from its oral source. Where there has never been a written text there is no automatic attribution of epistemological authority to the written version of someone’s words, no matter how authoritative the person is. At least initially, the process of “reducing to writing” is seen as diminishing rather than reinforcing the speaker’s authority. It may easily act to replace the author in person – exactly the issue Kunwinjku school staff have tried to avoid.

Secondly, in Kunwinjku thinking, the overwhelming association with anything written is the Balanda world. (So the word djurra is applied without differentiation to any and every piece of printed text, form or document – the lack of sub-categorisation reflecting the fact that djurra - written text of any kind - automatically connotes the undifferentiated world of the Balanda.) Dissimilarities in the text are of secondary interest to the multifarious Balanda demands perceived behind them all.

In 1977-78 as Teacher-Linguist in charge of the Kunwinjku Bilingual programme, I encountered widespread community enthusiasm for the idea of the school utilising Kunwinjku people, and even having children learn to read and write their language. But there was also a very strong resistance to the existence of printed Kunwinjku material. I think the reasoning was to do with perceptions of control: only Kunwinjku people could supply the language inputs and teaching in Kunwinjku oral language programmes, whereas the production of a body of printed literature, what Ong (1989) called “the technologizing” of the language, was seen by Kunwinjku people as something simultaneously beyond their capacity, and finally out of their control.

12.5.4.3 Creating Written Stories in Kunwinjku?
Writing stories, as opposed to writing them down, is a less problematic venture. During 1979 and 1980 I taught groups of Kunwinjku children between the ages of eight and twelve to read and write Kunwinjku (as well as English). Their skills and
achievements ranged from limited ability (able to write and read a short sentence in one or both languages) to several children who could produce creative fantasy stories or non-fiction reports of two or three pages in either language. At no point did we attempt to “reduce” to writing any traditional stories. We did not feel this was a task that parents had transferred to the school. This was also at a time in the community when story telling was a daily experience for most of the children in the hearth family. The idea of creating stories is part and parcel of normal Kunwinjku life, so their written creations had no impact on the formal story corpus of any family. However, the decline of hearth family story telling over the last decade has provoked a more adventurous approach within the school.

12.5.5 Telling Stories to Balanda: Transplantation or Deracination?

In a sense, the school has acted to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the family as a teaching venue. JU has described this change from the perspective of a Kunwinjku person within the school system:

> It's changed because, I'm not sure - and this is just my own opinion, there are just not enough Bininj adults coming into the school to watch the kids. Or, yes, there's not enough communication and so sometimes the kids get slack, and also, what'sit, there's not enough encouragement at home. Some kids just come to school and act silly when they get in the classroom. But in the old days, when I was at school, the adults, The Old People used to talk to us about things at home. They would tell us stories, and sometimes when we came home from school, they would take us places, maybe they would take for a walk. They used to combine the religious teachings - from both this world and from heaven. They combined all that as they were teaching us, when for example we would go out camping, for holidays. They would teach us on those occasions. And as well, what'sit, it was good living here because there was no grog, it hadn't arrived yet, nothing. No. But now, well, the school doesn't get much help. [JU: 64]

The school has funded JU and other Kunwinjku adults from time to time to teach traditional stories in the school. Any one adult can of course relate to only a limited range of the children, and in practice this job is taken up by a small group of Kunwinjku people who are willing and able to operate in the school environment. Under the direction of non Kunwinjku speaking Balanda staff, attempts have been made to teach traditional stories to primary school classes through a problematic
process of telling the story first in English, then translating it into Kunwinjku, then publishing the story locally, with illustrations often supplied by professional Balanda artists. This highly processed text is then used to teach children to read and write Kunwinjku:

Yes, they know about it up to a point, the dreaming stories, but in their writing, well...[Yes!] Writing, they are writing bit by bit. [Great.] Yes, and we do the same thing with our own class. But sometimes I push those kids. I'll say to them, "Try and extend the story a bit more." It's an upper primary class. [JU: 74]

In the last three years the school has pushed technologization further, funding professional Balanda filmmakers to make two short Claymation films. In 2004 the school funded a short filmed “The Turtle and the Spiny Ant Eater” using an English language version of the story. Children assisted the Balanda professionals and the film was marketed and entered in contests. Several children attended a screening at one contest in Melbourne with the deputy school principal who had organised the process. The distance between story time pedagogy in the Kunwinjku family and this advanced process of technologization and commercialisation can hardly be greater. In pedagogic terms, the children are certainly learning; but what, and from whom? Where is the narrator?

The story is now no longer contingent upon its creators. In fact, it could be thought of as alienated from the elders who were once considered the originators of formal narratives. The story may now be considered as contingent upon Balanda filmmakers, not because they originate, but because they seem to be maintaining a corpus of Kunwinjku narrative. Yet filmmakers and other cultural collectors are even less relationally accessible than the Balanda School staff, who had at least been longer-term colleagues of some of the Kunwinjku staff. The products of this intervention, whether considered an act of maintenance or of harvesting of Kunwinjku narrative, are not under any sort of community control, and in fact reflect a general willingness among Kunwinjku people to be the source of material for a number of recent films made for television tapping into the very oral literature which is now under threat. In 1996 for example, SBS television paid a group of Kunwinjku people to provide information and take a secondary part in filming a ballet based on their Mimih stories, but written and performed by Balanda professionals at a site near Oenpelli.
Kunwinjku people highlight the non-written nature of their texts, reflecting their pride in oral language skills and perhaps in response to the highly literate nature of the Balanda English language domain. The enscripturation of these oral texts opens the possibility that they may be approached as written objects, a distortion of their much larger and multiform oral versions. (If translation is betrayal, then enscripturation may be deracination!) The repositioning of stories within culture, as merely supporting its more marketable aspects, and as lacking relevance or usefulness unless and until written, are factors even in isolation from other pressures, that significantly limit the practice of Kunwinjku pedagogy and undermine its necessary self-confidence.

Sadly, it is now difficult to agree with Carroll’s optimistic 1995 assessment of Kunwinjku responses to the demands of the Balanda world: “In the 1990s that external pressure has become domination, yet in the midst of all the pressures and domination the Kunwinjku people maintained their continuous tradition of story and art.” (Carroll, 1995, p.343). Kunwinjku narrative is being relegated to contingency as the need to depend for income on the visual arts and the film industry forces radical lifestyle changes on those few people who could still transmit the stories effectively to their own younger generations.

12.6 CONCLUSIONS: THEORIZING STORIES WITHIN KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGIC THEORY

12.6.1 Telling the Stories – Relationality Motivates Narrative as Method

The telling and hearing of stories reflects all the key components of Kunwinjku pedagogy discussed in chapters 5-11 bringing together Kunwinjku curriculum and Kunwinjku views on children and adults.

- Stories were a flexible, individually gradable, age appropriate methodology for younger children [MM: 30] adaptable as the child grew [RN 151-156]. They recognised and tapped into children’s simultaneous demand for intimacy and for ideas [TN: 26-27]. Kunwinjku children share the universal childhood love of stories and hunger for them regardless of medium. Children from some families can still tell you about their favourite Kunwinjku stories [RN: 156] along with their favourite TV programmes or DVDs. Kunwinjku pedagogy was based on the kind of life timetable, propinquity and mutuality that embedded story times, and satisfied mutual desire to tell and to hear stories, and for the peculiar intimacy of those roles especially in the hearth family.
Stories express the complementary adult-child pedagogic relationship described in chapter 9: children demand stories [JB: 43] and adults reciprocally want to tell them stories [JD: 4].

Stories built learning on two core aspects of childhood learning: the universal desire to repeat enjoyed experience, and childhood capacity for memorisation:

*Ri: They were our favourite stories, our stories, the two boys who killed their grandfather's dog, and that other one about Yirrbadbad, the other one who burned them all, the little one who played all the time. The one about Namorrorddo who fought with the baby stealer, lots of stories. And nowadays I tell these stories to Desmond, and whenever they get those Ngalkangila kids from Goulburn Island, I tell them those stories. Those kids who live here, R__, N__, and there's K____, the older ones I tell the stories to. And that D___ always wants that story about Namorrorddo - where they had the fight, and the baby was stolen. That's his Favourite. [RN: 156]*

Telling and listening to stories, teaching through and learning through stories, was a feature of daily family relationships, so repetition and warm association with the storytellers ensured thorough, holistic learning.

12.6.2 Theoretical Postscript and Scope for Further Research

12.6.2.1 Oral Memory and Stories

It is beyond our scope here to relate Kunwinjku preference for narrative to any general theory about the potency of narrative and song as instructional devices. Kunwinjku pride and competence in oral memory skills had a pedagogic focus (11.2.3). The loss of the body of remembered texts and its exclusively oral mode of transmission may have implications for the way children handle and store learning in non-narrative domains. The loss of capacity for oral memorisation, or its lack of training in childhood may impact later learning, for example in school.

12.6.2.2 Narrative Theory and Kunwinjku Stories

There is an as yet unresolved issue about how to approach Kunwinjku stories which can only be briefly discussed in thesis. Are Kunwinjku stories purely functional, and if so, what are their functions? Carroll (1995, pp. 344-345) discussed the Berndt’s understanding that Kunwinjku oral literature transmitted authoritative propositional truth and practical survival knowledge. This may be saying no more than that narrative intentions reflected general pedagogic intentions.
However, narrative has a potent pedagogic function in both these broad content areas. Whether participants were conscious of the efficiency of stories in pedagogy or not, they provide a unique tool in pedagogy by allowing vicarious participation in things dangerous or for which the learner is still unprepared. Narrative has the capacity to teach by example, through narrated encounters with morally bad behaviour or with mistakes in survival skills and social conflict, with all their unwanted consequences, allowing childhood preparation for real encounters.

Bruner (1996) has more recently discussed what he called “the narrative construal of reality” (pp. 130f) suggesting a further role for narrative pedagogy, pointing out the particular role of narrative in the formation of identity as opposed to other kinds of learning: “It is through our narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (p. xiv)

This reflects some of what the Kunwinjku people have said in giving stories such significant status. If we also take from the Kunwinjku data the notion of the stories as a community (or familial) treasure trove of shared enjoyment, exemplic behaviour, history and vicarious experiences, we can suggest the function of Kunwinjku narrative is to provide the internalised, automatic models on which personal life decisions and behaviours are built, consciously or not, in emulation of the story tellers as much as of characters in the stories.

Beyond thinking in terms of the function of stories, there is the obvious enjoyment associated with narrative, and this too begs more exploration beyond our scope here. The loss of that kind of intimately situated enjoyment may be the most tangible of the problematic changes in recent decades. If there is no remembered enjoyed fellowship associated with learning from other Kunwinjku people, a loss of personal self-esteem and optimism may be unavoidable in any other learning environment.

12.6.3 Links to Other Chapters
I have discussed Kunwinjku use of narrative as a core pedagogy, and the way this pedagogy and the oral texts it teaches have been impacted by the Balanda world in general and through interaction with the School. In the next chapter I will discuss the role of the School more generally in Kunwinjku life and the way Kunwinjku people have adapted themselves and their pedagogic practices to this significant presence in their lives.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN
THE SCHOOL IN KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY
Chapter Thirteen: The School in Kunwinjku Pedagogy

CHAPTER 13: THE SCHOOL IN KUNWINJKU PEDAGOGY

13.1. THE SCHOOL IN KUNWINJKU LIFE

13.1.1 Scope and Limitation of this Chapter

Kunwinjku people have had a long experience of school. It has made a significant impact on Kunwinjku ideas and practice, necessitating a complex discussion in this chapter. The topic was touched upon by most informants in various ways, and therefore emerges at some stage in most of the chapters in this thesis. I will focus my discussion in this chapter on the following broad questions. What do Kunwinjku people say and think about school? How do Kunwinjku people relate school-based pedagogy to their own pedagogy? I will report on my own observations of Kunwinjku children in and out of school to complement adult interviews. These are significant constraints to the discussion, given the fact that school has been the locus of almost all the research on indigenous pedagogy reported in chapter three. To some extent this chapter provides triangulation for that corpus, but also explores two under-researched areas:

[1] Research on school in Aboriginal communities has generally overlooked the significant role played by Aboriginal community members teaching and working in the school, and how this shapes interactions between community and the school and their mutual expectations. A number of my informants have been teachers or worked in other roles in the school, and I will give some space to their views, as well as reporting what other Kunwinjku people have said about them. I will argue that there is no necessary dissonance between Kunwinjku and school pedagogies, and that problems in the school are due largely to the way the whole of the *Balanda* world interacts with the whole of Kunwinjku society.

[2] I will also argue that the nature of the pathological autonomy of Kunwinjku children has become one of the most significant factors operating in school-based pedagogy.

13.1.2 “School” in Previous Chapters

School has emerged as a multifaceted issue in previous chapters:

- The pedagogy of the Old People is considered as analogous to that of the school as to content, methodology and pedagogic authority (7.3.2) but the school threatened to displace them in these roles, along with the routines of pre contact life that allowed and demanded their teaching.
• school and schooling provoked necessary analogies with aspects of pedagogy in Ceremony (8.2.3) and the Law (9.7.4).
• The pressure from the Balanda world forced a re-analysis of the Kunwinjku curriculum, with ideas like “Both Ways” learning, Literacy and Bicultural Curricula supported by Kunwinjku people as tactics against the threatened displacement of their pedagogy by the school (9.7.5 – 9.7.7).
• Kunwinjku teaching methods were described in chapters eleven and twelve, with some indications of their involvement with school. This raises the question of whether there is any significant difference between Kunwinjku and school pedagogy and whether these differences are resolvable as children move between the two systems of teaching and learning.

13.1.3 School-Based Learning and Kunwinjku Pedagogy
I have discussed some possible points of difference between hearth family and school pedagogies in chapters eleven and twelve:
• The larger size of the instructional group (11.1.2) and the necessarily more diffused forms of personal scaffolding (11.2.4) are significant structural issues impacting teacher-student relationships in the school.
• The school prefers an in vitro approach, in contrast to the in vivo locus of Kunwinjku non-school pedagogy (11.2.4).
• Schoolteachers may misread “helping” interactions between learners (11.2.5.2) which express relational networks outside the school, but also some present day social pathology, also invisible to non-Kunwinjku school staff.
• The school system may use questioning in its methodology differently from Kunwinjku practice (11.2.7).
• In chapter twelve I discussed how the school’s self-appointed role in cultural maintenance focused on Kunwinjku narratives, which may have led to unplanned and serious damage to its objects (12.5.4), suggesting limits to the usefulness of the school as an instrument in Kunwinjku hands, and setting the scene for a discussion of Kunwinjku views on the problematic nature of school generally.

On the face of it, none of these features should make school pedagogy unworkable for Kunwinjku children. The broad approaches to method summarised in chapter eleven are fundamentally similar to the teaching practices brought to the school (even though Balanda may teach in English and sometimes use specific techniques
for implementing pre-packaged teaching schemes). When Kunwinjku parents talk about their own teaching methods, they invariably describe practices seen in at least some Balanda schools in the last century. (The question of relating Kunwinjku views to a universal pedagogy is taken up in chapter fourteen.)

If there is scope for methodological adaptation, are there yet insurmountable difficulties posed by the school’s different curriculum? I have already noted (9.7.4-5) that Kunwinjku people accept in principle that there is new curriculum to learn, and I will argue in this chapter that they regard accepting the Balanda curriculum as part of their accommodation of the school and its demands. (I will discuss at 13.5.2 the prospects for a locally negotiated bicultural curriculum and the way the school’s bilingual programme depended ultimately on Kunwinjku aspirations.)

If curriculum and methodology are in principle adjustable to, or at least negotiable in, the school, what about the Kunwinjku expectation that pedagogy will be a function of relationship? Can children construct, manage themselves and learn from Balanda teachers, or from Bininj staff in the school environment? Harris (1990, p.37) has summed up what my theorisation of Kunwinjku pedagogy predicts as the central issue in school pedagogy: Can a child switch between learning from relatives who teach you certain things as part of what Harris called a "nurturance" relationship, as these naturally fit into the cycle of Kunwinjku life, to learning in an artificial environment which takes place in isolation from, or is merely parallel to, cycles of community life, and is mediated by people who have no other relationship with the student? I will argue in this chapter that children do manage to set up relationships with Balanda teachers, but that these are sometimes only apparently pedagogic relationships. I will suggest that children are motivated to these relationships in search of substitute nurturers or as providers of security in other ways, apart from any pedagogic interests.

In conclusion, I will suggest that the school only has a limited range of ways to interact pedagogically with Kunwinjku children, and that neither school-based nor hearth family-based Kunwinjku pedagogies are any longer working effectively, leaving Kunwinjku children as the sole significant, active stakeholders in their own education.
13.2 SCHOOL AS A FACT OF KUNWINJUKU LIFE

13.2.1 Talking About “School”

Kunwinjku people talk and think about the school constantly. It is a major venue for Kunwinjku life experience, one of the largest employers of Kunwinkju people in the community, and one of the largest groups of Balanda living and working in the community. Most children attend it at least sporadically, and its annual cycle of special events attracts attendance by a majority of adults at most occasions, such as the annual school concert, the school’s “Culture Week” or visits by entertainers to the school. The school has been the focus of considerable research attention by Balanda, some of which will be addressed in this chapter. However, my principle concern is to follow what I can see of a Kunwinjku agenda in talking about school. To a large extent that agenda is self-analytical and self-critical. Their comments also reveal the extent to which their shared encounters with school provide discursive resources, and immediate motivation for discussing pedagogy.

The use of school as an analogy for Ceremony and Law has been discussed at 7.3.2, 8.2.3 and 9.7.4. Kunwinjku people rely on their long, shared experience of schooling and its connotations to discuss a range of issues in pedagogy. For example when AN described the Old Peoples’ pedagogy as “like school” [AN: 5], he immediately proceeds to describe his hearth family learning as a kind of parallel “school”, drawing attention to the clear differences between the actual school and its Kunwinjku analog:

> So when we were growing up it was like we used to go to school. That school had the real Law. They used to teach us how to go fishing, to make fishing spears, shovel nosed spears for hunting and spearing kangaroo, and the djalakirradj spear was for fishing [AN: 6].

MM makes a similar comparison as part of a theme in both his interviews. Whilst he asserts both kinds of school as necessary and authoritative, MM implies a hierarchy, where the hearth family valorises the school, but only as a pragmatic necessity:

> Mother, father they did that, they sent me. They send you when you (s) go to school. That's good. Balanda business teaches you something very good, so you (s) will go along and master what that White business says. It's doing...So, it teaches like mother, father. The same as when we Aborigines talk about things. We discuss it with each other; we are just the same as that. (The) Balanda when he does it, he talks with the child. A father talks with the child, or a
mother talks with it. It's just the same. However, on our part, we don't really grasp the White business. No. In order to function well, you really need to know both. They are teaching you so you know our own Law. [MM: 3]

MM in fact has a well worked out theory about the way school articulates with Kunwinjku pedagogy. His views as a senior traditional owner and intellectual leader are relevant here, and I summarise them as follows:

MM describes school as a parallel, synchronous and complementary source of learning and implies an obligation on the learner inseparable from and similar to the other demands made on Kunwinjku learners within their own pedagogy. He then relies on the authority associated with the Balanda school to encourage a parallel respect for teaching and learning in the Kunwinjku sphere:

*Nowadays, well what you children are doing, you call it "school". In fact we all say the same thing. We however, we Black people say "We are teaching you, which is what educates you and teaches you." Well, English says "It's this school that educates you." Why use the word "school"? school educates you and teaches you Law. That's why we say, we on our part say (the Law) is teaching us. You must teach - oh, teach like school! I mean our own language, which you must teach!"* [MM: 14]

MM’s doctrine of respect for learning and obeying the Law (noted for example at 9.4.1) is carried over to a respect for learning from school. He argues here that school teaches the parallel Balanda Law, with authority parallel to the hearth family:

*When in English you (s) say "Law", we say "kunkarre". Don't joke about it when you go to school to be taught. The Law instructs you as it talks to you. Don't take that message lightly or treat it as a joke. We ourselves say that White business is teaching you. In fact, that Law explains things to you (s) in the same way as Aboriginal people explain things, your father, mother, grandfather, grandparents or those you call your great-grandparents. I call all that the Law. Your mother speaks the truth when she said, "You (s) go (to school)".* [MM: 2]

MM regards the idea of school as a sufficiently understood and potent domain to inspire learning of higher language skills in a way analogous to formal schooling when he addresses young men, using school to imply the whole process of linguistic socialisation:
Kundebi, when you start using it as you talk, we would say - as English says - you are starting to do the Law. That is our Aboriginal "school". It's just like that when we teach you too. [MM: 6-7]

While MM clearly argues for the need to master both school and its Kunwinjku analog, he feels it necessary to argue in defence of the Kunwinjku “school”, urging learners to take it equally as seriously as they must also take the Balanda world. He does this by subtly invoking the power he assumes his listeners will associate with the Balanda school and its “Law”:

But this other thing I will talk about so you will know: you must learn when we teach you children. I have already talked about before, about school. When we're teaching you, it's "school". It's true...This (Law) is not a joke we are teaching you, it's school that educates you. We say we are teaching you; Balanda call it "school", which teaches you Balanda (Law) You must really believe that Law you are hearing, that school where we are teaching you. [MM: 9]

He associates the school with the Balanda Law, and assumes that Balanda will be its teachers, and apparently accepts the need to learn the Balanda curriculum as part of Kunwinjku life. Nevertheless, he sometimes uses “school” without necessarily having its Balanda roots in mind, to mean “education” - the whole process of moral and cultural learning of a person regardless of the distinct domains of Law to be mastered. “School” is merely whichever vehicle teaches the Law:

So now, when (your) mother and father tell you plainly, you (s) must understand it, you must take hold of it! That's the one that educates you and teaches you - that's the school. I mean your father, your grandparents, your mother's uncle, and the school that educates you in the Balanda (way). [MM: 26]

In each of MM constructs, he reflects the general Kunwinjku view that school-based learning should be respected out of necessity. It is interesting that in almost every case it is an item in the Kunwinjku world that is compared with school, rather than the reverse, inviting the speculation that Kunwinjku thinking about school is motivated by a desire to buttress their own analogous school. These analogies may therefore reflect a deep tension. If (Balanda) schooling is thought of as similar in status, power and instructional demandingness to Kunwinjku pedagogy, it must also have the capacity to displace it, potentially threatening not just the hearth family.
pedagogy but Kunwinjku Law and Ceremony, through competition for the time needed, and through exposure to a growing range of non-Kunwinjku thinking. So there is a dangerous potency recognised in the way the word “school” is used.

13.2.2 Strategies for Living with School

The incursion of the Balanda world has continued to compel adaptive responses from Kunwinjku people as they interact with its various structures. From the first encounter with school in the missionary era (2.4.2) Kunwinjku families have adapted themselves to its demands, constantly preferring strategies of accommodation rather than direct resistance or appropriation.

Over this period the Balanda world has increased its pressure on Kunwinjku life, and memories of earlier, more manageable, interactions with school have been replaced with serious concerns about its impact on Kunwinjku life generally, and especially the capacity for Kunwinjku people to maintain an independent pedagogy outside the school. Older Kunwinjku people who discuss school take a long view, comparing their remembered childhood school experiences in the “golden era” (5.6) with contemporary practice. This data should be taken seriously for a number of reasons. Interviewees have provided sufficient detail to disallow the facile response that this is simply a disappointed nostalgia, associated with the remembered Golden Age. Their comments also provide local exemplification of and triangulation with the data cited in chapter 3 about the general failure of mainstream schools in indigenous communities.

13.2.3 Accommodating the Demands Made by the Balanda School

I noted in chapter 8 the time demands of Ceremony, and the diurnal timetable of the hearth family (6.1.7), which accommodated each other. The school’s arrival intruded another, irresistible demand, and required a radical adjustment of daily routines, demanding a significant proportion of daylight hours, and even putting pressure on the Kunwinjku seasonal timetable, creating the unprecedented phenomenon of “holidays” for children, which some families used for accelerated teaching of the Kunwinjku curriculum of field skills [RN: 5]. These time demands also complicated decisions about protracted teaching at Ceremony (see discussion at 8.2.4). Given this need to digest the “otherness” of the early days of schooling and teachers, it is remarkable that any sort of rapprochement was achieved. Even allowing for the effect of some nostalgia in recalling this era, interviewees provide evidence that the school operated an acceptable working relationship with Kunwinjku people.
There is evidence that adaptation in the earlier history of the school reflected its more intimate involvement with Kunwinkju community life. The Old People were involved (7.3.4):

_They (the elders) used to come there when I was at school, this was in my school days....The elders used to come and be there for us, not only did they teach us about spears, bark painting, making fire, tracking animals...but we also went the right way. They used to teach us the right thing to do: they would say to us, "Don't argue with each other - that's wrong." ...Those elders used to do that back then.... [GW: 10]_

The presence of the Old People may have been the crucial factor in the better behaviour and lack of teasing many adults associate with school in an earlier generation [BG: 69].

Another factor in the better school behaviour remembered may have been a generally greater level of what JB recalls as a high level of intimacy between school teachers and children, and a less distinct border between Kunwinjku and _Balanda_ teachers, and presumably allowing children to form relationships with teachers that children perceived as authorised by Kunwinjku adults:

_Yes. Sometimes the teachers didn't hit us, but Aboriginal people did, sometimes parents... When we were children the teachers used to take us on holidays - it could have been to the waterfall or other places. They used to take us and the teachers would probably learn about our ways. Now this doesn't happen - the children only know about school and then they just stay at home...They just take them for excursions and that's it. [JB: 41]_

JB’s recollections are of a smaller more cohesive community generally, although it was still the practice in the late 1970s for teachers to spend a week with their class on protracted “bush excursions”. NN remembers the intimate connection between the manner of the _Balanda_ teachers, and the (then) Kunwinjku lifestyle:

_Oh, who were those Balanda here then? We didn't have any building like now. They would build shade shelters and that's where we used to go to school. And the Balanda used to live in a house, with a dining room, and we had school in there, and they would teach us. And in that building just here. [NN: 20]_

In another recollection from the same era, EM (41) and NN describe a high level of intimacy between community and school, where even corporal punishment seems to have been accepted within a generally accepted relationship of care:
They didn't get angry with us... Sometimes, when there were no teachers, the nursing sister would teach us - here where they used to work at the old hospital. One sister used to come and teach us. She would have to go and then another sister would teach us, and that one, if we were silly, she used to hit us. This was here. [NN: 28]

Kunwinjku people seem to have positive memories of school despite punishment and the tougher school environment [JD2: 4] and its association with that era’s moral rigor (that may be more attractive in retrospect), for example,

Well, what did they think? When that, what is it, missionary school, started, the missionaries taught the people at school. It was very strict. That school back then, the old school. So you didn't go and steal things, but the missionaries just gave people food, they brought it out and gave them. There wasn't any stealing. [AN: 91]

In fact one of the most complex adjustments faced by Kunwinjku people since the first Balanda contact has been the change from a small, stable staff of missionaries, who shared with the Old People an insistence on moral rectitude, to a much larger and more variable, shorter term Balanda staff whose personal morality often shocks Kunwinjku people, and has significant implications for relationships with them. This is particularly true in the school where the high rate of staff turnover typical of schools in similar communities (NTDE, 1999, p. 75f.) adds a further barrier to developing collegiality or even forming workable mutual expectations. In the absence of real personal knowledge, both sides tend to analyse each other as typical specimens, and then go on to fulfil each other’s expectations.

BG (like NN above) accepts the tough discipline in the school in previous years, reflecting the generally rigorous discipline in other areas of life:

When we went to school, they mixed us together. We were there in a group together. Yes, when we went to school, it was as a group. But, because we had rules we didn't tease each other. [SE: It was strict?] Yes, it was strict. It was very tough; we had strict rules when I went to school. We used to mix in together going to school, but we didn't muck around or argue with each other. We didn't call names. [BG: 69]

BG notes here the enforced grouping together that was part of school. PS (7) and JN (22) both remember their mixed feelings as they confronted not just an alien language but the sudden involuntary association with children from other clan groups.
and families – a challenge they faced in common with children in schools universally. In the case of Kunwinjku children this social shock is magnified by its suddenness and its isolation from the hearth family. The gradual expansion of childhood experience of other Kunwinjku families, clans and beyond, which characterised pre-contact life, was displaced by a school experience which was not under the hearth family’s control, but more importantly, mediated by people who were not only beyond family control, but were alien in speech, intention and perceived power. This may have been a much greater challenge for children in the past than more recently as the school has become a longer term and more “known” environment within Kunwinjku life.

Despite this, the Kunwinjku community seems not only to have adapted and managed, but to have utilised school better then than now. There was even an attempt to balance the times needed for both pedagogies, with some absenteeism legitimised, and the coexistence of two disciplinary systems that applied to children depending on venue:

> At that time people didn't often go to school. Sometimes they would spend three months at the ceremonial site, in the Ceremony. They would go right through with that until it finished. And back in those days school children didn't smoke tobacco. Their teachers used to stop them doing that. They could only go on smoking in their own homes. And also, they used to teach them English when they went to school, and about Aboriginal things, our (inc) Aboriginal people's things. [RN: 4]

If adults sent their children, and they attended, despite the harsher disciplines and the alien language, it must have been because of the nature of the relationships formed between stakeholders, which embedded the discipline, allowing it to be received as part of a sense of alliance with the school group of children and the teachers. Punishment could even have affirmed in the child’s mind, the complicated alliance with teachers and other children, and may have been therefore positively relational, particularly in earlier decades when physical punishment was valued as part of the pedagogy of Ceremony. But there were other aspects to the bonding process between school and children.

DM recalls a paternalistic system where Balanda (in this case missionaries) supported children’s attendance by providing food and clothing:
But we always used to go to school. We had two old ladies who would cook the food: Ngalwakadj and Ngalkangila. They worked there, cooking our food - breakfast, dinner and supper that we used to eat, us school kids. Yes, and they used to do the washing, washing our dirty clothes. They did the washing. But we had a second uniform. We would wear one uniform and when we came to shower, we would change into the other uniform and go to school. We used to eat breakfast, dinner and supper and then go home. Yes. We did. That's how we always ate. [DM: 6]

Perhaps the benevolent nature of this paternalistic intervention contributed to a devaluation of the hearth family pedagogy in the minds of children, particularly when parents too were recipients of Balanda giving. The Balanda world began to replace them as nurturers as well as teachers of their children. Although the dormitories were closed (after the problems discussed by EM passim), the capacity and willingness of the Balanda to pursue their “super parent” roles must have undermined the self-image of parents as key stakeholders, as discussed in more detail at (13.6.1) below. However, some parents have been proactive in managing the unavoidably dualistic nature of their children’s learning, for example, re-organising their timetable to include both schooling and their own home based curriculum, although the emphasis in the hearth family now may well be more recreational than instructional given the limited blocks of time available:

- So, that's what we are teaching our (inc) children. This is at home, I mean on the weekends. On Saturdays and Sundays. We (inc) teach them. We go hunting so they can do whatever they should to cook and cut up (the animals). [RN: 77]

- When it was, I mean... When it was coming up to Christmas time, when it was nearly the start of the wet season, when (school) finished, ah, I mean when they were finishing school, at that stage they used to take them off on long trips. They didn't just have them here at home. They would take them and teach them hunting. They would do that until school was nearly about to start again, and then they used to come back. [RN: 5]

Accommodating the school has been, for some families, a balancing act. In more recent times, JM, reflecting his general concern to incorporate Balanda material into his children’s curriculum has tried to organise a learning timetable for his children to
allow them continuity and access to both schooling and their grandfather’s
(Mawah’s) story telling and moral teaching:

But those kids of mine are all going. They like school. They really like it very
much. They want to learn Balanda stuff, but then still come back, and that old
man, their Mawah still talks to them and tells them stories about Aboriginal
things about our (inc) Aboriginal culture. He's their Mawah and they still come
back after school and we (exc) go and we take the kids to that old man, and he
tells them stories. [JM: 18]

The school has also worked on balancing its demands with a perception that their
task would be facilitated by supporting Kunwinjku pedagogic and social
relationships within its boundaries. There has always been an accepted presence of
Kunwinjku adults in the school: R and N remember some of the “old people”
teaching there in the 1950s and 1960s [RN: 91]. GW (11) says elders were involved
in teaching some Kunwinjku material in the school. The way in which Kunwinjku
people regard school as a domain for the exercise of their own pedagogy is a major
theme throughout the following discussions, and I will need to explore the way this
is a product of how Kunwinjku people think of themselves in relation to school.

Their behaviour in association with school provokes some questions about
what kind of accommodation is being made of the school. During my six years on
the staff I observed the school make decisions that were problematic for Kunwinjku
people, but which Kunwinjku people accepted without any obvious response in the
presence of Balanda school staff: for example, the previous practice of gender
separated post-primary classes has been abandoned then restored several times as
Balanda staff have turned over rapidly in the last decades. Other items that were
simply accepted by Kunwinjku staff despite the strong views they would discuss
among themselves, included: the way children are seated in classrooms regardless of
kinship complexities; the use of a bewildering and unexplained variety of teaching
methodologies in each subject area; the automatic assumption by inexperienced
Balanda staff of leadership roles in the school and classroom; the failure of the
Balanda staff to learn even simple social terms in Kunwinjku to address staff or
children. What Kunwinjku view of themselves, the Balanda and of the school allows
this kind of passivity? Although their criticisms of school are almost never about
academic failure or cultural irrelevance, they certainly have critical views about
many issues in the school yet they continue to acquiesce when confronted by
Balanda staff decisions.

13.2.4 Perceptions of School Failure
There is general community awareness that times have changed since the fondly
remembered missionary era. GW reflects recent general community pessimism about
the school and its link to the death of the Old People’s generation:

Nowadays I just don't see this happen at school, as I used to see it before. There
are some Aboriginal people, elders, now, who are interested in teaching. Like
what used to happen when we went to school. They used to come and teach us the
dances, so we could dance. And the women used to come and teach them their
stuff, how to collect pandanus and make dilly bags. And it was the same with us.
Those people, who taught us, well, they are all gone, finished. [GW: 7]

Kunwinjku people sometimes compare the present day unfavourably with their own
childhood memories. AN, for example, recalls that community members and school
staff operated as parallel pedagogic authorities:

Nowadays that Bininj business only happens to a limited extent. And some of
what we do now is Balanda stuff - jobs, money, whereas before we had no
money, or only a little bit. The old people used to get a little bit of food for free,
what they call "rations", that's what we used to eat. So I went to school to learn
Yiwarrudj (formal Law), and sometimes we went in the afternoons down to the
billabong, fishing. We used to watch the old people using fishing nets.
Sometimes they used to take us and we would go hunting for animals. [AN: 3]

13.2.5 Resistance or Adaptation as Responses to School?
We must assume that Kunwinjku people operated their pedagogy to their
satisfaction, and that it mostly “worked” even if in a largely unanalysed way,
automatically. The turbulence induced with the arrival of the Balanda and the
introduction of school must have forced people to think about the nature of
childhood learning and the roles of children and adults in teaching and learning, if
not for the first time, at least in a very acute way. They may have considered
resistance to this formidable incursion, but I have heard no statement about this
despite frequent hostile and resistant statements made by Kunwinjku people about
other Balanda entities. MM has made the clearest comment on the colossal nature of
Kunwinjku concessions to the Balanda world, especially in the way parents have
accommodated the school in an irresponsible way. Instead of a stance of resistance, MM implies an unconditional surrender of parental responsibility

Yes. There was no school. A long time before that, they used to explain the Law to them: "Don't go and steal." "Don't go and take things." Or, "What are you up to?" They warned them about wrong. Then, later, Balanda people arrived and made a school. [Missionaries?] Yeah. The Aboriginal people way back then said, "Ah, that's it! All right then. Why not let's send them to the Balanda people." So, we took them to school. But the parents did not think about something else: in that matter they didn't say, "Hang on, it's up to me to teach (my child) so he will know." No, they just went along to them said to (the children), "Yes, that's settled, you (s) enrol." So we put them there and it's teaching them the White way, and that's okay. But they should have thought back at the start, and taught them language too; those people back then, the parents, our people. And thus explained things to them, while they were with them, and told them things. Those people long ago, should have explained it to them, told them about it. So of course some lost the Law, they didn't hang on to it firmly. [MM: 19-20]

The response of other traditional Aboriginal communities to school has been described as a kind of passive cultural resistance. I will discuss at (13.5.2-4) the need expressed by some informants for Kunwinjku people to ensure their own pedagogy is not forgotten simply because children are learning at school, but this is not resistant so much as accommodative behaviour. Folds (1987) argued resistance as an appropriate label for the activities of Pintupi children in school contexts that prevent school pedagogy functioning, but assigns this label no matter what conscious motivations are involved (for example pp. 42 and 66). There is no evidence of a conscious stance of cultural resistance among Kunwinjku people. This issue is complicated however. Children sometimes act in difficult ways at school and their motivation is not obvious to Balanda staff. For example, both Balanda and Kunwinjku teachers report Kunwinjku children can be very difficult to manage and sometimes violent in classrooms, yet they demonstrate friendliness outside the classroom and particularly away from the school to the same teachers. So what is going on? The children can apparently set up a good personal relationship with Balanda teachers, but without either side seeing it or managing it as an effective pedagogic relationship. Neither teachers nor children know what this might entail. If
this response is a kind of unconscious resistance, it is similar to the way Kunwinjku people interact with the clinic, the local council or any other Balanda structure. None of these are articulated by Kunwinjku people as sites of resistance or contest, at least not a contest between Balanda and Kunwinjku laws or social groups, yet the operations of these sites often involves strong confrontations between Balanda and Kunwinjku individuals who may be on reasonably friendly terms outside the institution. It is the issue of what motivates Kunwinjku approaches to the school, and what they see as its resource usefulness, and how successful they feel they have been in operating relationships within the school, which has been the subject of most of their comments about it.

13.2.6 Responding to the Threatened Displacement of Kunwinjku Pedagogy

Whether resistance was seen as futile, or the school was viewed as a resource to be adapted and used, there is a strong Kunwinjku view that whilst the school must be given its place there is a corresponding obligation to insist on a balance, to protect the loss of Kunwinjku learning. Some of the interviewees reveal a sharp awareness of the threat of displacement of Kunwinjku learning by the school. MM and JD have both been explicit about this risk, and the deep responsibility of Kunwinjku families to teach their own Kunwinjku curriculum:

- So when he goes to the Balanda (school), where he will listen to Balanda. Fine. If he works hard and writes English well, he goes through to high school, but he has his father's teaching too. But not if the father doesn't teach him. Then (he'll have) nothing. Our Law he won't understand properly. Nothing. Maybe that Kunwinjku (child) will go to high school - that little boy, a young man. A Balanda will say to him, "You've been to school so off you go to High school?" He keeps going there, keeps on with it, and learns Balanda. So he just keeps going along that way, he keeps going there, until at the end, he's got nothing. He looks back, and, no, he's missed our Aboriginal Law. The Aboriginal Law. That's the way I see it. Now I've told you how I see this. [MM2: 57]
- Yes, it's good. We discuss things like to do with the young blokes attending school. There are two systems: when those young blokes go to school, and also the young ladies going too - there are two systems they follow: one Black, one White. That's the issue. There isn't just one way that they follow, just the Balanda way. But they should learn the other, our own Aboriginal
system. That's what we talk about. And parents need to try and raise them with both. They should teach them. Both systems. They should learn to want both Black and White Law. They shouldn't just go to school and learn the one

MM and JN are both regarded by the Kunwinjku community as senior traditional owners and both are respected for their outspokenness on public issues. Yet their comments reveal both have conceded the ineluctable nature of school demands. They have faced the question of whether the school is invasive or beneficial, and decided, as most Kunwinjku people have, that the question now is not how to counteract it but to how live with it in some way that protects their own “school”. JM for example, describes an approach intended to achieve this balance:

I teach them Balanda and Aboriginal things. I teach them our own culture, and about Balanda people, the Balanda system. They'll know that as they grow up, they'll know two ways: Balanda, Aboriginal. We don't just teach them the Balanda way. Or they'd grow up only going along the Balanda way, and they'd forget our own Aboriginal way. We must teach them two ways: our own culture, and they do the Balanda way at school. They learn about two ways. They can go along the Balanda way if they go to school, that's the Balanda way. They would grow up knowing Balanda, but they would just forget our culture. They just wouldn't know it any more. But if we teach them both, Balanda, Aboriginal, when they grow up they will know Aboriginal and Balanda ways. They would then know both. [JM: 7]

MM has conceded some advantage in school based learning of Kunwinjku literacy as a new part of the Law, but this too needs to be consciously subjugated to Ceremonial learning:

You young men, the Law, well you must know it and understand it. That's why you go ahead and learn to write, but then you come back to go to Ceremony when they summon you. [MM2: 5]

He is explicit about the responsibility on the learner to preserve the priority and continuity of Kunwinjku Law while necessarily learning through the school:

You young men, don't break the Law. You (s) go to school. Maybe you know that way. You must go to both. Don't just go one way. You go to both so you'll know. Really get hold of Balanda (Law) and our Aboriginal (Law). [MM2: 9]
RN addresses adults as teachers, arguing the same chronological order implied by JM (7) above, and MM, should be imposed in brokering the child’s learning, allowing both school and Kunwinjku learning but ordered intentionally to safeguard the priority of the Kunwinjku Law:

When they're older we (inc) teach them (Aboriginal things), when they're becoming adults. They want (people) to teach them but they'll get too scared when they're only small, maybe 12, 13, 14, 15 or maybe 16. With my kids, I want them to keep going (to school) so they will really learn Balanda things, and then later our Aboriginal things, so ours would be after (school). They would forget it if they did it first then went through and were taught the Balanda side. [RN: 173]

Regardless of argument as to which order would best achieve this goal, and as to whether anyone is in fact capable in the years available of learning all of both Kunwinjku and Balanda Laws, JD implies the battle for balance may have been lost already:

I say that because those mothers don't know about bush tucker, they didn't learn about it when they were young people. Those mothers went to school too. They don't know. They know a bit, but they don't really know enough about how to get bush tucker. [So they would go hungry?] Yes, a child might for example have gone to school, they used to go back then, [Yes, okay.] but a child born nowadays? Well, people don't teach their own children. They just don't know about food from the bush. ... All this bush tucker, we just don't know, we didn't go and learn about it. We (exc) didn't eat it. So now we (inc) just go along with the Balanda way here, and you learn that. [JD: 78]

13.2.7 Kunwinjku Rationales and Motivations for Pedagogy in School.

Regardless of what has motivated Kunwinjku accommodation to the school, there are some commonly expressed rationales, usually revealed when a parent or Kunwinjku teacher is trying to motivate children’s attendance or improve their school behaviour. Several interviewees have articulated views that are often heard in Kunwinjku discussion about school. GN discusses her rationale for sending children to school:

school, well, that's about White business. In the early days we used to go - when the missionaries, as they called them, had arrived. Our mothers and fathers used to put us there. So we went to school. They used to say to us, "It's settled. You just go so you will know that White business, so you can read
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everything." So we went all the time. And it's still the same now. We (inc) tell the children, "I'm telling you to go to school so you will know things, so you will learn about the Law of those White people. Because those White people have a lot of Law." And that is specifically why we want to arrange for our children go to school. [GN: 6]

BG declares parents have a responsibility to motivate children to attend and to learn at school, even proposing an obligation on senior adults to support school:

But what you're talking about - well some of them just let (the children) hang around at home. But if they're hanging around at home, it would good if the older people get them and teach them and explain things to them. They could explain to them what school is all about. And this school - it's important for us to go and learn. For us to learn so we will know what is right to do in the Balanda context. [BG: 66]

BG may be reflecting here her brief but positive experience as a boarding school student in Darwin, which she analysed in retrospect as allowing her to at least navigate if not participate in the Balanda universe away from the Kunwinkju environment [BG: 12-13].

MM still associates the school with its initial missionary era purpose of teaching Christianity and general morality [MM2: 86], but his other statements, above, show he accepts that it now teaches a less defined, general Balanda Law, and he not only concedes its existence, but insists children must learn it. Kunwinjku people invariably support the notion that children must learn through the school how to operate in, and how to understand the Balanda world. Invariably, parents comment on their own failure to achieve this, and hope explicitly for better outcomes for their children. DM’s view is representative:

Balanda are experts. Balanda and Aboriginal should join together to teach them. So they'll learn well. What the old people used to say to us is, "You go to school. We didn't go ourselves. We were born in the bush and just grew up our own way. We want you younger generation to go and learn so you can write for us, and speak English. You can interpret for us when we don't understand."

That's what they told us. [DM: 61]

Parents quite often say they want the school to teach their child English, by which I think they mean more than the language. Kunwinjku self-deprecation about English is usually accompanied by some anecdote about having failed to understand some
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aspect of the Balanda system, of which spoken English is merely the most immediately obvious difficulty

13.2.8 Perceptions of School, Children and Employment

Apart from the strong association with learning how to cope in a general way with the Balanda world, and especially learning to speak its language, there is a strong association in Kunwinjku thinking between school and employment. However, there are two problematic aspects to the way Kunwinjku people make this association. Firstly, the worsening lack of employment (other than “work for the dole” programmes) now means most schoolchildren have parents who have never been employed and who do not actively motivate their children in terms of prospective careers. Secondly, there is some evidence that school is understood as a kind of workplace for children, without any analysis of what is to be produced, or what kind of work this entails. The school, seen in this way as an end in itself, provides minimal motivation to either children or parents who have no experience of the workplace as complementary motivation, as was the case in a previous generation. Both these associations with employment need further discussion.

JB retrospectively assigns a very direct pragmatic role for the school, suggesting the Balanda economy demanded children fit in as prospective employees, and revealing a strong link in his thinking between English skills and employability:

_Maybe only the Balanda introduced that, maybe they didn’t go to school like we do now, but they just did what we used to do. Right back then, to start with, children only this high [[Indicates with hand a child's height in early teens.]] would get jobs and for that it was just English, they just taught them English so they could maybe do the work. [JB: 35]_

ED implied the role of school as an entrée to employment [ED: 55] though her concern was more about the way Balanda people are taking jobs previously available to Bininji. No other informants noted this, although some explicitly regretted the loss of an employment ethic they remember from the missionary era. This is not surprising given the virtually full employment provided in those decades, and the rapidity of change to the present system where mainstream job advertisement procedures and qualifications exclude Kunwinjku people from jobs their fathers and mothers had. Rather than spur them to any commitment to school, the suddenness of the change may have left them unable to see the connection with school. Since the pattern now is that Balanda people get the jobs because of their English literacy and
other school based qualifications, simply being *Balanda appears* to Kunwinjku people to be the prerequisite, which leads not to school but only to despair.

I have never heard any Kunwinjku adult use the link between school and employment to motivate children towards school, but the link between school and adult workplace employment may become conscious because of the social divisions emerging between employed and unemployed Kunwinjku, some of whom have started analysing the impact of long-term unemployment on the shape of their society. JN: 50 (cited at 7.9) implies failure in school divides the adult community into successful versus less; a real distinction he doesn’t explicate and which is spoken about from time to time by some adults. This division is increasingly evident, and maps onto the division between those who have opted for daily heavy drinking and those who avoid alcohol completely. Without a job-based income, even with some sporadic income from either art or royalties, unemployed family members are invariably in conflict with their employed relatives over loans and gifts of money. They are also more likely to depend on their employed spouse or relative for help with paperwork or administration of various kinds. The division is presently one of practical competence, rather than social level, but school education may drive a kind of social class distinction which becomes tangible. Families with adults on the school staff usually have children from their family attending regularly at school.

**13.2.9 School as “Work” for Children?**

There is a further complication in Kunwinjku understanding of the link between school and employment. In the childhood of the oldest interviewees, children and adults all performed some kinds of what they described as work (5.6.2). Perhaps this adds to the perception among some adults that school should be rationalised as a kind of employment for children. Two factors make this more likely. Firstly, distinctions between adults and children in pre-contact Kunwinjku life did not include any differentiation in terms of the need to do productive work. Adult competence and capacity were greater, but the child would move towards this area of Kunwinjku adulthood too through approximated stages of “work” with increasing productivity. Secondly, the fact that regular attenders receive Abstudy payments, although it does not seem to improve attendance, does present as a kind of reward for participation.

If *Balanda* are thought of as insisting that school is the pedagogic locus for children (rather than any longer term pedagogic association with adults) and if children see their attendance and participation as a sort of reciprocal obligation to
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“work”, it is likely children will feel their school participation has met this obligation on them to “work”. This means they may resent the imposition of any additional daily structured learning in the hearth family. In other words, unemployed Kunwinjku adults may be not only incapable of modelling adult work, but may displaced by school as the entity to which children should respond pedagogically, with the children seeing their “work” obligation fulfilled in school.

For many adults the analysis if simpler: school is simply another part of the demands of the Balanda world, without any need for any other explanation. This view impacts on children’s motivations towards school too. If the only reason for attending is to placate Balanda or match their expectations, without any complementary rationale, then the locus of management moves from within the child to the Balanda who alone have accessible motivations. The child then loses capacity to motivate his or her own attendance and learning, or more likely leaves the issue of motivating and managing attendance up to the school staff, leaving the child free of any feeling of obligation.

This further element of precocious autonomy adds to the likelihood that children may soon be the only potent stakeholder in their own pedagogy, suggested at 13.6.1.

13.3 KUNWINJKU PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOL

13.3.1 School as a Complex Zone of Relationships

The relational model of pedagogy developed in this thesis suggests school as the site for jointly constructed pedagogic relationships. The significant stakeholders in this joint construction - parents, children and teachers - must create a working relationship, in fact a network of relationships, reflecting mutual expectations, mutual authorisation and agreements about who has what powers. Among the stakeholders, it is the Kunwinkju adults who have the longest experience of school. Children and teachers (and therefore the school’s providing system) depend on parental pursuit of goals and their capacity and willingness to prepare and scaffold their children through the school process. The children depend on the parents to authorise new extra-familial pedagogic relationships. The teachers can only work within the framework erected by parents and children, which in turn reflects the parameters set by real life economic and political conditions and practices that shape parents expectations’ and self-image as stakeholders. Most potent among these circumscribing conditions is the ubiquitous presence of Balanda people in authority roles.
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I will suggest in this section that Bininj staff members are themselves highly potent as factors in the school because they are in practice the most important locus for school relationships. It is an easy mistake to conceive of school in a remote Indigenous community as an alien, exclusively Balanda entity, surrounded by Aboriginal people who are trying to make sense of it. The following discussion will elaborate on the complex reality: both school and community are trying to make sense of each other, but there are Kunwinjku people in both these environments, and to a surprising extent, the school is “owned” as a kind of Kunwinjku entity by many community members.

All interviewees recalled childhood experiences of school and commented their more recent adult reflections. From the earliest days, Kunwinjku adults have worked as teachers or assistant teachers at school (2.2.4.1 etc.). JN and ED have described the process of moving from student to trainee teacher and their experiences teaching Kunwinjku children in the classroom [AN: 16; ED: 16-23; JN: 23-26]. Their histories are supplemented by parents who have dealt with the school in conflict situations, for example [RN: 40-44], and those who have been involved as school council members, for example JB and JD; and those like JU who work at school providing counselling and other non academic support, paid as Teaching Assistants but working as a pastoral support staff. Until the last decade all the administrative, cleaning and gardening work was done by Kunwinjku people, but this work is now almost always done by Balanda, usually as their second jobs.

It is reasonable to expect informants with experience on the school staff to have well thought out views on school. More important is the fact that Kunwinjku relationships with the school tend to be mediated through Kunwinjku people on the staff. How Kunwinjku people see each other in the school obviously has significant implications for how both community and school see one another. I will allow some longer quotations here from Kunwinjku school staff members to provide enough data to assess attitudes that may not be stated baldly. I have relied particularly here on the views of JU and ED, who have the longest experience as members of school staff and who both have made revealing comments about this role.

13.3.2 Kunwinjku Staff and Kunwinjku Children in School

Kunwinjku staff members are sharply aware of the challenge to children engaging in the new set of pedagogic relationships within school. JU reports her explicit teaching about mutual goals and limits:
Yes. Now with our class, the kids we teach, I tell them, "When you come to school, we teachers are responsible for the classroom. That's how it is. That's why we have these rules and you have to follow them. At home, you're there with your mother and father, grandmothers and grandfathers, you've got all those people, and they will tell you about all this. They teach you things before you come to school." [JU: 70]

JU, ED and other staff take this view generally with children, and I observe in classrooms that children willingly, and I think consciously, “switch” themselves to this particular pedagogic domain, even when the teacher at the time is Balanda. They appear to either co-operate or misbehave depending on their mood or their interest in the lesson, regardless of the teacher being Balanda or Kunwinkju, except when the Kunwinjku staff member is a close relative - a relationship which transfers uneasily to school in any society.

When I ask children about teachers at school, they do not distinguish between Bininj and Balanda, naming all as “teachers”, suggesting children are capable of at least attempting a pedagogic relationship in school. This leads to the question of how Kunwinjku adults conceive of Kunwinjku staff as teachers (as distinct from perceiving them as representatives of Balanda power). Amongst the general commentary of daily life on the way children behave, there is sometimes an admission that the school staff faces particular difficulties in managing the behaviour of children, suggesting at least some sympathy with their role and conceding behavioural issues in the school:

Well, some is good and some bad - it's a little bit hard for those teachers, you know? It could be their own problem or the kids making it hard for them to work with books. They might be not very happy teaching the kids. They (the kids) argue with each other there downstairs at the school building. The kids go there so the teachers can build them up, but the kids don't follow when they are teaching them. It could also be that some of the kids make trouble for themselves. Some of them just throw papers around and if the teachers hit them they just pick up their things and walk away. So they don't learn properly what they are taught. [JB: 4]

JU’s valuable if informal role as the school’s resident student counsellor involves her in some relational risk-taking in her focus on the child:
Yes, it’s a sad business. I’m working hard on this, and I’ll probably be talking with the father and mother and then the little boy. We’ll talk together. I reckon I’m involved because I was there when it happened, and we all saw what happened. So sometimes the families, the parents will start to criticise - you know what I mean? [[Laughs]] It could happen. But I’ll do it, and it hasn’t happened this time. They haven’t criticised me. Yes, and I keep thinking about that kid. He was really good when I used teach him earlier on, and I noticed he used to come to school every day. But then, I mean, I heard that boy talking back too, even in the classroom. He would talk back. [JU: 114]

JU is describing something all professional teachers invariably and universally risk in their tasks, but made more intense here by the small size of the community, and made more emotionally charged by family relationships that involve all participants both in and out of school. The tension between acting in a professional school role and maintaining purely Kunwinjku roles is a constant minefield. Angry parents rarely confront teachers at school and almost never outside the school, but their approach when doing so is invariably to accuse the Kunwinjku teacher of “acting like a Balanda”, which is a serious dismissive form of abuse in the community, reserved for other Kunwinjku people perceived as acting on Balanda authority. This was the accusation made against ED by RN (215).

Their position is more complex than simply being the Kunwinjku face of the Balanda school. From the viewpoint of the Education Department and the Balanda world generally, Kunwinjku staff represents the Kunwinjku community in the school. ED speaks from this position:

No. What I mean is, what (the Education Department) does is, they make policy from out there and then the document arrives here. Consequently here a lots of documents, for example one we have is, what’s name, Behaviour Management Policy it's called, that one we now have. We end up with a lot of these. But this area of policy is not the same as doing things our way - not at all. In fact, we say to them, "It's different from the way we look at things. Leave this with us and we'll produce something." And they say, "No. We're giving you this document, so this is what you do; you follow what's written in it." Then we say, "No. It doesn't fit." But they are stubborn, and they just send it out. [ED: 29]

Kunwinjku staff members often feel uncomfortable with their liaison roles. Inevitably other Kunwinjku people see them as “experts” on school, and may simply
misread them as spokesmen for the Balanda. In any case, Kunwinjku staff members sometimes react by criticising parental ignorance when faced with the task of raising community awareness and level of involvement in school:

No. They don't really know, some of them, about the Education system, some of them don't understand, they just don't know much. That's why we want to teach them so they will understand when they make decisions, for example about ASSPA, for example about that money that comes. They have to make a decision themselves. They need to give them some ideas, and they need to see what that boss (woman) or hear what that boss is saying. So they can say, "Yes, that's settled, we understand what she's saying and she's right, or he's right, or..." So actually they will discern if that woman is right or if that man is okay, if she/he understands for example. But they can't understand this from a long way off, not what it really means. Because previously, here, it's as if they've had their thinking confused, and they've run out of ideas so what did they themselves actually want to see happen? But more and more of the Balanda way was always coming in, so that they just gave up. It's as if they don't want to help their children. It's not happening. [ED: 31]

ED’s criticism is tempered by the awareness of the enormity of the learning task faced by the community. She positions herself here as commentator on the power structure, rather than part of it, noting the presence of the (then) Balanda woman who was school principal. It is the Balanda principal and her governance system that needed to be understood, with ED deferring either to avoid rejection of herself, or out of practical political reality.

Kunwinjku staff however have persisted in their uncomfortable role, and sometimes reveal some positive aspirations despite the tensions. JU described an episode where she assisted ED in producing a community liaison newsletter encouraging parental involvement in school via contact with Kunwinjku staff. This episode reveals more of the self-image of the Kunwinjku role in the school:

[SE: The adults of the community generally, what do they think about the school? Do they think deeply about it or don't they take it seriously?] JU: Some of them don't seem to take it seriously. [SE: Would you like to have them come to the school and maybe they would then change their mind?] JU: Yes, and, that's what (ED) wrote that letter about. She wrote a letter...before the holiday break. The letter went into "Letter Stick" so people could see it in
writing. She wrote it in English and I helped her with Kunwinjku. Well, we both helped each other while I helped her. It's talking about school issues, about how parents don't want to try to understand what's going, what school is all about. They should go and discuss it with (ED) herself or maybe the other Aboriginal teachers, the assistant teachers. So they could explain things to them, tell them what school is like. That's why (ED) told them, "Your children are not just your own concern, but they belong to us (inc) all, and we all teach them and we all work together to help them. This is a new start." 

[SE: You mean the parents and teachers would work together to teach?] Yes. No, not quite. There would be adults, children and the teacher who might be a white woman. She could just be there and watch. Or she could do things or whatever. She could copy what they're doing if she wanted to, yes. [JU: 84-89]

JU’s description suggests a set of assumptions held by Kunwinjku school staff that surface when they speak informally:

- they promote the use literate communication with the community
- they believe parents of the community are unaware of, and maybe uninterested in school
- they are proactive in trying to involve parents
- they have a theory of school pedagogy as part of the community’s shared pedagogic responsibility
- they value team teaching relying on complementary pedagogic expertise from professional and parental participants;
- they rely on the presence of Balanda in the school

### 13.3.3 Kunwinjku Staff and Community Involvement in School

Kunwinjku staff are usually very proactive in recruiting part time or visiting teachers from among the seniors of the Kunwinjku community [JU: 49-51]. This has been problematic despite available funding and general support from the Education Department.

Kunwinjku staff members have wrestled with the pragmatic difficulties posed by the desire to include community elders in the curriculum and timetable:

*But there are a lot of different activities being taught. In my own thinking, this is what I'm thinking, is that people should come in from the community and teach children about cultural things... But the time involved might worry the*
teachers. The time would worry them, but maybe we'll bring it up at the school council. Maybe I'll bring up and we'll do it. Do you know about "release time" we give them, that the teachers have? The two teachers (on a class) could have the release time, and those kids could go with community adults during those times and do whatever they want to do with them - maybe weaving for one class. Anyway that kind of thing is what I've been thinking about. [JU: 83]

(JU’s concern about the response of “the teachers”, meaning the Balanda teachers, points to the awareness shared by Kunwinjku people across life that their plans will have to pass muster with the Balanda.) Kunwinjku staff aspirations about the involvement of senior community members is driven by their views on the needs of children. JU and JC (another Kunwinjku school staff member) discuss here the ideas behind the school’s annual “culture week”:

JC: Hang on. We were saying they don't get any background. Let me think. Background might mean we don't just talk about home, but what about the school as well? The school should extend Culture Week. That might help kids, the ones who are not getting Kunwinjku language skills.
JU: Yes, and it would also stop wrong behaviour; stop them doing what's wrong - disciplined behaviour.
SE: And disciplined behaviour? [JU: Yes.] The school has one week now as Culture Week, but you're saying there should more of this?
JC: Yes. Mm. In fact...it should be permanent. They (elders) should be there all the time.
JU: At other times, like with weaving, the elders should just go into the classrooms at any time.
JC: Any time at all if they want to. Yes, just like during Culture Week. They should continue with that, and the children should be doing a lot of different things, being taught and being told stories.
[SE: So who would teach them all this?]
JC: In Culture Week? Yes, it would be weaving, story telling, um, and painting - bark painting [or] dancing, yes, and...
SE: And what about language, I mean Kunbalak [JU: Yes those stories.] SE: Or Kundembuy, whatever?
JC: Yes. That sort of thing as well as stories. [JC: 46-55]
This exploration of a form of bicultural and bilingual education is very unusual. There was no deference implied to Balanda constraints in this discussion. JU may be reflecting her view, common among Kunwinjku adults, that children are no longer learning these curriculum areas at home, and that the school may be appropriated, at least as a venue, to provide compensatory teaching. Another motivation for community involvement is the difficulty of disciplining troubled children within the school environs, an issue conceded as a problem by all Kunwinjku staff and the wider Kunwinjku community and discussed below at 13.4.2.

13.3.4 Kunwinjku and Balanda Staff as Co-Workers?

Kunwinjku school staff members operate in a complicated social environment, living with some serious but unresolved tensions, obscured to casual observation by overt friendliness between Balanda and Kunwinjku staff:

- There is some evidence that Kunwinjku people prefer to remain as trainees for long periods rather than graduate and accept professional status, a tactic guaranteeing employment while allowing them to deflect blame to Balanda staff. Balanda staff themselves can deflect departmental complaints as well as parental questions to the Kunwinjku staff. The result is form of acephalous management which in the end allows children with learning or other problems to drift without a clearly responsible adult carer in the school, constituting another element in the precocious autonomy of Kunwinjku children.

- Only one of the twenty or so Kunwinjku teaching staff has completed formal teacher training, and many work in the school for short periods without any substantial training at all, yet Balanda professional staff invariably prefer Kunwinjku staff to handle any interaction with community members as well as providing language interpretation and child management skills in class.

- With the sole exception of ED, the five Kunwinjku people who have actually approached completion of their training have all refused full time work as teachers. In practice they are treated by the school as though they were replaceable by any other Kunwinjku person regardless of qualification. This occurs without any conscious discussion. They and their less well-trained, or untrained colleagues who work as classroom assistants to Balanda teachers are allowed by default, for example, to avoid staff meetings and to take time off without notification. When they are absent, their class continues with Balanda relief teachers to replace them. There is no confrontation. Both the Kunwinjku
staff and the children must eventually conclude they are redundant to school processes.

- This apparently blatant silent racism reflects one of the fundamental and unaddressed issues in the school: Kunwinjku staff cannot work in Balanda defined professional roles because, firstly, their availability is too limited to more urgent priorities, such as JU’s constantly active pastoral support role. Secondly, Kunwinjku staff members are unlikely to attend consistently because they cannot predict when and if they will sleep, nor when and if they will be involved in the routine emergencies of a collapsing society. They are by definition in demand for their English skills in contexts outside school, and are therefore continually involved in meetings and negotiations.

It is hard to find any overt racism among Balanda staff, who would not want to be appointed or to remain at this kind of school if they started from a self-consciously racist position. It is also hard to find racist rhetoric among Kunwinjku people. Both groups seem to accept that the school has problems and that it may not be possible to challenge the others to rectify things, or that the problems are simply beyond addressing. In the meantime, ad hoc and rather unpredictable partnerships are developed. Kunwinjku and Balanda staff have both told me of their enjoyment of relationships in the classroom with each other, or sometimes of their frustrations with particular staff members. None of this is overtly racial. It is in fact what one hears in among any group of teachers.

Kunwinjku people generally express the need for Balanda teachers in the school. For example, JB makes a typical and common sense argument for using both Kunwinjku and Balanda staff in team teaching roles: reflecting the overwhelming community desire that the school teach English effectively:

Yes, it will improve. But I'm noticing, for example, in one classroom, you know? There are two people working together there - one lady who speaks Kunwinjku and one who speaks English. And that seems to be a good situation. If it was just the White lady speaking only English, then a little boy or girl might not understand her. If that Balanda also spoke Kunwinjku, even a little bit, you know? Then someone could explain the complicated ideas. That would be good, and the child would probably learn. [JB: 8]

Kunwinjku people generally defer to Balanda in what they perceived as areas of Balanda expertise, but the encroaching nature of the Balanda world means this
deference is a daily experience, and is now making an inevitable impact on self-confidence of Kunwinjku people in areas that are their own domain. JU for example is a senior traditional owner who speaks English more confidently than most of her society and has worked in the school for over 20 years. Despite this, she seems deferential about, and willing to be distanced from, issues of school governance. She follows the normal contemporary Kunwinjku habit of pleading ignorance or vagueness about administrative structures of which she is a part [JC: 76-91], and voices an acceptance of the need for Balanda to have ultimate authority in the school (I quote here words here from the interview she did jointly as JC):

SE: So who's in charge, I mean, um, who's got the real power to run everything at the school? Or which people?
JU: White people do that. [SE: White people?] Yes. We just don't really know all about that situation. At the moment J__-may be running it, but who knows? They're both there together in that, so we're...Hang on, what was that document she's got, she's finishing it, in fact a couple of days ago they finished it, they'd been working on it...let me think. Later we'll hear about it when we've got time, then I'll start to explain our position to her. Because she's already reminded me about that. She told me, "I've been put in charge here, so I want to talk about rules, and you'll have to have those rules." For example, let me think, "No Smoking in front of the all the kids." Yes, that happens sometimes, including the teenage boys. She's made it clear to us anyway. So, anyway it's running all right now. With a good principal and Black teachers. [JC: 86-91]

School is not the only zone of low self-esteem or at least overt self-deprecation in Kunwinjku life. I will argue here that the general Kunwinjku tendency to self-disqualification in the presence of perceived Balanda expertise or power is a cause of some of the school problems, especially when that tendency works jointly with Balanda misperceptions about Kunwinjku motives and capacities. school governance is misread from both sides, leaving the planning and practices in the school rudderless. This is a further aspect of the general picture of the school and community each deferring pedagogic authority to the other.

Part of this mutual misreading is the way the school simultaneously offers itself as willing to learn from Kunwinjku advice, but also offering advice to the community about the nature, demands and advantages of school. I asked some informants indirectly about their attitudes to the Balanda participants in this complex
situation. ED reflects the major tension in Balanda – Kunwinjku relationships as they are acutely focused in the school. On the one hand, there is a desire to move beyond a conceded necessity to depend on Balanda at this stage, but there is also a similarly veiled concession that the community may not be prepared to take the place of the Balanda. Mutual self-deprecation that leaves ED and other Kunwinjku staff, and children, in limbo:

But, getting back to your question about the Balanda business? [SE: I'll ask it again. Maybe later you will put the Balanda out?] Yes, we'll put them out because they have a problem with the kids, and if it's not working for the kids in the school, then they have to bring the school out to the community. Because I've said from the beginning you should take the school outside if you want kids to come into the school. That way you promote education with everyone because it's everyone's responsibility, education. If want it enough for the kids, then we will get on and show ourselves to the parents, amongst the community elders so they can trust us too. What is it that we're teaching? But if we what happens is we just remain isolated, then that's what we get, we just all stay separate. [ED: 90]

I note here that ED’s ideas on making the school more workable do not involve the actual teaching methodology, but focus on the way Kunwinjku people can become its owners. They are reticent despite the relative accessibility and transparency of the school.

The school may be the only secular institution in their world whose mechanisms and goals are recognisable to Kunwinjku people. It is the only institution that recognises the capacity of Kunwinjku people to make a substantial contribution (compared with, say, the courts, the accountancy systems in the local government office or the medical staff at hospital). Despite this accessibility, Kunwinjku parents respond similarly to parents in many Balanda schools. Most adults don’t visit the school regularly, relying on reports from children. For example, as a senior Ceremony organiser GW might be excused on grounds of higher responsibilities from spending time at school, although he spends most of his time at home (near the school):

As for the children - I haven't visited the school, I haven't been to see what they do with them there, but the school is good. [GW: 3]

In general Kunwinjku people will certainly spend time in classrooms if a particular teacher invites them on special occasions, and if their children or other close relatives
are involved school, and they often express enjoyment after the experience [JB: 9]. Some teachers have told me of improved behaviour by some of their children after close family members have visited the classroom, and made clear to the child that a particular teacher is as an adoptive relative in the classroom situation.

Very few Kunwinjku people will approach the school without an invitation, even when very concerned about some issue. Intense anger might allow them to overcome any self-doubt on occasions, but then other problems arise. I have seen MM, the senior traditional owner shout very angrily at a Balanda school principal, but entirely in Kunwinjku. The principal had no idea at all of the nature of the communication. It was only because of his strong anger that MM went to the school. Sometimes a woman will approach the school armed with a stick or other weapon to attack or rebuke another Kunwinjku adult or child, but will often do so with a painfully simultaneous expression of deference towards Balanda staff. People with less power in the Kunwinjku world are even more reluctant, even though they may speak English well enough.

The school has tried over the last decade to create a workable advisory council comprising parents and Kunwinjku school staff, with one or two Balanda staff, trying to involve Kunwinjku people in policy and other governance issues. This has been problematic. The school is remarkable as a venue in Kunwinjku life where the Balanda staff members actively pursue Kunwinjku involvement, and the failure of this to realise in effective Kunwinjku school management reflects the range of difficulties that make any involvement by Kunwinjku people in governance of any kind problematic.

The absolute association in Kunwinjku minds between school and the Balanda world, and their insistence that the school’s function is teach Balanda Law, set up the expectation based on analogous ceremonial structures, that that Balanda are the legitimate managers and experts who should run it, making Kunwinjku self-disqualification in issues of school governance not only more likely, but invisible. This deference is quite rational up to a point, as the response of any non-specialist to a professional, but in conjunction with the unequal power associated with Balanda people and systems, the attitude of deference may become one of unexamined self-disqualification, disallowing any self-confident participation by Bininj.

To some extent the willingness to work under Balanda authority may be a desire to maintain a relatively comfortable status quo: the Balanda with the skills to
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negotiate management and other issues in the Balanda world, and the Kunwinjku staff left in their middleman roles between parents and children.

It is difficult to discover how Balanda and Kunwinjku staff feel about each other’s status. In fact both Balanda school staff and their Kunwinjku colleagues tell me from time to time they are mystified by the other group, despite cordial if unequal working relations. Whatever they think, the most problematic aspect of this mutual misreading is in the area of governance and decision making as a whole school. (I will discuss some of the problematic aspects of governance within the Kunwinjku community generally in chapter fourteen). ED has described the very fragile nature of community involvement in school management:

I do have a lot of problems [[Laughs]], lots of problems but always I look on the brighter side. I'm thinking I've already got authority, so now, if I want to make changes it's up to me. Because in this area I have the power to change things and I can start getting into new things, not only new things, but for example, with those people want to get into this language thing, well that might be one area we can set up to teach language or our culture. But again if all the Balanda who work with us in education, together with us, if we all support that idea, everyone including the (Balanda) principal, well then maybe can all say "yes". But if one party is upset, well it won't work. [ED: 48]

ED’s reliance on consensus, without scope for majority will is not radically different from the normal operation of decision making in Kunwinjku life, but her implied view that final approval is inevitably in the hands of the Balanda may de-motivate community involvement, while simultaneously presenting to the Balanda involved as a passivity which generally provokes an impatient proactivity on the Balanda side.

It is also possible that Balanda presence is experienced and perceived as being so powerful that all decision-making and all exercise of power must be considered invariably in terms of predictable Balanda responses. The preference for consensus preferred in any small social group is added to this:

JU: Let me think. At the moment...so, yes, it will be a long process for us, I mean we don't have something in place yet, so we'll be working on it together, getting together and listening to what other teachers are saying, what the principal is saying... [JC: 77]

Kunwinjku reliance on reciprocity among themselves in key issues produces a vacuum, an apparent indecisiveness that Balanda organisations can misinterpret or
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exploit. The most significant consequences of this in terms of school pedagogy are (a) the worsening of Kunwinjku confidence in exercising power in contact with Balanda, including the school, and (b) the likelihood of Kunwinjku people blaming each other when problems are encountered, usually for not taking the lead in doing something to solve some or other issue. This element of self-criticism in analysis of the Balanda world is not surprising.

13.4 KUNWINJKU SELF-ANALYSIS AND SCHOOL PROBLEMS

13.4.1 Analysing School and Analysing Our Kunwinjku Selves

The most central point in analysis of Kunwinjku interaction with formal schooling is that the experience is almost as long as their contact with the outside world generally. Whatever reasons are mounted to explain problematic aspects of school, its novelty is not an available explanation. If school is problematic, it is also deeply a part of Kunwinjku experience; it is therefore not surprising that Kunwinjku people may find it impossible to analyse changes or problems in the school without analysing their own society and its changes over the lifetime of the school. This introspective element is pervasive in Kunwinjku reflection on every aspect of the Balanda world.

In fact much of the criticism they make in this analysis is directed at other Kunwinjku people. Moreover, Kunwinjku criticism of school is almost always directed at particular people rather than any reified idea of a “system” or at the government. Rarely, one hears a specific criticism of academic processes, for example [PS: 91]. It is more common to hear criticism of particular teachers, both Balanda and Kunwinjku. In fact, I have no evidence that Kunwinjku people think the school as an entity is failing in any way. A few are in fact quite pleased with the school as an entity [AN: 16]. Kunwinjku people often discuss problems in their relationships around the school, but these are always relational problems between the stakeholder groups that contact each other in the school. The two most frequent causes of heated discussion about school within the school and community are children’s behaviour at school, and their attitudes to school attendance. I don’t know of any Kunwinjku person who says the school has failed, but most people nominate these two issues as matters that need to be addressed.

13.4.2 Pedagogic Discipline at School as a Problem

Kunwinjku people at school and in the community criticise children’s behaviour generally. Kunwinjku school staff often comment on the lack of hearth family
training of children in manners and learning skills [JC: 46; JU: 68]. The difficulties faced by the school in attracting parental involvement are evidence, according to JU, of the way parents generally fail to provide hearth family foundational teaching:

Or, yes, there's not enough communication and so sometimes the kids get slack, and also, whatisit, there's not enough encouragement at home. Some kids just come to school and act silly when they get in the classroom. But in the old days, when I was at school, the adults, the old people used to talk to us about things at home. They would tell us stories, and sometimes when we came home from school, they would take us places; maybe they would take for a walk. They used to combine the religious teachings - from both this world and from heaven. They combined all that as they were teaching us, when for example we would go out camping, for holidays. They would teach us on those occasions. And as well, whatisit, it was good living here because there was no grog; it hadn't arrived yet, nothing. No. But now, well, the school doesn't get much help. Maybe people just think that school is only for children. So they just leave the kids in our hands, so it's up to us to do it all, to talk to them and tell them stories. Or maybe they're just too lazy to come to school. Yes, that's right. [JU: 64-65]

JU may be reflecting a universal concern among school teachers about the lack of community support, but her remarks about the changes in her lifetime reveal another dimension to the impact of the rate of change on the way school has operated. Her criticism of parent motivation may reflect tensions in the Kunwinjku staff self-image. Some community members agree school staff have significant behavioural problems to deal with and a number have been honest about the balancing act required by teachers:

Yes. That's what those two (grandchildren of mine) were doing. The teacher sometimes is harsh with those kids. When teachers tell them off, a child will become very unhappy. But, if they speak to them gently they kids' (behaviour) just gets worse and worse and they will abuse them, they'll end up throwing things around, written work, books, or cutting things up. [NN: 62]

NN echoes JB’s comments [JB: 4] cited at 13.3.2 above. Of course, problems of pedagogic discipline are not unique to the present time or to Kunwinjku people. R and N’s comments concede discipline problems needed addressing in the past too, but this took place in an era of tougher discipline at school:
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AN: And also, back when we used to go to school we didn't look for arguments among ourselves either. Some of the kids we went with would argue among themselves, but he would rouse on us. Cigarettes, we didn't smoke tobacco either when we were going to school. He used to get angry with us, our teacher. And the young men, when they were being silly, he would be angry with them too. We used to behave well when we used to go school, we didn't argue among ourselves. [RN: 9]

JN describes a process of pedagogic discipline by the teachers. In relational terms, his viewpoint suggests the child will accept an additional disciplinary context because of the higher order discipline of the hearth family relationship:

So a teacher might be good, a happy teacher. He doesn't hit the kids. My own teacher...he used to hit us with a broomstick, a broom handle. Yes. He used to hit us with it. But there's also something else. If a teacher is, ah, if he's good but soft, the child will just go off on his own the wrong way. But if the teacher keeps a close eye on the child, and just straightens him out every morning, every day, and at the same time gives him as it were, that good food, feeds him, and does the other as well, disciplining him, well it will probably be go well for that child. But sometimes it gets hard for a child. He may not want to go on and learn any further, because the child and teacher are starting to irritate each other. The child is thinking, "I won't go to school. He'll hit me." Or, "He hit me." That's what the child will think. Now in our case, he used to hit us, but we still went. [JN: 65]

Kunwinjku school staff members are invariably expected by their Balanda colleagues to provide disciplinary interaction with children and to liaise with parents involved. This is made more difficult because the school is required to follow behaviour management guidelines which are simply local versions of Departmental guidelines. Kunwinjku staff who are relatives of the children concerned find this an almost impossible situation when an incident involves children from other families, as is often the case. The presence of senior community members in the school could help here but only by spreading the blame when violent objections are raised outside of school, by family members. Kunwinjku staff members, in other words, usually try to have Balanda staff negotiate disciplinary situations by waiting long enough for them to act. The result of this is a general lack of firm discipline at school, and this
too annoys some parents and exacerbates children’s pathological autonomy by allowing some children to be “teased” out of attendance (13.4.7).

Because behaviour management has to do with authority, the use of Balanda by one or more parties in resolving crises is now a normal preference. P and S are usually proactive in approaching the school, and they have suggested a process for dealing with serious discipline, reflecting the common Kunwinjku willingness to invoke Balanda power to settle Kunwinjku disputes:

*If he does the wrong thing, if that happens, I reckon, ah, ah, two, two things should happen - there should be two procedures. The mother and father should go and talk about it straight away. That Balanda will drive there straightaway, the liaison worker, will come and get the mother and father, and drive them and drop them off there. He should collect them. When that child has a problem the mother and father should give him a warning, they should warn him, they should give him a warning. If that little boy can't (change), in that case the police should also be involved. I mean the police aide, the Aboriginal policeman. No, I was just saying, I said there are two things, there are two procedures that should be in place: mother and father go to the school straightaway, and make a rule. And if that child does it a second or third time, then the mother and father and the police should all be there, the Police Aide, the policeman.* [PS: 112-114]

Many Kunwinjku parents actually use the threat of Balanda authority in the hearth family to prevent children misbehaving badly. Sometimes this takes the form of a reminder about the police but often the threat is that Balanda of any kind will notice an action and respond in some way. Children eventually realise how frightened their parents are by Balanda power, and its ubiquitous nature, but in the meantime these threats are taken by children as conventional.

The complexity of the relationship between teachers and parents in discipline issues is illustrated by JM:

*Yes. Yes. I used to go to school here in Kunbarllanjnja. I mean, I used to go sometimes, sometimes not. The teacher used to come and be angry with me. Or if I would, maybe, go to school late, turn up late, he would be angry with me. Or if I had been smoking he would be angry with me. But now, I send my kids to school. I mean, I send them and they go. I don't know but maybe they say the same things to them. I don't know. I'm unaware of it. I don't know. If they get*
angry, and maybe go crook at them, the kids would come home and maybe tell me, and I would go, and maybe say something to them, go crook at them or something like that, explain to them. But when we (exc) used to go to school, back then, the teachers would go crook at us, and they would hit us. But I don't know about this lot of new teachers teaching our kids. Maybe they're scolding them or talking roughly to them, I don't know. Sometimes they let the kids fight among themselves. I mean they don't separate them, and this goes for our own Aboriginal people working there. I mean they don't say to the kids, "You two leave each other alone! Don't fight. Just leave it." Nor do they go crook at the one who started it. They don't go crook at him, or tell him, "Stop it. Don't look for trouble. Don't cause fights." [JM: 16-17]

It is unclear whether JM has, in his own mind, authorised both Balanda and Kunwinjku teachers to use some sorts of discipline in the interests of protecting his children. JM’s position suggests a stakeholder error: parents presume teachers will discipline, whereas teachers may assume this authority has not been extended, or can only be exercised by Kunwinjku staff. There is another complication. Teachers who do treat children with the same discipline they would use in a mainstream school (like the examples JM provided) invariably attract criticism, but this comes usually from other Balanda teachers rather than parents. This is another aspect of stakeholder dissonance about processes that, if unresolved, leaves the needs of children unaddressed.

13.4.3 Children’s Sporadic Attendance

There is no dissonance about the other commonly discussed problem in school. Children’s irregular attendance at school is an area of complete agreement among Kunwinjku adults, non-Kunwinjku teachers, Kunwinjku children and even Balanda educational researchers. For example, Parish 1990 (pp. 108-118) and more recently, NTDE (1999, pp.143 - 145) have both reported similar phenomena to those I present in this section. All stakeholders agree disrupted or inadequate school attendance is the most serious issue to be addressed by the school. In confronting children’s sporadic attendance, we need to examine these questions:

- Are Kunwinjku children choosing as autonomous learners not to attend?
- If the children make this decision, what are their reasons?
• Are parents withholding their children from school?

If so, are they doing this to provide a space for their own pedagogy, with children learning under Kunwinjku teachers, or is it simply happening by default?

I have spoken with dozens of teachers working at the Oenpelli school over the years, and with teachers working in other similar Aboriginal community schools. They invariably cite poor attendance as the biggest obstacle to children succeeding at school. Their collective argument is simply that no matter how culturally sensitive the teachers, no matter what curriculum is negotiated, no matter what teaching and learning styles are applied, if children attend too infrequently or too sporadically, they will inevitably fail to benefit from school learning. ED has stated it this way, touching on the main themes of in an ongoing discussion among Kunwinkju people:

... if they don't go to school much, if the adults don't send them, some of them just hang around at home, some of them just move around from outstation to outstation, and from community to community, and then they come back and they've forgotten what they learnt before. So they have to start to learn all over again, get that knowledge again. In that situation, we say to the parents about those kids, "Hey, you parents don't keep those kids (at home). You should always send them to school, so they keep going, so they can develop in their thinking. They should keep going all the time, so they just keep sticking with all those many ideas we teach them. There's not just a little bit to learn, there's a lot of things to know that we teach them, and they need to learn it well." [ED: 54]

ED here speaks as she does routinely in her job, directly to parents without any attempt to divert responsibility towards the Balanda system, holding them accountable for the child’s attendance, and basing her argument on their assumed understanding of children’s learning processes.

The highly irregular attendance patterns have some obvious consequences beyond the catastrophic ones noted by ED. Teachers cannot plan for or monitor progress through any kind of syllabus when in a typical class in the Oenpelli school, half or more of the children have missed days or weeks of the experience shared by other students. School-based research is almost impossible, with children missing standardised tests and absent too often to be subjects of any diachronic studies. Even within the classroom, teachers find it impossible to monitor particular children over a long period when their attendance leaves so many gaps. The relationship between
attendance patterns and likely school learning outcomes is yet to be researched quantitatively, to address the question of how much damage missing school actually does to learning. Arguing from the extremes, it is axiomatic that zero attendance will predict zero school mastery, but the typical Kunwinjku case is sporadic: two children may each miss twenty percent of school days, but one will come for eight weeks then miss two, the other might attend an average of eighty percent missing unpredictable days each week. Some Kunwinjku children have escaped enrolment at school completely in the last decade, and others have attended much less than half the required days, so perhaps more precise research is redundant, when the general pattern so clearly predicates school failure.

Kunwinjku people are aware of the attendance issue, but there is no clear consensus about its causes. Although one hears individual teachers criticised because of an encounter with a parent about discipline or attendance, these criticisms are not applied to the school as a collective entity. Parents who may not send their children regularly will still come to special events such as sports days or concerts. There is a dissonance between a general tolerance for the school and perceptions about the commitment of time it requires to achieve school goals, which may also be unclear, but there is no “in principle” objection reflected in some kind of passive resistance. In fact, parents seem to want their children to attend, even when they are often not capable of making them do so. There is a general belief that something has to be done about attendance. JD’s position is typical, and involves ideas about the school shared with most Kunwinjku adults: children should attend school every day; parents should be involved; commitment to school somehow means less likelihood the child will become an alcoholic; school will equip the child to interact with the immediate Balanda world and to provide for his or her economic needs.

Yes. If the kids go every day they're okay. They keep teaching those kids. And they also invite the mothers themselves, and explain things to them. So they'll think about leaving that grog and so forth. And they'll be able to listen to what the council is talking about. This is really about them sending the kids so they'll learn. And also, if they don't go what else are they going to do? They'll just be sitting there without money. When that money stops, child endowment or whatever, that's it. Where will they find food any other way? They'll be hungry!

[JD: 69]
This is a comprehensive view on attendance, but other parents share at least the awareness that lack of schooling will disadvantage the child in some vague way.

Parents seem quite aware of their legal responsibilities in Balanda law, and even express some pride in their own remembered school attendance:

*R: Yes, back then. Back then we used to go to school, and we didn't just quit. There was a really tough man we had as our teacher. We didn't just come for one day and then next day leave it. He was tough that one, and we used to go and he would make us pull weeds at his place. We would clean the grounds up. Sometimes we weren't in the classroom. He would hit us, not like the ones who teach you now, they're nice. They let you take a week or two off if you don't like school. That's fine, you just stay home. Whereas with us that never happened back then. In fact he would drive to our place sometimes, and look for us. So we didn't miss any school with him, we always went. We would go right through until it finished. [RN: 8]*

There is general agreement in the community that attendance was not a problem in the missionary era. In keeping with both mainstream Balanda and Kunwinjku practices, school discipline under the missionaries was tough [JD2: 25] (and see section 5.6.2). Yet, despite that perception, school was better attended by children than is now the case [RN: 8]. JN suggests this reflected parental commitment to the process:

*Now in our case, (the teacher) used to hit us, but we still went. In my own case, I went because they used to send me. They would say, "Off you go to school."*[JN: 65]*

Staff were apparently committed to their students and would chase up non-attendance in person [RN: 8] school attendance was vigorously enforced in the childhood years of older Kunwinjku people. Some interviewees remember the steps their families took to enforce their attendance at school [GN: 6, 9]. Even despite the reality of physical punishment at school [JM: 16-17] because parents actively sent the children [JM: 16-17].

JD even expresses some regret that he was not able to attend school as a child because his family resisted settling in Oenpelli, preferring a peripatetic lifestyle based on clan land (His reference to Manmoyi is to the locale, not the outstation, which didn’t exist at that stage):
No. If we'd come down here, I would have gone to school. But, Ngalwakadj made up my mind for me when she took me there out to the east. So I didn't go with the idea (of school), I went way over to the east and then headed south. A long way away, that's where I was travelling. I was born there in the Manmoyi area. And we went further on from there, so I couldn't come down here. The old people didn't bring me down here to school. So I couldn't go to school. They had other plans, and they took me with them. So I went to other places. [JD2: 12]

Some parents continue to struggle with the issue on a daily basis, acutely aware of the damage to their children. It is possible on any school day to hear interchanges between parents and children where the parent (usually the mother) vociferously urges her children to go to school, and the children make excuses or ignore her, perhaps retreating a few metres, but not heading off to school. The two arguments most often used to persuade children to attend are along these lines:

“If you don’t attend the government won’t pay me any Family Allowance and that means you will have nothing to eat.”

“If you don’t attend the Balanda will be angry with you.”

Neither argument seems to work well in terms of attendance, though sometimes an angry parent will achieve a temporary agreement. Typically, children forced by this sort of pressure will attend in the morning but leave at recess or lunch and not return, suggesting a kind of pseudo acquiescence which allows the child to act unilaterally, with the school unwilling to follow up partial attendances and the parent unwilling to continue to struggle, assuming the child goes home after leaving school, which is not always the case.

Despite these ineffective attempts by some families to enforce attendance, JD criticises parents for their general passivity. However, he links this attitude to their unemployed status and implies this is due to the displacement of paid employment by social security. He is reflecting here the broadly shared Kunwinjku view that children only attend school because it is see as a kind of parallel to parents working in their jobs mentioned in 5.6.2 and discussed here at 13.4.1. His thesis is parents have been made idle, and parents may think this justifies children becoming idle too:

*There was no school; (Balanda) hadn't come yet. People just worked and that was all. There was no school so the kids just stayed home. They would just go along doing things. With no school, the kids would sometimes go camping. So*
they thought okay, they would build a school for them. But there was no money; to start with they didn't have money for them from Child Endowment for kids to go to school. No. They hadn't started it. And no pension either. They hadn't organised that. No unemployment benefit. Nothing. The government was very strict back them. Only later on did the government arrange to give that child money, pension and unemployment, single money (supporting mother's benefit). All that was only recently created. Back earlier it was bad. The government was very tough and didn't fix it. People just had jobs and that was all. Nowadays the mothers and fathers just stay at home, and if the children don't want to go to school they still get the child endowment, the mothers. There are a lot of kids, I see them in the Arrkuluk area, kids who are not attending school. I don't know why the mothers and fathers don't send them. They don't have clue. [JD2: 30]

This adds another dimension to MM’s comment on parents as resigned or irresponsible in their surrender of children to the school [MM: 19-20].

13.4.4 School Responses to Non-Attendance

The school tries perennially to tackle the attendance problem, setting up committees including Kunwinjku staff to canvass ideas, which almost always enact the same sequence: attracting parents to school events, publishing lists of unexplained absentees on community noticeboards, sending the school bus around the community on special “drives” with a driver willing to harangue parents and children at their homes. Parents certainly respond to invitations for special events, but without any necessary improvement in their child’s attendance; the intended embarrassment of the name lists seems to be more amusing than shameful; children regularly hide from the school bus, resisting family members’ attempts to dislodge them from various hiding places [JD: 50-52; JD2: 31-34].

However, no parents have ever been prosecuted for failure to send children despite clear documented evidence of their culpability. The school has had funding for a Home Liaison Officer for nearly a decade, yet people in this position have never been permitted by the school administration to develop prosecutions. Balanda staff members have not yet endorsed this tactic at the local level, despite a number of Kunwinjku staff members pressing for it every year. Parents will use the threat of the police to motivate their own children, while at the same time there are each year new Balanda members of the school staff who express surprise or regret that attendance
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is compulsory for Aboriginal children, and abrogate any role in using legal means to address attendance.

Despite the often expressed desire by Balanda staff to tread sensitively in dealings with the Kunwinjku community, relations with Kunwinjku parents sometimes becomes a zone of great tension when a new group of Balanda staff eventually become impatient with poor attendance, and their Kunwinjku colleagues’ inability to deal with within the restrictions they impose on them. When other tactics have failed, Balanda staff have usually tried to confront parents at their homes themselves, and the results have often been more highly confrontational than the teachers planned, with threats of violence and the all purpose dismissive argument that teachers don’t understand Aboriginal Law or people or culture. Both responses come from parents or relatives embarrassed by the arrival of Balanda at their home, and more importantly exasperated at “being forced” to something they have tried to do already. Disempowerment produces violence at some point.

More positively, the school has in the last five years taken playgroups out into the community, setting up temporary venues, with Balanda teacher, a Kunwinjku assistant and a trailer full of resource materials near groups of houses. This was due largely to ED’s concern to make connections between the school and the parents, and has had agreement from Kunwinkju staff. The results are ambiguous, since the target children in this age group are usually the best attenders in the school, with attendance declining through the grades. In addition, the symbiotic nature of relationships between young Kunwinjku mothers and their school age children means younger infants have not yet realised the economic risk of being away from mother. This is one of the factors to be kept in mind in the following discussion.

13.4.5 Non-Attendance as Kunwinjku Adult Behaviour

There is a significant factor generally overlooked in considerations of school attendance. There is evidence that Kunwinjku people are withdrawing from, or minimising their involvement in any dealings with the Balanda world in whatever context. This is paralleled by an extraordinary withdrawal from participation in purely Kunwinjku or Aboriginal ceremonial events.

Most committees in the Kunwinjku world pay sitting fees, but invariably the Balanda running the meetings must proceed without a quorum of Kunwinjku people, or after “rounding up” members by vehicle. This includes the school council (which doesn’t pay sitting fees), the club committee, and the management committees of the
Arts and Crafts Centre, the Demed Outstations Resource Centre, and the Local Government council. This effective Balanda control of all these organisations inevitably leads Kunwinjku to either passive resistance or simply acquiescence, the practical expressions of both being indistinguishable in powerless and voiceless groups. In March 2005 the Kunwinjku members of the Kunbarllanjnja Local Government council resigned en masse as a formidable proof of Kunwinjku disenchantment with governance structure.

TN built and supervises a school on his own outstation, serviced by visiting Balanda teachers two days each week, but concedes attendance has been problematic:

_That's the thing Mamam that I, I'm worried about that, because the children I look after there (at my outstation) go to school. And it's good thing when they go. Sometimes they go; sometimes they are distracted by hunting trips instead._

Yes. [TN: 36]

Balanda staff who visit outstation schools to teach one or two days per week have also described to me low and unpredictable attendance at these centres.

I mentioned in 8.8 that attendance at ceremonies had become a significant issue, and this has become catastrophically worse since 1990, despite the fact that participation in Ceremony was enforced, sometimes with physical force, as recently as 1978. In fact the lack of proactivity and continuity in attendance by Kunwinjku people impacts all of Kunwinjku life. The only organisation well attended is now the Club. This phenomenon is the subject of much self-critical humour among Kunwinkju people who jokingly describe the Club as "their new ceremony", and ridicule each other's visible dependency on daily alcohol consumption. The impact on Kunwinjku involvement in school governance, and part time cultural teaching are both significant. More seriously still, the attitude may indicate a general concession to fate, a resignation of any strong desire to take control of issues like school attendance or even the general welfare of their children.

### 13.4.6 Child Poverty and Normalised Non-Attendance

Balanda staff confronted with this unworkable governance situation usually place reliance on "off the shelf" explanations, usually one or other variety of an argument that there is an inaccessible but legitimate "cultural" explanation for people's absenteeism. The elasticity of this approach is remarkable, even at systemic level: for example, children are brought home from boarding school for up to three months...
because it is alleged they are required for a family funeral, even though the deceased
may have been a distant relative, and in some case despite the child’s protests to both
boarding school staff and his own family. The boarding school management accepts
this, apparently without inspection, partly because Abstudy funds travel for such
purposes. This amounts to an institutionalising of non-attendance, or at least a
passive general acceptance of a behaviour that all participants know to be
pedagogically destructive of children, apart from removing them from accountable
adult supervision for the school hours of the day. (The significant protective function
of school attendance has not been discussed as an issue either by Balanda or
Kunwinjku staff, but is certainly at issue.)

Absences from school are not usually investigated at all, due to the likelihood
that a cultural explanation can be applied, whether the child has been “taken hunting”
or is “at a ceremony” or “sorry camp”. Yet, it is a simple matter of observation that
almost all children absent from school are easily observed on any day involved in
one of six ways:

- with mothers looking for food, or waiting for payments into a bank account;
- with mothers playing cards [RN: 131; JD: 48];
- at home watching DVD with adult family members;
- fishing with family members often within one kilometre of the school;
- less frequently, they may be with family on shopping trips to Darwin
- Very rarely an individual child will move to an outstation to take part in
ceremonies which may keep him from school for a term, since actual time needed
for involvement in ceremonies or at funerals is always only a fraction of the total
school absence.

The common thread to these behaviours is the fact that the child adheres to the
mother, or other adult relatives, usually women since the large majority of men are
involved in drinking from lunchtime onwards. In the mornings children in fact avoid
at least some of their male adult relations to prevent them being forced to hand over
whatever money they have. This attachment is certainly not for any intentionally
pedagogic purpose and often occurs despite the parent’s strenuous objections.
Children are motivated, as they will tell you when asked, by the need to extract
money from whichever person is likely to hand it to them. This is the product of the
child’s precocious self-reliance in seeking food and care, which in turn is the general
mode of physical nurture in contemporary Kunwinjku life. Almost no families prepare meals at home, and food is not routinely provided to children old enough to buy it for themselves from one of the take away shops. Even at outstations there are small stores selling tinned food and sometimes bread and other non-refrigerated products, and children beyond infancy are expected to buy and prepare their own meals. In some families take-away foods are bought by parents and shared with children. In many families, children are relegated to a kind of indulgently treated begging within their own families in lieu of any active provision of meals or clothing by parents. Children by and large accept this precocious form of self-reliance, and even discuss their own budgeting for store bought items like make up and clothes. I have yet to hear anyone refer to this economically motivated absence from school as equivalent to “work” for children, despite its parallel to the way most adults spend most of the working day – in a quest for survival cash. The further element to this economic focus for children is the way mothers need to strategize handling of Family Allowance and similar payments to avoid other relatives demanding access to the money, as they often successfully do. Since children even of primary school age accompany those mothers to ensure they receive enough to manage their own needs, it is often the case that the mothers end up without survival cash, a further motivation to gambling.

13.4.7 Children’s Views on Non-Attendance

There is no secrecy about these behaviours in the Kunwinjku world. Children will readily tell you what they’re doing and why they are not at school, and they don’t appear to associate this with any sense of guilt or obligation, whether their intention is economic or otherwise. I have been routinely asking children about their reasons for school non-attendance since 1977. The answers have remained in four broad categories:

- the absentee simply didn’t want to
- the absentee has no clean clothes
- the absentee had clashed with a teacher; or
- Other children had “teased” the absentee.

Petrol sniffing is another possible category, but has not been mentioned by any children. It is only in the last five years that petrol sniffing has directly involved substantial numbers of school-aged children. Almost always, a child who “takes up”
regular petrol sniffing will leave school permanently. This partly explains why this reason for non-attendance has not been mentioned, at least in my hearing. The phenomenon of sniffing is beyond the scope of this thesis, and in any case warrants urgent and focused research as it gradually involves more young teenagers.

Each of the four categories of answer listed above has merit, at least from the child’s viewpoint. Autonomous children see it as their right to simply go or not to go as they feel on the day, but this reason is given least often. Using dirty clothes is in fact an adult Kunwinjku excuse for failure to attend almost any public event, and the same children who cite this are just as likely to attend school if they wish, wearing dirty clothes. The school has no protocol in place for dealing with unwashed children or their clothing, or even obvious illnesses. There is some criticism among Kunwinjku people of families who can’t organise to wash their clothes either at home or in the communal coin operated machines. Mostly children in these families are restricted to wearing one set of clothes until a new set can be afforded, so the distinction may be part of the emerging social divisions mentioned at 13.2.8. If a child presents with repellent symptoms (such as the strong smell associated with chronic ear infections or bed-wetting), school staff may try to contact parents to arrange for medical attention at the local clinic, but this typically takes many hours. Some staff shortcut this by relying on a Balanda colleague to wait outside the clinic with the sick child to intercept the parent and insist on a diversion from their route to the club to sign required medical consents. This has become an established pattern with neither clinic nor school staff able to find ways legally to obtain parental consent in a general way. Sickness, including malnutrition, is in fact a major reason for absences, but one that is never reported by the children, and without any written or oral communications from families, is not recorded in the school roles, nor is there any documentary way to link it to families who drink heavily, although both Balanda and Kunwinjku school staff assert this link.

The teasing between children is the most serious and complicated of these reasons. It is often very hurtful, and becomes unendurable when the child is isolated by a larger group. Even when a child clashes with a teacher and walks out, they can often be talked into coming back to school again, the walkout a short term safety valve, whereas children have left the school and refused to come back for weeks after a major incident of teasing in the playground. The seriousness reflects the way family allegiances become involved, and this is complicated because some families
are perceived as “owning” the school and the rights to any jobs it provides. ED (25-26) addressed the issue of adults becoming involved in school altercations and thereby escalating them and making any return to attendance problematic for the children involved. Failure to intervene in teasing or fighting is sometimes a criticism of school staff by parents [JM: 17; RN: 38].

Kunwinjku people are aware children make an autonomous assessment of their relationships with teachers and other children and evaluate their chances of security at school:

Well if he gets angry with them, if for example the kids are teasing each other in their own way, and they upset (the teacher). They will think, "Oh, he'll make trouble for us, he'll go crook at us. If we argue with each other, he'll be angry at us." Those kids like that will just take off and go for good, and not go back to school. I'm thinking that way because I know in the past the kids would be looking for fights among themselves. So a child would leave, and be scared to go to school because they might attack him. They do that, that's what they do to each other, arguing. [JD: 75]

Autonomous children however are acting in a space provided by a kind of culpable tolerance by both school and community. In fact, the most significant change in the way attendance is addressed has been in the way adults in the community have become much less willing, in my observations since 1977, to redirect children from public areas to school, or act jointly as a community in enforcing attendance. Balanda shop staff for example, may sometimes refuse to sell things to children during school hours, but increasingly a child confronted with this blockage will simply continue wandering around the community looking for food or money. JD has identified a link between unenforced attendance and parents avoiding financial obligations to their children:

Some kids attend school and others don't. But in the past, they wanted to go, and in the past they used to go to school here, when there were lots of missionaries living here. The Law was hard back then. They didn't get child endowment. Nothing. The Government gave them nothing. No UB, nothing...Back then the Law was harsh, and the government didn't make any Laws on their behalf. Whereas now they've made those Laws, and that's why the kids just hang around the place. They just get some money, some of them, the money they're giving them without any conditions. The kids don't go to
Apart from neglecting their own children, even good Kunwinjku parents will no longer act in loco parentis with children from other families unless a child moves into their home. There no longer appears to be a general adult-child relationship of the kind mentioned 5.6.2, so children are not pressured to go to school by community members. Police routinely refuse to attend calls to deal with truanting children, even when the children are reported in adult card games or at some risk in other ways. This means adults have no recourse to what has become the ultimate Balanda authority to enforce compliance.

### 13.4.8 Non-Attendance and Pathologically Autonomous Children

By and large, pre teenage children say they enjoy school when they do attend. When I ask children about their school experience, or more often when they volunteer these details, they express well thought out ideas, in some cases as to why they are not attending, but more often narrating classroom or playground interaction with some enjoyment. Adult family members often discuss a child’s interest in school. Typically four-and-five-years-olds want to go to pre-school and are often reported by parents and grandparents as really enjoying it, as for example JM (18) and JB (17). Teachers have reported children too young to enrol following older siblings to school and wanting to stay and join in. This general readiness to “try” school may be an artefact of growing up in Oenpelli itself, where the school is ubiquitous and physically close, and where older children can be seen attending. Kunwinjku parents will sometimes comment on the way particular children really love attending school. Teachers on the staff of Oenpelli school have told me of children who “run away from home” to attend school, with the parents having to come and pick them up, against the child’s protests, to go on planned family outings.

The fact that attendance is in most cases a matter of the child’s choice allows the school one pseudo-positive option based on what is otherwise a potentially destructive autonomy: children are very open to direct negotiation and can be persuaded to commit to various school activities. The obvious limitation to this “positive” is the likelihood that the same child will simply opt out when things become even temporarily dissatisfying, either in terms of the school activity, or more often in terms of relationships with other children.
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Relationships with teachers are almost never an issue in children’s self-analysis. Children will sometimes describe a certain teacher as very strict or unpleasant but keep attending regardless. I speculate that the more dysfunctional the home life of the child, the more acceptable an independent adult relationship may be to the child, an authority who is also a resource for security and the food and drink made available by the school to children in need.

The teachers who have tried this sort of negotiation with autonomous children have been well motivated by a concern for the child’s welfare, but their actions do not address the underlying issue of the risk to the child in such radical autonomy: if the parent is absent or refuses the stakeholder role, the child’s role is then distorted, taking responsibility for his or her own education without sufficient life skills or awareness of long term goals, and without the explicit direction and emotional scaffolding needed. This means children who are at school because a Balanda teacher has set up a good working relationship will simply leave if other children tease, or the teacher is absent or suddenly uses an unacceptable kind of discipline. The child’s attendance is still conditional entirely upon the child. This is not, however, an unproblematically healthy pedagogic relationship, but reflects profound relational pathologies in the community.

13.4.9 A Note on Alcohol as a Factor in Non-Attendance

D’Abbs and Jones (1996) have described the impact of alcohol on the Kunwinjku community. Kunwinjku people themselves routinely describe their community drinking practices as the biggest problem in their lives. There are only a few moderate drinkers among Kunwinjku people, with the majority of drinkers becoming intoxicated on every occasion they can afford to. A minority of the community, mainly women but including a handful of men, do not drink at all. The social intentions of drinking and its interaction with personal psychology are beyond our scope here, although I mention the issue again in chapter 14. In pedagogic terms, alcohol abuse has reached a scale that has serious impact on children as learners and adults as teachers.

Alcohol has been singled out as a major factor in the collapse of ceremonies in comments by older men. GW found in the late 1990s that he was obliged to recover his ceremonial trainees at the local club, exactly the same problem that finally made the Wubarr ceremony impossible to continue twenty years before. Beyond the catastrophic impact of alcohol on family structures, rendering hearth pedagogy
problematic, the amount of time absorbed in drinking and its aftermath rules out ceremonial involvement completely for most men. Within the hearth family, pedagogic relationships are problematic when children are fearful of key adult family members because of their frequent drinking. The impact extends to school in two ways: firstly, children from affected families are unprepared by their own early learning for school based tasks or relationships; secondly, the alcohol problem means Kunwinkju school staff are less likely to be at work and to function effectively as teachers.

JD (67) has briefly mentioned the way drunkenness rules out employment at the school for some people, reflecting the community wide phenomenon that leads to the majority of men employed in CDEP projects being too drunk to work after lunchtime in what might otherwise have been career type employment.

The impact on school and hearth family pedagogies is most insidiously through the high level of sleep deprivation and chronic fear in most households. School staff, both Balanda and Bininj report as daily phenomena:

- Children arriving late and without having eaten
- Children arriving fearful or crying
- Children exhibiting extreme tiredness during the day, often reporting fights or loud videos and music all night
- Children arriving irritable and behaving violently towards other children and teachers, with younger children re-enacting witnessed violence.

13.5 APPROPRIATING THE SCHOOL?

13.5.1 Appropriation and its Limits

The school is affected unavoidably by this social dysfunction in two general ways. Firstly, the school will feel obligated to adapt its syllabus and management systems to cope with children arriving unable to cope with normal school expectations, and then inevitably and unconsciously lower those expectations in an attempt to accommodate the worst affected children. Secondly, the Kunwinjku people who are essential to any effective adjustment of curriculum or method are themselves much less likely to be available to this task, or able to give it any sort of priority against more immediate issues of survival in their private family lives.

These two factors together explain both the motivation and the failure of two major initiatives during the last thirty years that have been designed to make school
more attractive and effective for Kunwinjku children: the openness of the Education Department to a locally negotiated “bicultural” curriculum, and the formally funded, departmentally designed “Bilingual Programme”. My discussion here will be limited to Kunwinjku response to these two ideas, which were seen by Kunwinjku people as initiated and run by the *Balanda* world. (See my comments at 2.4.3.)

Despite the problems encountered by these two strategies, there is evidence that some Kunwinjku people may still consider the school as a possible venue for responding to their community dysfunction, utilising school to replace collapsing hearth family pedagogy, as a venue to teach most valued aspects of the Kunwinjku curriculum (see 13.5.4 below).

**13.5.2 A Negotiated Curriculum?**

Community involvement with school has declined, despite present day aspirations by Kunwinjku staff about having senior community members within the school. Even when community members have been paid on a casual basis as visiting teachers, they have had to work within a few hours of timetable space, and concentrate on teaching dance or basketry skills. There has never been the intention on either part to provide a full bicultural curriculum within the school, probably for the simple reason it is impossible for the school to act as venue for teaching the whole of two Laws. Firstly, as I have described, Kunwinjku Law entails learning constantly from birth through to adulthood and relies on hearth family and ceremonial domains. The school is limited to a small part only of this total time. Bicultural, meaning bi-curricular, schooling, regardless of who advocated it, was always only the art of the possible, and necessarily assumed incomplete mastery of at least some of both curricula.

Similarly, the school is designed and resourced by the majority culture of Australia to perform only part of the pedagogy for the *Balanda* world. *Balanda* children too require the years from birth to the end of adolescence to acquire the learning necessary for *Balanda* adulthood. Even assuming governments might have funded school to provide exclusively Kunwinjku teaching of their own curriculum, this would mean no possibility of Kunwinjku people learning any of the *Balanda* Law, removing the only rationale for attendance strongly articulated by Kunwinjku people. Whether they verbalised their motives clearly or not, Kunwinjku people have pursued a clear policy about using the school: by full attendance and adapting their pedagogy, children may learn enough to speak and operate in the *Balanda* world. Their own Kunwinjku learning would be confined to the hearth family and
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ceremonies, accommodating the time demands to allow schooling to fulfil this goal. Kunwinjku teachers would provide resources and scaffolding, supplementing instruction about Balanda curriculum in the children’s language and providing moral and craft teaching for which Balanda were not equipped or authorised. We have glimpses of this policy in operation up until the last two decades when unemployment and alcohol began to undermine social structures generally, and when those with the authority to teach as Old People began to die off.

Social dysfunction and the resultant unlikelihood of adequate time commitment by community members are catastrophic factors in any model of schooling, but there are other difficulties too. JU reflects on the pragmatic difficulties of managing even a limited form of bicultural teaching

*When they're finding out about, say, an animal, or whatever they're looking at, whatever topic they do, they'll use the Kunwinjku names. And then the teacher will speak to them about it again, telling them the English. Um, she might write the word, or maybe not. This is in the classroom. There's no scope for that, not in the SACE area: SACE is, what, Social... [SE: Social and Cultural Education] We don't do it with that area, that one subject area, even though we do cover and work on a lot of different topics. But not in Kunwinjku. At the moment, oh, they think it's, um, they don't...they think it's just a what, just an English language school. So they don't work on things, say, the kinship system. They could do that but it doesn't happen. I don't know all about it, but I was studying it when I did my third year, or was it second? Third year. When I had the choice of topics to do for social issues, I decided to do the kinship system. We did a paper on it. But when it comes to teaching it in the classroom, well, E___for example maybe can't do it. I don't know. [JU: 97]*

The issues here are the way space is made in the timetable and curriculum to teach Kunwinjku curriculum items; what will be left out of the desirable Balanda curriculum? JU also hints in this statement at the difficulties any particular Kunwinjku teacher might have in making and teaching a syllabus from Kunwinjku curriculum items previously designed to be accrued in the longer time frames of hearth family learning.

13.5.3 Kunwinjku Aspirations and the Bilingual Programme

If a bicultural curriculum is problematic, what about the more obviously practical issue of teaching Kunwinjku literacy and oracy in the school as a bridge to English
performance? This is a parallel question to: what does MM’s interest in written Kunwinjku skills [MM: 13, 26, 37] mean for school based teaching? Remarkably, among the interviewees, no one initiated discussion of the school’s bilingual programme, and in response to my questions about it, no one made an enthusiastic case for its reinstatement. This was unsurprising. In 28 years living in the Kunwinjku speaking community and working six of those years in the school, I have never heard anyone suggest the school should teach anything other than English and Balanda life skills such as knowing about money and the legal system. No Kunwinjku person has ever suggested in my hearing, unless questioned about it by Balanda, that the school should teach any aspect of Kunwinjku language or Culture apart from what might be done by Kunwinjku people involved in some special event, additional to the school’s own curriculum. BG’s warm recollection of the bilingual programme [BG: 8-10] is from the period before the Education Department introduced it as a formal structure within the school. It had been taught at the school but by the same family members who raised BG and who taught her and others religious values at home and at school.

My own involvement with the programme (2.4.3) was initiated before I became aware of the difference in Kunwinjku thinking between involving Kunwinjku adults and language in the school, and a Balanda authorised programme for teaching their literacy, and especially, the highly valorized distinction they make between oral language and the literate form of their language they associated with the Balanda world.

In looking for Kunwinjku theorisation about pedagogy, I was continually forced back to the realisation that for most people, pedagogy is calculated by parents to achieve pragmatic goals in their children’s lives. Kunwinjku parents have had goals in mind for their children, and school was one of the elements to be reckoned into that calculation. It still seems to be a universal viewpoint among Kunwinjku people that the school’s raison d’être is to teach Balanda Law and especially English. They have resisted, not school, but anything that threatens that prospective use of the school, which may have meant passive resistance where Balanda goodwill proved unreceptive, if not frightening.

Balanda may comfort themselves with the truth that Kunwinjku oral literacy is as rich, diverse and culturally pregnant as the written literacies of the mainstream. This is in fact what teachers often tell their Kunwinjku students, and what some at least of the community still believe. But from a pragmatic Kunwinjku viewpoint, it is
simply humiliating and frightening to know that the principal means of communication in the mainstream world is alien to them - that literacy in English, one of the essential keys to independence and power, whether personal or political, is denied. There is little comfort against this in one’s own corpus of literature no matter what its objective value. Of course, the avalanche of DVDs, TV and magazines now part of Kunwinjku daily experience not only demonstrates but creates the irrelevance of that traditional oral literature. Kunwinjku people may articulate it less directly, but they want the school to produce Kunwinjku students with a legitimate self-esteem and confidence to enter mainstream Balanda interaction as of today, which is necessarily based on self-aware achievement of its primary participatory skill: English oracy and literacy. So, pragmatic curriculum choice has been the major reason for the very limited nature of structured bilingualism in the school, adding to the general rejection of Balanda technologization of Kunwinjku texts (2.4.3).

13.5.4 School as Saviour of Kunwinjku Pedagogy?

One can now argue that poor attendance reflecting social dysfunction means Kunwinjku opinion on school is largely irrelevant: their failure to motivate and sustain children in school is pedagogically fatal, so why continue to attend to their now inoperative aspirations? This overlooks the situation of a significant if small minority of Kunwinjku people, mainly those who have taught or worked at school for some time, who still try to implement pedagogic aspirations for the children of their community. They share with the community a distrust of structured bilingual programmes, but this certainly does not mean they are opposed to the use of Kunwinjku as a language of instruction. Pragmatic concerns drive this too. Some take the view that Balanda and Bininj should team-teach, allowing appropriate expertise in both languages (13.3.2-4).

Kunwinjku teachers at school certainly have aspirations about greater community involvement, though this is increasingly the same as that hoped for by many schools in the Balanda world. ED has tried a number of ideas to provoke community interest, for example her formation of what she called an “Action Group” [JC: 81] based on the school council and potentially building on the specific areas where community members have shown some enthusiasm. Special events continue to attract people, and sometimes the Kunwinjku language content is particularly applauded, for example in the Christmas concert and prize giving, which is always
well attended [JC: 62]. The Kunwinjku teachers themselves seem to enjoy an emerging role as custodians of the stories children no longer hear at home:

> C: Back at the beginning, I started that off, making that. As I was telling them the story they kept laughing all the time, because they didn't know it. Now, these were very young kids. And that's the kind of thing that they should be taught all the time, so they'll know it. That's what happened when they saw it the first time, I tried to tell them the story and they just laughed and laughed. [JU: They'd never heard that story before.] Because they hadn't heard it before. [JC: 58]

As pedagogy outside the school continues to collapse school allows this kind of celebration (rather than systematic teaching) of stories that may be more valued as they become scarcer. Inevitably, the school may more and more be seen as the venue for training children in morals, ethics, manners and language. ED has speculated on this kind of curriculum adjustment to partially replace hearth family learning of stories and their associations (though she has not addressed the practicalities of access to land and ownership of stories that framed their hearth family teaching) and may be moving towards a model of school that can preserve a curriculum through school in spite of its local community:

> So that is why we want to come in and tell them some Dreamtime stories. Those Dreamtime stories have real meaning for us; they gave them to us so we could know how to behave because we go to sacred places. We would come and do that, so we can take them to the appropriate place and teach them about that dreaming: Why did it put itself here? What's the meaning of this? That kind of thing. So then they might learn in the same way that as in Balanda culture they would learn their own moral stories, like from Little Red Riding Hood. So we want to get hold of those children for that purpose, before they start thinking, "Oh, I know what it means." [ED: 61]

Her motivation may be similar to that of MM and JN in their emphasis on learning both Laws to protect the Kunwinjku curriculum from neglect by its owners and teachers:

> They haven’t come and told me what they want, those parents, but some of them do say, “We (exc) want to teach our own (stuff), Aboriginal, Aboriginal stuff, belonging to us, so that their thinking will grow up our own way. And in turn, the White people’s way too, so that they will see what it all means and so
they'll know what it's about, that other business. Instead of the two things missing each other at school. We’ve been teaching lots and lots about the Balanda way, and virtually nothing about our Aboriginal way.” So they want both to be taught together so that maybe the meaning of things will become clear and they will therefore have good understanding as adults. [ED: 23]

In a more direct form, this idea emerges in visualising how to use the school for pedagogic rescue, not so much in the face of the Balanda world, but from the neglect of hearth family pedagogy:

- Yes. If they started it again it would be good, and I’d like to teach. We (exc) would teach short lessons for example about language so they can speak well, because some of them are speaking their own new kind of Kunwinjku. Maybe you've heard them? [GN: 35]

- It would be good if they start again. In that way, the children will not lose hold of the songs which belong to us (inc) Black people. Both, they should learn and they should have them both together - White and Black. They won't lose their grasp of it. Some nowadays are letting it slip; I mean the older ones among the young men and women. [GW: 53]

Inevitably the possibility of using the school even in this limited way as a venue will confront the question: if the hearth families are not teaching their own curriculum at home, who will teach it at school? This sort of question has occurred to at least some of the most senior Kunwinjku people. JN has talked about schooling as a long-term process and without mentioning a separate Kunwinjku curriculum, implying school learning as a viable alternative route to independent, morally informed adulthood:

If a child does that, then he knows what's in your mind. He knows your values and principles. That's what learning is. And there's that new way of learning. What I mean is, if you take the child to school, and maybe, if he's good, he'll go on later to Kormilda College, and he could go a lot further, if he looks towards going to university, from senior high school, he'll go past that and move along to university. Now from there, if he goes beyond that further, a bit further on, he will more or less, as English speakers say "explore." He'll look for something extra, go further. And from there he'll look back where he's come from, from when he was young, he'll see all the rubbish, the mistakes he made, although he still might be making mistakes, no matter if he graduates from that university domain, or before that. We still make mistakes, but you keep moving along. The
child is still moving along all the time. Well, next time he'll be able to judge. As they say in English, he'll get himself “organised”. That's what I mean, we Bininj will say “he's made himself”, so he'll organise everything for himself. He'll look after himself. I don't mean he'll be looking after his own body, but his mind, his thinking. His mind. [JN: 39]

The tragedy is that the school doesn’t work this way either. In a sense, JN’s model is another indication of the mutual misapprehension between school and the Kunwinjku community. Children are stranded between a school system thinking the Kunwinjku community has answers, and vice versa.

13.6 CONCLUSIONS

13.6.1 Children and School Pedagogy: Victims or Leaders?

The school has been part of Kunwinjku life since the oldest living people were children, and is remembered as having achieved its goals as they were construed by an earlier generation of parents. Kunwinjku methods of teaching were not very different from those practised by earlier generations of teachers, and the alien language was precisely what the parents sent their children to encounter and learn. Teachers universally need to set up working relationships with children beyond their preparatory experiences in the home, and an earlier generation of Balanda teachers did so, and are warmly remembered. Kunwinjku children now relate to teachers warmly, but without either side any longer being clear about the pedagogic expectations of the relationship.

The longevity of the school in Kunwinjku experience has not prevented its relegation as a priority, as more urgent needs than long-term goals of pedagogy intrude. Men are now by and large absent as teachers and educational brokers in the hearth family setting. Women are engaged in the time consuming labour of unemployed poverty, the continual pursuit of money. Children are precociously autonomous, and are daily engaged in their own labour intensive business of caring for themselves through close but dependent relationships with adults.

The pathological social and economic features of Kunwinjku contemporary life, and the fact that Balanda participants do not see these pathologies for what they are, have changed the way children are engaged in pedagogic relationships. The school staff and its system expect parents to regard themselves and to act as the primary stakeholders in their children’s school learning, and in their pedagogy generally. On their part, parents (and the community generally) now increasingly
regard the school as the primary manager and provider of children’s pedagogy. At this systemic level, the children are relationally stranded.

Politically, the Balanda government regard small indigenous communities as capable of, and committed to, informed self-management, while the Kunwinjku people regard the Balanda as the irresistible ultimate authority in all governance, including the school. Children are thought by both groups to be ultimately the responsibility of the other.

Kunwinjku children show their capacity to construct and direct relationships, including pedagogic engagement with Balanda. Neither their community nor the Balanda world any longer reciprocates pedagogically, allowing child-adult relationships only in terms of the child’s self-perception as emotionally and economically needy.

What are the mechanisms of this failure? Kunwinjku people who have criticised their own society have held parents as culpable for educational failure. Failure of hearth family pedagogy leaves children unprepared for pedagogy beyond it. Without prior familial instruction, the child cannot learn at school. This prior learning implied as a tool for the child to interpret and manage school.

*It was necessary for me to explain it to them all. They would go to school, but then they would think about what they had learned from me beforehand - what I used to tell them about. If no one explains to them, if their fathers don't - if the father or mother's father (doesn't) - this is what I'm seeing, and I think it's wrong. Some of them going to school are good thinkers and some are just not. And why is this, son? It's because early on, no one gives them the Law - I mean they don't ask them and they don't explain to them... [MM2: 61]*

This background produces another in the series of relational dysfunctionalities: the teacher – learner dyad is replaced with that of nurturer – dependent. With or without deliberate pedagogic elements in the hearth family, children experience and therefore learn relationality. If they grow up into and through school years experiencing family relationships of fear, of economic competition, and without pedagogic elements, they will retain the capacity to relate to schoolteachers but in a wary, conditional way, and without pedagogic intent. Teachers tend from their side to construct relationships with Kunwinjku children that are not productively pedagogic for additional reasons:
• The Balanda world’s insistence that indigeneity predicts children who can only learn through radically different cognitive and values systems from the school system;

• A level of pity for children’s perceived neediness which overrides immediate pedagogic goals;

• A desire to form relationships of friendship in a bid to retain autonomous children in the classroom.

Instead of parental authorisation of schoolteachers complementing the hearth family pedagogy, the child constructs the relationship on the model of the hearth family in terms of adults as a manipulable source for economic or emotional nurturance.

The failure in parenting behind this has been identified and discussed by many Kunwinjku people. Children failed in this way are not suffering so much a lack of knowledge of their own culture, as a lack of knowledge of their own identity and person.

JU: How could describe the (cultural) background (of the kids)? There isn't any. They are just sent off to school and they learn there, they just do the White thing at school and that's it. I mean, a lot of us when we try sometimes, find it hard with the school; so how do we prepare the kids for schooling? Some of them don't even have that little bit of background. [JU: 32]

It may be axiomatic to suggest school succeeds or fails in ways reflecting attitudes prevalent within its embedding community, but JU and MM have presented an argument at the next level down: an individual child will succeed or fail in school learning and in Kunwinjku learning dependent on the pedagogic proactivity of his parents, particularly his father, in managing his education:

... when he's about so high [[indicates height of an infants school age child with hand]] we should start, when they are up to this height, and then they can pay attention to what their fathers are saying. At about that age. The same age that Balanda begin schooling. So he's old enough to understand a bit. What I mean is, as he grows up, when he gets up to here, when he gets to this stage, he must start being given the Law. He must have the Law, the ideas explained to him. Before he learns to write Balanda. Look, he must thoroughly understand it, and know it properly...In other words a man should first of all give him the Law, the father, or the mother's father, he should give it to him early, or his mother should give it him the Law early, so then he can go to school and write
and learn well, the ideas and meaning so he can understand what it does, so he can say, "Yes. That's what this means." So he will understand properly at school, and also when he listens to an Aboriginal man, he'll remember his words. That's how they'll know things. As it is, a (father) will just keep the child there without telling him things, and then when he gets to this stage he'll say, "Go to school." But why doesn't he explain things to him earlier, when he's only this high? He just sends him to school. So he goes to school and does all that writing. Fine. Then in the afternoon, "Oh, I'll just go and play." In the morning he goes again. He goes along at this stage, this tall, he goes to school. But he doesn't have any teaching from his father. Nothing. Before that, no one has given him any ideas. Nothing. He gives him nothing to start with. No. So he only goes along to the Balanda (school) and that's all. This is a bad thing. This is wrong. That's what I say, it's wrong. A father must give him the Law so that when he goes to the Balanda (school), when he goes there [[pointing]] to learn (Balanda) thoroughly, he will know both. From where he goes, from where he goes and he will also know what his father tells him. [MM2: 55-56]

In chapter 14 I will discuss the process behind this resignation of parental stakeholders in pedagogy. Children may not be able to resign as stakeholders in pedagogy, and may by default, have become the unique stakeholders. School teachers, whether Balanda or Kunwinjku may be able to provide some nurturance, but they will not be able to replace the hearth family’s moral training, or displace its relational models. Unless parents change their views of themselves, no amount of curriculum or methodological adjustment will build on the attitudes they teach ineluctably to their children.

13.6.2 Concluding Questions and Links
Although chapter 14 will raise the issue of further research generally, there are some questions that should be noted here, involving research directly related to the future prospects for schooling of Kunwinjku children:
[1] What prospects are there for the increasingly isolated parents who want and try to use school within a pedagogy they manage and plan for their children? This small subgroup of Kunwinjku people who see themselves as employable and capable of independence within the Balanda world are now openly speculating that they may only be able to fulfil their pedagogic expectations by moving to communities where
schools can still operate for, and cooperate with, pedagogically functional parents, in societies where these parents are in a majority.

[2] Whether or not the model of radically autonomous childhood I have suggested here is correct, we need to know what children now want to do about their own lives, including their participation in school. What are the goals motivating their decision making about school and life in general? I have only informal and partial evidence about their aspirations and self-image, and this needs urgent research. For example, if, as some children affirm, they want employment in mainstream Balanda jobs as doctors, teachers, policemen and so forth, are they aware of the pedagogic processes needed? If, as they assert, they want to attend high school outside the Kunwinjku community, how will they be adequately prepared given the problematic early childhood schooling available in the Kunwinjku domain? If they do in fact want to marry and live generally outside the Kunwinjku social framework, do they know what this entails in terms of economic and pedagogic preparation? If, in the meantime, they continue to opt out of schooling and therefore, whether intended of not, out of engagement in the work economy, how will governments plan to cope with the inevitable result? If intervention is not to happen with this generation’s burgeoning population of almost totally unschooled and culturally rootless young adults with aspirations that lead them to urban areas, but with personal histories likely to produce personally self-destructive lifestyles that are universally consequent upon their unrealised ambitions for employment, when will the need for intervention be forced upon the government? What school will be able to cater for the children of this educationally excluded generation? What economic cost will be incurred in losing the next generation or more of people who could have been economically productive?

[3] Finally, there is the question of how my analysis of Kunwinjku interaction with school, if it is correct, would apply to similar indigenous communities. This is part of the broader discussion taken up in the next chapter as to how theorisation about Kunwinjku pedagogy might interact productively with theories of education generally.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
SOME SPECULATIVE CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 14: SOME SPECULATIVE CONCLUSIONS

14.1 RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY AND NON-KUNWINJKU THEORIES

14.1.1 A Rich Pedagogy Revealed

I will not reiterate here in any detail findings discussed throughout the thesis. This chapter is more in the nature of an essay in response to the findings, exploring ways the Kunwinjku pedagogy interacts productively with other theoretical models of human learning. I also return to the discussion commenced in chapter two of the other human factors upon which pedagogic motives and practices are contingent.

I commenced this research with the hypothesis (2.5.4) that Kunwinjku people have and use a well-constructed set of pedagogic principles and preferences. In chapters five through twelve I described and explored the ideas and comments of Kunwinjku people which taken together comprise a rich and detailed proof of that hypothesis. I have suggested Kunwinjku views and practice can be theorised as relational pedagogy. In this chapter I will explore the possibility that the relational theory I have suggested as a model for the Kunwinjku data will interact productively with other studies of Aboriginal learning and with more general theorisation about pedagogy. I will then take my theorisation from the Kunwinjku data to a further stage suggesting a model of pedagogy as the intentional reproduction of the adult self in offspring.

I have also reported in the previous chapters the Kunwinjku view that aspects of their pedagogy are in crisis. I will suggest here the process whereby the rapidity and the profound nature of changes forced upon Kunwinjku society have caused social divisions and a loss of self-esteem which make self-governance in any domain problematic, and also produced a kind of poverty that dominates daily affairs to the detriment of adult-child relations and schooling, as well as hearth family based learning. I will also suggest the unemployment and underemployment that cause this poverty also act against effective pedagogy by diminishing motivational options for school-based learning. I will note evidence that some Kunwinjku families have continuing pedagogic aspirations despite these factors. Finally, I suggest research into the aspirations of Kunwinkju children will be productive in terms of their future pedagogic options.
Chapter Fourteen: Some Speculative Conclusions

14.1.2 Kunwinkju Pedagogic Theory and Other Research in Aboriginal Education

I will discuss here the way the Kunwinjku relational model of pedagogy and methodological preferences interact with other research. Firstly I will briefly discuss the relationships between this research and the work of Harris (1977) and Christie (1984a) which both focussed on indigenous children in a similar setting to the Kunwinjku. I will suggest the potential for a relational analysis of pedagogy to inform their (already potent) research. Secondly, I will explore the way such a relational analysis of pedagogy may be applied to two other studies of Australian Aboriginal children who constitute minority groups within urban mainstream schools.

14.1.2.1 Research on a Similar Group of Indigenous Children

I have suggested throughout chapter 13 that school failure for Kunwinjku children is largely the product of social, economic and historical factors impacting Kunwinjku self-esteem, family pedagogy and historical and personal relationships between Bininj and Balanda. In doing so I have worked from the unstated assumption that whatever differences in race or culture between school and family, pedagogy was adaptable when and where appropriate relationships could be constructed. Both Harris and Christie have also argued that schools should and can change to account for such differences in expectations between school and students. Although neither explicitly describes relational processes, both researchers have in fact described what are essentially relational processes behind the problem of involving indigenous children effectively in school.

Both Harris and Christie share the general view that indigenous children could be included effectively in school pedagogy provided the school made some adaptations. Neither strongly argues that the children might also be expected to make any adaptation, but I don’t think this is due to any ontological assumption about the nature of indigeneity, despite Christie’s speculation that a broad model of racial differences might inform the way schools and indigenous children interact (Christie 1984a, pp. 346f). He explicitly states that he has done his analysis is in terms of “variables which teachers can control” (1984a, p. 387). I have argued throughout chapter 10 (especially 10.5-10.7) that Kunwinjku children have the capacity, as well as the interest, to adaptively construct new pedagogic relationships. Harris in fact discussed evidence that the Yolngu people he observed exhibited a strong capacity
Chapter Fourteen: Some Speculative Conclusions

for high level adaptivity, which he described in terms of Yolngu “innovation” (Harris 1977, pp. 240-246). Christie also seems to assume the capacity for adaptation in Yolngu children but argues they deliberately choose not to make certain kinds of adaptation despite their potential utility in the classroom (Christie 1984a, pp 347-348 for example). (Perhaps the question yet to be addressed by research in the Aboriginal context is whether adaptive behaviour can be overwhelmed or reduced to passive self-protection in the turbulence when one social groups is unwillingly absorbed by a disproportionately powerful other, and whether the rate of change demanded of innate adaptive capacity can be outrun.)

Harris addressed the issue of relationality in pedagogy implicitly in his detailed analysis of interpersonal communication styles (Harris, 1977, pp. 405ff). He argues that the mismatch in speech act strategies is an impediment to pedagogic communication. He addresses (without using terminologies of social power) the way in which Yolngu people may react in self-critical and accommodating ways to Balanda power figures (pp. 420-422), adding examples of deferential speech interactions between Yolngu and Balanda teachers which impact on school pedagogy (pp. 421-422). The extent to which this sociolinguistic domain can be subsumed in terms of relationality is evidenced in Harris’s comment: “The best solution to the problem seems to be for Balanda teachers to stay at Milingimbi long enough to get to know Yolngu people well. Then Yolngu people tend more often to say what they think.” (Harris, 1977, p. 421). This may well be simply a localized statement of principles of universal human communication, but the whole of Harris’s discussion in his chapter 11 implies pedagogy is dependent upon relationships (as evidenced through speech acts).

Christie’s conclusions about the nature of classroom interactions between Balanda teachers and Yolngu children focuses on the way both groups develop “coping behaviours” in response to what I suggest can be described as a relational disappointment at a lack of mutual cognition and achievement of goals (Christie 1984a, pp. 360ff). In the absence of explicit and mutual cooperation and reading of each other, both teachers and students tend to perform in ways Christie describes as “ritualized” (p.363 and passim) rather than “purposeful” (p.55 and passim). On page 270 Christie describes the way the community parents and teachers misread each other’s general intentions about school, betraying at least a lack of communication but suggesting on both sides an unproductive tolerance of separation between the
two. This kind of relational passivity where community and school coexist without mutual construction is reflected in the passive but unproductive classroom Christie describes as typical of the school he observed (p. 353) where children and teachers simply coexist routinely rather than coconstructing mutual goals. Instead, the only negotiation is to allow the coexistence of a pair of parallel coping routines.

I suggest Christie’s core conclusions (set out most clearly in Christie 1984a, pp. 395-406) can be described (though perhaps oversimplified) along these lines: school pedagogy fails because teachers and students do not share a common purpose or commitment in their roles at school. Both are frustrated, and without the capacity or willingness to communicate deeply, both groups deepen in their expectation that there can be no fruitful relationship between them – a predictably self-fulfilling expectation.

14.1.2.2 Two Examples of a Relational Analysis Applied to Existing Models of Schooling of Minority Indigenous Students

There are two well researched studies of Australian Aboriginal children in mainstream schools in which Balanda researchers have proposed desirable features of an effective school pedagogy. These two models will allow me to explore how the relational approach might interact with other analyses. I will argue here that the relational framework may subsume some other considerations in analysis of school pedagogy, or at least focus such analysis on personal and inter-personal elements as the most crucial variables in pedagogic transactions and settings. Moreover, the fact that a case can be made that a relational approach to pedagogic theory draws together or explicates a number of features of pedagogy in school suggests Kunwinjku pedagogy may have worked effectively within school-based learning had the school been the only alien entity or factor involved.

Hudspith (1996, p. 317) recommended an “…authoritative, structured, incremental…” teaching approach in school pedagogy with Aboriginal children, and implicitly argued its relational basis:

Some of the prevailing wisdom in Aboriginal education stresses that students must like their teachers; I submit that respect between teacher and students is more socially powerful and pedagogically powerful, particularly since this has been shown to be highly valued in urban Aboriginal homes.
She also noted (p. 317) the methodological constructiveness of continuous feedback and explicit assessment, which I discussed as features of Kunwinjku methodology at 11.2.6. Hudspith focused on the interpersonal nature of effective school pedagogy:

The findings support and extend Malin’s (1989) thesis that Aboriginal students’ failure in school derives from social and cultural misunderstandings between them and their teachers. In Durkheim’s terms the collective representations of Aboriginal students are not reconciled with those of their teachers; in Bernstein’s (1970, p.115) terms, there is a failure of reciprocal understanding; ‘If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher.’ (Hudspith, 1996, p. 313).

Bernstein’s contention cited by Hudspith here recognises cultural difference which Hudspith claims is addressable through construction of a pedagogic micro-system; the formation of miniature communities for learning as these relationships may involve teachers with small groups as well as individuals (p. 309). In Kunwinjku terms, this is the construction of a relational locus for learning.

Hudspith (1996, pp. 311-315) summarised features making for effective school pedagogy with Aboriginal children. It is indirectly a statement about the need to construct intimate dyadic pedagogic partnerships exactly on the model implied by Kunwinjku pedagogy, and applying preferences for explicit teaching as to methods and goals which are also similar to Kunwinjku preferences. She characterised (pp. 309 f) three kinds of constructed communities, which I summarise as:

- “ascribed” pedagogic communities which may acknowledge but not provide for differences between home and school in pedagogy (Hudspith, p. 309f);
- “neo-tribal” constructs where “…teachers consider that Aborigines’ cultural interests are incompatible with those of the school and they explicitly re-structure their praxis to accommodate them” (Hudspith, p. 309f);
- “organic” pedagogic communities where “…teachers attempt to mediate and reconcile urban Aboriginal and pedagogic orthodoxies” (Hudspith, p. 309f).

The first two options mean that a pedagogically effective working relationship with the child was displaced by, in the first case, a surrender by the teacher of his or her capacity to construct a relationship with a child due to perceived invincible cultural difference. In the second, “neo-tribal”, case, the teacher errs the other way, with an over compensatory accommodation to the child’s difference, acting on the
assumption the child cannot move out from his or her “culture’ to form a pedagogic relationship. Hudspith preferred the third option because it meant both parties worked towards “real intimacy” but also took account of, and worked with, the child’s pedagogic intentions to satisfy performance goals he or she negotiated in the pedagogic relationship, the kind of assumption about children’s intentionality in learning made by Kunwinjku pedagogy (10.3.8).

Malin (1992) reached conclusions similar to Hudspith’s. Malin cited Erickson and Shultz (1982), who stressed the child’s and teacher’s need to understand each other’s group affiliations and implied the resultant capacity to construct a “co-membership” with each other (Malin, 1992, p. 63). Malin also cited Jordan (1986) in locating the construction of identity within a relational network (Malin, 1992, p. 79), but this does not rule out the prospects for a child’s simultaneous membership in two or more networks, reserving for the child what is, in the Kunwinjku view, ultimately his or her self-management of this aspect of both learning and identity.

Networks are of course inherently potentially political things. Malin in fact described school pedagogy relationships as “micro-political” (Malin, 1992, p. 64); an attractive terminology given the potential of failed schooling to impact children’s later earning capacity and ability to participate in structures of social power beyond their immediate environment. Malin (1977b), citing Poulson (1988) and Ngarrritjan-Kessaris (1992), recognises Aboriginal critiques of school as politically biased institutions (pp. 139-140). Schools however are contingent upon a society and are therefore unavoidably politically biased as well as relatively more powerful than the student. The school failure implied by such politically aware critiques is inevitably a failure of participant relationality of the kind Malin and Hudspith have described at the interpersonal level.

Malin has also addressed another way teacher approaches to classroom relationships can fail pedagogically. She argues indirectly for the sort of constructed relationship preferred by Hudspith and which echoes Kunwinjku relational pedagogy, where teachers maintain pedagogic authority but avoid modifying school to match learner predispositions with the potentially harmful result of:

…simplistic stereotyping of students whether in the realm of communications or learning style, values orientations, academic potential, or whatever, can, at the extreme, lead to unethical rationales as to why a teacher can give up bothering to
try and teach a culturally different child, or at a less extreme, to have lowered expectations. (Malin, 1992, p. 83).

Malin has brought together the factors operating simultaneously in Aboriginal school experience, and which demand difficult but possible responses from both children and teachers in terms of their co-construction of a working relationship. In her research, she stressed the significant role of difference in cultural practices and in expectations between home and classroom:

These differences, together with the teacher’s unconscious low expectations of the Aboriginal students’ academic and social potential, created serious conflict between the students and teachers. This conflict gradually developed into a vicious cycle where the soundest became marginalised both socially and academically. (Malin, 1977b, p. 140).

In Kunwinjku relational terms, this describes a failure to construct mutuality as to goals and personal roles and authority.

The most likely obstacle to achieving a presumably fundamentally human potential to co-operate in mutual tasks with mutually understood goals is the unconscious presumption of racial and radically impenetrable otherness, a reification or at least a mishandling of the perceived cultural and social differences noted by Malin resulting in expectations which may mismatch those of the student and the student’s social group.

Educational theorists have previously identified a “teacher expectancy effect” on school performance (Rogers, 1982, p. 38-39) inviting questions about the way in which Kunwinjku children and other similar indigenous groups may be extreme cases of this effect because it is masked by the teacher self-image as benefactive rather than unconsciously racially discriminatory. The expectation of “difference” defined in vaguely cultural terms coupled with inadequate mutual knowledge as to goals may result in personal warmth in classroom relationships without producing pedagogic success from either viewpoint. The teacher expects and therefore tolerates classroom outcomes that would be disappointing in the case of non-Aboriginal children, and this reinforces a concessive lowering of demands and surrender of pedagogic authority on the teacher’s part and a more serious matching accommodation on the part of the learner, a lowering of self-expectations and pedagogic self-esteem.
Relationally analysed, this occurs because both teachers and children may see each other, or be trained by habit to see each other, as so different that task oriented mutuality is not anticipated. The difficulty on both sides is to construct a relationship even given difference, by assuming or identifying common goals and common human cognitive, perceptual and emotional capacities. Teachers as adults necessarily set the parameters for this mutuality within the classroom, seeing students as children rather than, for example, “Aboriginal children”; as eight year olds rather than “Black eight year olds”. I have discussed evidence, especially at 10.3.6, suggesting Kunwinjku pedagogy doesn’t predicate educability or even capacity to relate to teachers as racially or even culturally parametered. A working pedagogic relationship between adult and child recognises a more profound universal adult-child relationship as the basis for collaboration.

Both Malin and Hudspith bring into focus two issues that impact Kunwinjku pedagogy: the crucial bi-directional nature of teacher-learner relationships which is the focus of Kunwinjku pedagogic interest, and the unavoidably political nature of schooling. Balanda teachers in schools in remote communities rarely possess the professional experience and the capacity for self-analysis demanded, making it more likely they will unconsciously marginalise their Aboriginal students by a benevolent over-accommodation of what teachers mis-read as racial and therefore incomprehensible difference.

14.1.3 Kunwinjku Theory and Other Broad Theories of Pedagogy

Handling supposedly “racial” difference has in fact been an unavoidable issue in this research. However, it has a strong productive potential. I have had to assume throughout this thesis, and indeed throughout this research project, that it is legitimate and possible to analyse one small society’s pedagogy from an outside, universalist viewpoint, and to theorise from its data about pedagogy in universally applicable ways. If theory based on Kunwinjku data engages with the pedagogy of the Balanda world, meaning the Western world, a world of apparently polar difference from Kunwinjku society in scale and complexity, it should have been unsurprising to find Kunwinjku data was susceptible to theoretical modelling in ways applied to Western pedagogy. In fact, the resonance between Kunwinjku concerns and Balanda pedagogy in general is striking. Their concern for explicit pedagogy and mutuality of awareness about goals, their willingness to use memorisation as a tool within understood negotiated learning are accessible to Balanda teachers and
schools. Some more abstract Kunwinjku thinking is remarkably similar to *Balanda* theories. For example, Dewey’s 1897 Pedagogic Credo has many points of similarity with the views of MM and JN on the moral issues and values driving curricula, and on the potentiality of learners. Whitehead (1962) and Krishnamurti (1973) are examples of non-Aboriginal pedagogic theorists who share Kunwinjku concerns about values and the moral curriculum as core issues in pedagogy and the motivations of society to pedagogy.

I noted the interaction possible between Kunwinjku methods of scaffolded instruction and Vygotskian approaches at 11.2.4. Vygotsky summarised his conception of childhood language learning in relational terms:

“The path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person. This complex human structure is the product of a developmental process deeply rooted in the links between individual and social history” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.30).

Vygotsky elaborated the notion of a relationally mediated locus of learning, focusing as does the Kunwinjku data, on the way teachers and learners collaborate (1978, p.85-87), but he went beyond Kunwinjku data in proposing a kind of capacity for learning by collaboration which operates in parallel to cognitive processes (p.85-86). Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” (p. 86) should be mapped onto a relational pedagogy, since its exploitation or rather enactment depends absolutely on the social or interpersonal nature of the teacher-learner collaboration.

Another influential educational theorist on human learning behaviour, Bruner, wrote *The Culture of Education* (1996) reflecting on four decades of study of psychological and other aspects of education. From this reflective position Bruner stressed the essentially social locus of human cognition and learning in ways that resonate with the Kunwinjku data generally and with the relational model I have suggested from it.

For example, Bruner (1996) proposed as a pedagogic universal what he called the “interactional tenet” (p.20) where transmission of knowledge or skill is of a kind with other forms of human exchange and necessarily involves a relationship between a learner and a teacher or some representation of, or conduit from, a teacher. In fact Bruner insists it is an essential quality of human culture to form “communities of mutual learners” (Bruner 1996, p. 22), implying the need for a broader model of human collaboration but immediately resonating with the close Kunwinjku focus on
interpersonal relationality in pedagogy. Bruner in fact anticipates that data from small societies may contribute to theory at a universal level:

But to say only that human beings understand other minds and try to teach the incompetent is to overlook the varied ways in which teaching occurs in different cultures. The variety is stunning. We need to know more about this diversity if we are to appreciate the relations between folk psychology and folk pedagogy in different cultural settings. (Bruner 1996, p.48).

14.1.4 Pedagogy as Reproduction of the Adult Self

In section 10.4 I discussed the Kunwinjku view that children by nature want to learn. Bruner (1996, p. 47) has emphasised the significance of this trait:

In our species, children show an astonishingly strong ‘predisposition to culture’; they are sensitive to and eager to adopt the folkways they see around them. They show a striking interest in the activity of their parents and peers and with no prompting at all try to imitate what they observe.

But Bruner goes further, citing Kruger and Tomasello (1996), specifying there is …a uniquely human ‘pedagogic disposition’ to exploit this tendency, for adults to demonstrate correct performance for the benefit of the learner. One finds these matching tendencies in different forms in all human societies. (Bruner 1996, p.47).

The Kunwinjku pedagogic behaviours I observed support the notion that teaching is an almost automatic part of adult – child behaviours. I will suggest a further stage to theorisation of pedagogy at this universal level. Human reproduction may not be merely biological. The strong Kunwinjku ethic of transgenerational pedagogy (7.2.4; 9.4.2) points to a level of self-awareness in adults seeking to reproduce in their biological children their own Law, their own moral compass, their own capacities for social life and personal life satisfaction. I have very briefly summarised some motivations for teaching offered by Kunwinjku informants (10.5.3) which show a mix of intentions, all based on or constituting together adult valorisation of their teaching role.

A universal adult pedagogic motivation will be reflected in more or less different ways by each particular family or set of teaching adults. The notion of education as the transmission of culture or the reproduction of a particular culture must be relegated under this more primary and individual motivation. It is predictable that parents from the same society will substantially overlap each other’s
motives and curricula in pedagogy, giving rise in large societies to professional teachers and schools, and in small ones to a sharp awareness of what being, say, Kunwinkju should entail. But this agreement is contingent upon the individual and separate families and parents having personally rooted motivations. In fact, in large societies there is an unavoidable eclecticism in method despite the relative homogeneity of even “multicultural” nation states, reflecting inevitable divergences among parents and groups of parents as to their reproductive intentions in teaching their children. The range of non-state schooling available in Australia reflects the interaction of two fundamentals: firstly, that parental aspirations about their children’s pedagogy do not wholly overlap; and secondly, that these aspirations have a primacy in parental concerns and economic and political commitments, suggesting pedagogy is a core human motivation.

The Kunwinjku emphasis on relational locus of pedagogy means in fact a familial locus in thinking, only extending to ceremonial or school venues through direct interpersonal authorisation by parents and families (8.3 and 8.4). Pedagogy is designed to reproduce the teacher because the teacher is authorised to reproduce the parents. This model complements the doctrine of in loco parentis which operates mostly invisibly and mostly unconsciously in schools in mainstream Australia to parameter teacher behaviours. Within this model, we would expect schools to operate effectively only as tools in the hands of allied co-operating individuals, all pursuing similar enough goals for their children to use the school collaboratively. The capacity and desire to associate with other parents sharing pedagogic goals means school systems and school types will multiply in proportion to the diversity of moral or religious systems co-existing in the sphere of operation of the individual parents. Regardless however of the structures involved, the success or failure of pedagogy depends on the results seen by parents in terms of their personal aspirations for offspring. Also regardless of structure, these results will reflect the nature of teacher – learner relationships as the unavoidable nexus of personal and shared sets of pedagogic goals.

The concept of pedagogy as the reproduction of the person or identity is subject to the same caveats as any human behaviour. For example, it can operate between parents and children without conscious examination. It can also fail when parents or other adults are unavailable or abrogate pedagogic tasks. Parental authority to teach can be resisted by children beyond the age where they begin to
interact with sources of teaching beyond their family, so it may not be simply equated with a kind of moral cloning. In the Kunwinjku model, children beyond a certain age depending on individual circumstances begin the self-management of their learning, especially the moral or ideational parts of it, since unlike technical learning, these are not automatically validated for the child in daily routines. The growing child’s volitional awareness in learning is not only desired by adults, but may well be irresistible, despite its origins in the dependency of the very young learner on parental intentionality and scaffolding. Becoming an independent adult paradoxically means beginning in relational dependency, meaning the earliest childhood years are crucial to adults achieving in their children an effective reproduction of the adults selves.

The question arising from this is: is there a pedagogic instinct, analogous to the language instinct suggested by Stephen Pinker (1995) or suggested in a rather oblique way by Kruger and Tomasello (1996, cited by Bruner above). Whether or not this is so, some researchers have tried to describe education in broadly sociobiological terms. For example, Bisin et al (2002, pp. 2-3) have tried to model mathematically the processes of “transmission” of educational content to children and the way this kind of intended “reduplication” may be modified by the child’s learning from sources outside the family, whether randomly or generally from the culture embedding the family. They also noted the significance of parental “intolerance” to educational inputs to their children from sources parents disapprove of, implying strongly proactive behavioural expression of motivations about pedagogy as a general trait in parents. Parents’ motivations must therefore be considered core concerns; ultimately personal rather than cultural or social. When the embedding social group is relatively heterogeneous, however, this trait need not be displayed as intolerance, and allows for collaboration through schools where other parents’ goals are similar (Bisin et al., 2002, pp. 2-3). The reproductive nature of pedagogic relationality operates invisibly but crucially in this sociobiological model too, since regardless of source of motivation or kinds of descriptive modelling, parents are described as using pedagogic tactics to ensure a curriculum reproducing their own preferences.

Regardless of particular explanatory models that can be applied to pedagogy, I have presented it throughout this thesis as essentially an adult child symbiosis of extraordinary significance to both parties. In the following section I will return to the
Kunwinjku data to discuss factors that exert pressure on Kunwinjku society generally of such significance that the core pedagogic relationships are distorted.

14.2 SOCIAL CATASTROPHISM AND PEDAGOGIC ANOMIE

14.2.1 A Subjective Argument for Objective Research

I now confront the most difficult aspect of this research. My preference for a grounded theory, and the ethical concerns noted at 4.1 and 4.2 necessitate my discussion here. Kunwinjku people have indicated in the interviews some strong concerns and even mutual criticisms about aspects of their society and its pedagogy. I have described a comprehensive strong pedagogic system, but I have also had to describe some of its recent failures. To do justice to Kunwinjku viewpoints requires some further discussion as to the causes of those failures.

This section (14.2) is based on my own observations and some tentative conclusions about the impact on Kunwinjku pedagogy of economic and political factors acting on their society, but also now within their society. I have attended to informal Kunwinjku commentary on their recent experiences but I present the discussion here as my own opinion. I have tried to analyse Kunwinjku perceptions of and responses to their present situation, rather than an attempting any analysis of the mechanisms, policy bases and histories of imposed economic structures, governance systems and especially structures of employment that act upon them and their pedagogy. Each of these areas needs urgent, targeted qualitative and quantitative studies beyond the scope of this research. In this section I will argue for this kind of research.

Kunwinjku pedagogy is no longer operational in the way remembered by informants, and some of them have been critical about the pedagogic practices of their peers. I will propose that Kunwinjku society and therefore its pedagogy cannot now be observed except as one point in a process of catastrophic change. I categorise this process as catastrophic because of its speed, its irreversible nature, and because from a Kunwinjku perspective the changes are beyond their comprehension and certainly beyond their control. I have followed the concerns raised by my informants in discussing throughout the thesis the Balanda world’s interaction with Kunwinjku society, particularly in chapters 2, 12 and 13, providing some orientation to the uncomfortable reality from which Kunwinjku people speak. I will argue here that the failure of their pedagogy including school pedagogy must be analysed in economic and political terms rather than cultural, even though the pedagogic consequences in
any case are mediated through individuals with personal motives and psychological histories.

In section 2.2.4.3 and 4 I discussed the notion of pseudo governance and what amounts to pseudo employment. Why do Kunwinjku people apparently accept without organised protest or complaint underemployment and models of governance that effectively exclude them from self-management let alone self-government in any sense? Why does MM claim Kunwinjku parents have simply surrendered their roles in pedagogy? (see [MM: 19] cited at 13.2.5). I will propose here a set of factors that each contributes to Kunwinjku feelings of political impotence and consequent acquiescence in roles and personas as underemployed or even unemployable, with consequences for personal psychology, aspirations and the teaching of their children.

14.2.2 Governance and Social Fragmentation

Kunwinjku society talks about itself in terms of clan and family distinctives. Language nicknames are the friendlier realisation of this natural division, but the association between clans and specific areas of land, and the concern to maintain balance in the exchange of promised marriage partners point to a strong continuity in the self-aware distinctiveness of clan groups even in necessary social interactions through marriages and ceremonies. The “natural” balance between clan heterogeneity, primary loyalty to hearth family and the need for interdependence across all these boundaries survived the agglutinating pressure of formation the Oenpelli community mentioned at 2.1.2, where social boundaries remained despite enforced propinquity. This balance has however been gradually undermined with fragmenting forces resulting from new alignments demanded by the Balanda world’s operating methods, producing a range of deep economic and social tensions. Some unstable and potentially harmful re-alignments occur across Kunwinjku society in response to how these pressures work together. I discussed at several points (2.2.3; 8.2.5; 10.6.2.2 for example) the Kunwinjku social doctrines of personal non-compulsion (“Don’t force me!”) and reciprocity. Neither of these operating principles can be applied against Balanda: their power is too disproportionate, and their processes rely ultimately on irresistible force.

In any case, the points of contact with the Balanda world involve Kunwinjku people in very small groups, making political responses more individually dangerous. Each Balanda entity requires a governing committee – whether the arts and crafts centre, the outstations resources centre, the sports and social club or the
school. Each structures its governance upon a committee drawn from the same
corpus of willing and available people who tend to come from the same clans – those
with some commitment to, and therefore experience of, employment. So a
Kunwinjku person may find himself or herself at odds with fellow clan members
who are associated with other local structures, vying for government funding, or
alternatively, in the position of being suborned or threatened by close kin to exploit
employment resources privately. In addition, income generated by, or at least offered
by, mining operations is distributed along clan lines, with other clans missing out
because of lack of relevant political nous, which equates with lack of contact with
Balanda or confidence or English skills in dealing with them.

This pressure placing individuals in competition with each other in a society
without access to an open employment market generates some self-aware conflicts,
but also a mostly unconscious response by Kunwinjku society as a whole. The strong
Kunwinjku endosociality allows people to view themselves “against” the Balanda
world. What makes me unique as a Kunwinjku person inevitably bonds me with the
other Kunwinjku people who are different in the same way as I am from the
Balanda. However, this resultant focus on endosociality does not build communal
consensus that could drive a politically effective call for meaningful employment. In
pedagogic terms, one could predict the growth of interest in appropriation of school
as locus for construction Kunwinjku identity. However, other factors undermine this
interest. Most significantly, the alcohol outlet in Oenpelli is the site of a great deal of
male homosociality of this reactive kind, with the result that alcohol abuse becomes
part of an acceptable new Kunwinjku identity for men.

In fact the drinkers versus non-drinker distinction is one of a number of
emerging fracture lines making politically united actions of any kind problematic if
not unimaginable. A kind of economically based class division, mentioned at 13.2.8,
developed over the last three decades, is becoming more visible. The minority of
Kunwinjku people who are employed and use a level of English sufficient to manage
their affairs through Balanda structures are in progressively clear contrast to others.
None of them drinks dangerously, and all of them base their personal timetables
around work hours and their personal economies around regular wages. A significant
majority of unemployed Kunwinjku may now regard themselves as without access to
jobs or other aspects of the Balanda world, with resultant loss of motivation or skill
for personal self-management in either financial or other spheres. I take it as
axiomatic that a self-perception of unemployability is part of the self-image of any social group who have never worked and have not seen their own previous generation at work. These are the characteristics of the group of young Kunwinjku adults now raising young children.

**14.2.3 Failure of Adult Pedagogy Provided by Balanda**

Adult education with this group is unlikely to provoke any response in terms of a pedagogic commitment to their own children. Without visible prospective employment, well-intended and even well designed adult education programmes will fail, Kunwinjku participants seeing only the immediate and urgently relevant attraction of payment they receive for training. Further imagining of any future self is limited by:

- The English language skill level required for mastery of any recognised training qualification or management role depends on them having completed secondary schooling at least to year 10, which has only ever been achieved by five Kunwinkju (women), and none in the last decade.
- **Balanda** trainers employed under the CDEP scheme are often used only as nominal trainers with groups of young Kunwinjku men, cleaning up fallen trees, building fences and similar tasks. Trainers are required unofficially but unambiguously to complete tasks assigned as venues for incidental on-the-job training, since the local government authority has no alternative funding sources to tackle the tasks in isolation from training;
- Despite intermittent lobbying by small groups of Kunwinjku women, and some criticism by the school, the Kunwinjku community has been unable to persuade various liquor commissioners since 1977 that the lunchtime drinking available in Oenpelli has led to unemployability and limited training. The manager of the Gunbalanya Sports and Social Club is publicly and privately spoken of by Kunwinkju people as the most powerful individual **Balanda** in a **Balanda** dominated world, since he can control the traditional owners who drink, and therefore the way other **Balandas** obtain necessary signatures for their projects. The way the club has developed as a locus for celebration of Kunwinjku identity not only associates self-image with heavy drinking and contributes to self-destructive reactive expressions of identity mentioned above. The high level of alcoholism among Kunwinjku people (Dabbs and Jones, 1996) also provides the
Chapter Fourteen: Some Speculative Conclusions

Balanda world with a management tool or weapon against Kunwinjku political action.

14.2.4 Disguised Underemployment

In addition to the forms of non-career pseudo employment available to Kunwinkju people I discussed at 2.2.4, there is a less cynical form of underemployment that nevertheless has its own indirect impact on pedagogy. Taylor et al. (2000) noted the frequent movement of young Ngukurr adults among the limited range of jobs in their community, which is also the case for Kunwinjku young adults. The minority who are employed almost always change jobs within two years between the council office, the club, the shop, the school and the clinic. I know of only one man and two women who have continued in the same jobs in Oenpelli for more than a decade. I do not know whether this produces or merely reflects the expectation that Kunwinjku people, unlike Balanda, do not have career type employment. The self-perceptions of the minority in the workplace even on this basis need study: do their expectations reveal a glass ceiling for local Kunwinjku employment, or do they create it? In either case, the link between home or school pedagogy and this kind of job is very weak; making it unlikely a Kunwinkju parent will “sell” school to children.

14.2.5 Traditional Owners and Pseudo Power?

Given the acephalous nature of Kunwinjku and other small societies with little apparatus or mutuality to provide resistance or a strong interaction with the Balanda world, it is unsurprising that various government agencies have imposed or anointed some or other form of accessible spokesmen for these groups. In the 18th and 19th century this involved installing interactive personalities as “kings” with appropriate nameplates. The Australian government’s creation and anointing of “traditional owners” in the 1970s lacked nameplates, but cemented into place an essentially non-representative and certainly unelected system of power. The so-called “traditional owners” developed an awareness of their power only gradually, as other interested parties began to exploit the dollar value of their signatures. I was present in 1977 with a group of the oldest Kunwinjku men who were teaching me the language and representing the three biggest clan groups in Oenpelli, when they met to talk about providing for the first Balanda request for a traditional owner. They nominated a young man whose father had been regarded by missionaries as a spokesman for the Kunwinjku clans then present in Oenpelli. The young man, in his late 20s at that time, protested vigorously but was “appointed” by his elders. Their argument was
that they didn’t want to have to deal with Balanda, and since he was young, he could learn enough English. Within twelve months several other men had presented themselves to Balanda who wanted traditional owners for each clan who could sign on behalf of their clans for mining exploration or other administrative decisions. Some of these men have been able to cash in on the value of their signatures to Balanda businessmen, receiving royalties for example for soil removed from their land to build up roads in the community. There was no legal framework for the distribution of much of this kind of money, contributing to the present day economic differentiation between families. There was a second and more serious unintended consequence. The Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act and its subsequent amendments provided traditional owners with extraordinary control over their own people. Traditional owners are not required to follow any democratic or even consultative procedure with their own countrymen, while Balanda can pretend they have consulted a community by simply speaking conveniently and off the record with one individual. This system also provides a ready-made mechanism for mainstream authorities to decide which if any complaints they will act upon about financial allegations. In practice, individual Kunwinjku with complaints about traditional owners are usually referred back to the same traditional owners as though they constituted an independent and impartial point of arbitration.

From the Balanda perspective, Traditional Owners are a convenience and pose no threat. From the Kunwinjku viewpoint, Traditional Owners possess power by association with the Balanda world: it is real power without the legitimisation of consensus, or of authorisation by the Old People or a basis in any purely Kunwinjku functionality.

14.2.6 Catastrophic Change at the Individual Level
The erosion of individual political rights has been psychologically and volitionally devastating. Whatever system of collaborative and reciprocally balanced decision-making had enabled Kunwinjku survival was replaced in a generation with power exercised in non-transparent ways defined by Balanda with the resources to implement their decision. The social collapse has overtaken the process of years needed for young Kunwinjku people to learn what rights and social systems they could access beyond their own communities. Without this knowledge or a clear employment goal, there is no motivation to school attendance, which prevents the next generation deriving fundamental personal benefits from schooling. Against
these potential causes for despair, some Kunwinkju people try to maintain the integrity of their families, and provide some income, seeing advantages in committed employment. Others may not be able to imagine this option.

The collective experience of employed Kunwinjku people in pseudo employment or short-term jobs tends to reinforce a limited self-image. If these people could come and go into the Balanda workplace, living the other parts of their lives secure in a separate domain, this might not involve in lowering of self-esteem, but given the economic parameters of dependency, there is no escaping the tendency to evaluate oneself against workplace success. In fact, it may only be a general preference for benevolent Aboriginalism on the part of governments that has prevented until recently the application of mainstream psychological and sociological studies in Aboriginal contexts. It is axiomatic that unemployment impacts personal psyche and is linked to a range of self-destructive behaviours in long term unemployed sub groups regardless of ethnicity. This now axiomatic link between unemployment, poverty, social and health issues may not have been applied to Aboriginal people in deference to a preferred model of incomprehensible cultural difference. Only recently some writers have begun to reanalyse remote Aboriginal community issues in terms of established social research expectations (For example Taylor, Bern and Senior, 2000; Taylor and Hunter, 1998) and this too needs further study, particularly as to the prospects of connecting the next generation of Kunwinjku children with the mainstream job market. Levitus (1982) very briefly explored Kunwinjku responses to underemployment, but significant and urgent research is needed on both adult and children’s views of themselves in terms of unemployability and the relationship of school to jobs.

Meanwhile, the impact of adult disempowerment and lowered self-expectations impacts child pedagogy, principally through school non-attendance and lack of hearth family care and teaching. Children respond with their own analyses of the surrounding social catastrophe, retaining aspirations they do not necessarily link to the need for learning either in school or at home.

14.2.7 Aspirations and Employment as Fields for Research on Pedagogy
Kunwinjku children sometimes tell their teachers that their fathers have the job of drinking at the club, or that their mothers’ job is playing cards. These seriously intended statements from pre school age children, reported several times over the last decade by several different though equally distressed teachers, simply reveal the
children associate daily occupation of adults as “jobs” analogous to Balanda adults they observe working in the shop, the office or other venues in Kunwinjku experience. I suggested at 13.6.2 the need for studies on children’s aspirations, but such research would also need to allow children to reveal their present perceptions of how school articulates with adult jobs, particularly in the absence of any close adult with employment experience beyond CDEP.

Adults are frequently heard describing their lack of employment prospects beyond the work for the dole scheme. When they articulate a goal about jobs it is almost invariably in terms of access to a reliable income and some means of protecting that income from unemployed relatives, rather than in terms of self-fulfilment. Their emphasis on financial independence is however inevitably more urgent than other employment motivations, although a small number of parents still talk about the need for their children to attend high school in Darwin in order to move into good jobs. The tragedy of their position is that of all the people who have articulated this kind of aspiration in talking with me, none of them was able to ensure his child attended primary school regularly enough to allow this more distant gaol to be met. This failure too is a factor in lowered self-esteem and lowered expectations. It also constitutes one of the arguments parents consider in sending younger children away from Kunwinjku environment for the sake of their early childhood education. At present, this is being pioneered by a few families who have been able to send their primary aged children to stay with relatives in Darwin allowing them to attend school there. Over the last two years all these children have opted out after experiencing the lifestyle changes demanded of them, and for which they were not well prepared.

In fact, the case for moving to the Darwin urban areas as whole families is made by an increasing, though still small number of people, usually women with dependent children, and not usually for pedagogic reasons. It is often based on a desire to move away from problems of domestic violence, financial insecurity or child abuse rather than towards employment or schooling opportunities. People who attempt this move typically stay for shorter or longer periods with sick relatives who need to stay in Darwin for medical care. Those few families who have attempted to move permanently have all returned after problems caused by visiting relatives overcrowding the house, leading to trouble with the government housing authority landlords.
Nevertheless, children continue to speak about moving to Darwin, but their aspirations are expressed in terms of access to shops, cinema and sometimes school rather than any longer-term employment related goals. It is likely that the increasing autonomy of Kunwinjku children means their aspirations will provide some indications for social planning as well as pedagogic policymaking. Children, especially young females, may well initiate a family’s movement to urban areas. Kate Senior (2004) has described young women’s self-reported aspirations and noted the limitation imposed by lack of role models in the Roper River community, which has a similar profile to Oenpelli (Senior, 2004, p. 13). She also reported the girls’ interest in employment may have been constrained by expectations of their families and their consciousness of limited employment options in their community (pp. 12-13). This study needs parallel research in other similar communities, but should extend to children younger than adolescent, given their precocious autonomy.

Pre-adolescent children in Oenpelli frequently arrange for even distant relatives or known Balanda adults to drive them into Darwin where they stay with relatives, allowing them to develop aspirations not restricted by practical and gender issues of adolescence. The way these children will handle disappointments, or insist on proactivity about their goals, or link goals to education, are all potentially potent in designing and realising future school based pedagogic options.

14.2.8 The Economics of Different Pedagogic Futures as a Field for Research

There are some now unavoidable research priorities and questions for governments, assuming the priority of children’s pedagogic and longer-term employment prospects:

[1] Is it possible to build upon existing policies and funding which support the clear desire of many remote community parents to send their children to mainstream boarding schools? Pedagogically and perhaps financially aspirational Kunwinjku parents are already using this option, but almost invariably the children fail in the secondary school environment without having attended or learnt well in primary education in their communities. I described briefly (2.4.5) the limited ways in which Kunwinjku parents have tried to utilize boarding facilities in Darwin.

[2] Is there a means to provide a kind of primary education located in the communities but protected against the dysfunctional nature of life I have described? If not, should governments recognise and fund the demand for primary age boarding facilities in urban centres?
[3] What are the economic, social and policy issues to be tackled to ensure assistance can be given to people who wish to move into urban areas to further their children’s educational and employment prospects in the absence of either jobs or effective schooling in remote communities?

[4] What are the economic prospects of developing viable and visible employment in remote communities catering for the same range of aspirations expected in non-Aboriginal Australians, and not merely limited to employment based on current educational outcomes? How do these costs compare with both the economic and social costs of inducing movement to urban areas as hunger for career type employment inevitably grows?

Although disaggregation of motivations is problematic, it will be important to analyse the motivations of people desiring to move permanently into urban areas. Given there are always tensions for a woman (or anyone) between the attractions and repulsions within her family and tight knit community, and moving to, say, Darwin, is a balanced calculation: increasing use of electronic banking and mobile phones are part of the softening of the blow. They have helped to make it easier at the time when negative pressures are also more powerful. Neither women nor children at risk entertain questions about their responsibilities or desires to maintain culture, language or links with place. The questions they face daily are: Where will I be safe? What will I surrender in the interests of peace and safety? How do I get money for food?

Leaving motivations towards children’s welfare aside, governments will need in other words to decide whether to fund positively, that is, for Aboriginal educational needs with the long term goal of employable and economically productive high school graduates, or to continue negative, post hoc funding to communities where social and medical needs become geometrically more expensive as new generations of uneducated children grow up reproducing the dysfunctional curriculum they cannot avoid learning deeply if automatically, through daily observation. The decision will entail significant costs either way, and regardless of whether jobs are to be created in communities or aspirational parents are to create demands by their growing presence in urban areas.

I have tried to provide here a picture of how pedagogy looks to Kunwinjku people now, particularly to children, as part of their experience of life generally and to speculate on where trends I observe now may lead. I have reported what I have
been able to find out informally about their motivations and self-image. Kunwinjku pedagogy reflects the way that self-image has changed in response to catastrophic social factors. I will suggest here the mechanism by which that now impoverished self-image is expressed in pedagogic failure.

14.3 PEDAGOGY, SOCIAL CATASTROPHISM AND THE KUNWINJKU SELF

14.3.1 The Displacement of a Pedagogy?

I propose the following process to explain in terms of Kunwinjku pedagogy the collapse of that pedagogy in the last decades, firstly from the child’s viewpoint.

Kunwinjku children were to be taught by and through stable relationships with adults they trusted for their security and physical needs, and whose teaching attracted the child’s collaboration in learning in four ways:

- it had immediate practical benefits in the child’s life;
- it secured the child in a network of relationships, extending his feeling of belonging to an intimate family into previous generations;
- it anchored the child morally providing self-esteem based on acceptance as a competent potential adult committed to family ideology and practices;
- it provided a rich world of ideas and narratives associated with the family and the child’s universe.

All of this invoked and satisfied the child’s innate and constantly operational drive and capacity to learn. When the adult providers of this cognitive, volitional and social nurturance were overruled or withdrew as teachers, the only pedagogic factors left operating were the child’s reliance on unexplicated mimicry – the process of approximation blind to the motives and models that once framed learning, and a desperate hunger for safe nurturing and guidance.

From the adult side, surrender or loss of the opportunity or immediate motivation to reproduce the self, to enact the supremely defining adult roles of physical reproduction and pedagogy, inevitably allowed them to feel less adult, less responsible for children – twin, mutually exacerbating losses of confidence and role. Both are further reinforced by the loss of capacity and confidence in self-government and as an economically productive adult. The extent to which this surrender or unwilling loss of adult pedagogic confidence impacts the psyche of an individual may indicate his or her willingness to become artificially childlike – pathologically dependent on Balanda acting as “super parents” in core aspects of life, and assumed
by failed Kunwinjku parents to be able to meet their children’s needs for pedagogy in their absence as pedagogic stakeholders. The pedagogic symbiosis between adult and child is replaced by a kind of economic symbiosis between *Balanda* and Kunwinjku adults, whether this is located in the arts industry or the liquor outlet.

Despite these economic relationships, the abandonment or at least denial by the *Balanda* political world of explicit goals about assimilation, even under the control of its participants, disallows any Kunwinjku access to the moral codes and organisational values of the *Balanda* world. Had they remained secure in their own pedagogic network, Kunwinjku people could have penetrated this sort of opacity when supported by well thought out motives and learning techniques from their own experience, interacting from a base of confident self-regard as learners. Adults could transmit to children the self-management approaches needed to utilise alien *Balanda* aspects of pedagogy for their own reasons. However, without any clear hope of self-managed economic participation and with the immediate examples in the home only of unemployment if not personal failure, a motivational vacuum for children is inevitable. The collapse of systematic hearth family pedagogy in infancy means Kunwinjku may grow up without having learnt how to learn. Without self-conscious rationale as to why to learn in an alien environment, and without confidence as a learner from hearth experience, pedagogic participation in what is only a very weakly relational and non-explicated domain is impossible. The child has not learned how to learn collaboratively.

The present generation of Kunwinjku adults has been the first group of children growing up through the pedagogic catastrophe and now automatically approaches learning on the default and unselfconscious learning style model of approximation. No explication is provided or sought as to goals; no accessible Kunwinjku model is available; no secure relational network embeds or allows this teaching. The default process of learning without intentional hearth family teaching allows the child only self-directed approximation, a valuable but contingent process in learning. When approximation becomes the only viable methodology, without the experience of relational pedagogy, the prospects for school pedagogy success is at least limited. Given the continuing high level of non-attendance, the present day younger Kunwinjku people become increasingly untrainable and therefore unemployable. More seriously, they will transmit by example to their children similar expectations. Approximation begins with the child’s automatic observation
and modelling of his perceived universe, and this will include the way adults in the child’s purview model teaching and learning. It will include the whole of the child’s experience of adult behaviours. When this is not pedagogically directed or explained, the child has and knows no choice in approximating that range of behaviours. Failed pedagogy reproduces failed pedagogy, whether intentionally or not.

This process is reinforced by tolerance of underperformance on the part of those who now have pedagogic authority to assess or correct - the *Balanda* – and this tolerance tends to confirm in the minds of Kunwinjku learners a view of themselves as pedagogically incapable. Approximation meant learning by supervised and scaffolded trial and error, teaching the child to cope with minor failures in the process of mastery. This was approximation with clearly understood goals in the short and longer terms. The process was not mistaken, as it may be for children now, for the end product of the learning.

This process begs further study beyond the scope of this thesis, for example: At what age, or under what conditions, does it become too late for a child to be taught how to learn without explicit teaching about goals and expectations? How can a child who has not learnt to learn from his own hearth kin, learn how to learn from aliens, let alone aliens who don’t assess pedagogic performances truthfully or provide transparent exemplar roles? How will those children apprehend motivations based on an understanding of the mechanics of empowerment? Do they accept the ultimately race-based expectations their new teachers provide for them, and limited by effective exclusion from a job market, learn only what supplies immediate financial needs providing one or other aspect of their “culture” to *Balanda* buyers?

These are not hypothetical questions, and need research as an emerging aspect of the formation of identity as a core element in pedagogy.

### 14.3.2 A New Kunwinjku Identity?

I tentatively propose the following process where displacement of Law and other parameters of Kunwinjku life led to a profound general change in the nature of Kunwinjku identity. The process is driven by political and economic pressures, but realised in terms of personal psychology, which is then expressed in some general features of Kunwinkju society and its pedagogy.

[1] The practice and transmission of what is remembered of Kunwinjku life and culture is displaced by the pressures of the new lifestyle and its smorgasbord of enticements, as well as a new and urgent need to utilise *Balanda* resources for
survival in the economy they have imposed, and which is now simply accepted as the ineluctable state of the world by the younger adult generation.

[2] The constant process of adaptation does not reach a stable state of adjustment because rapid change in the Balanda society demands continuing changes in Kunwinjku dependents. Constant reconstruction necessitates constant novelty – taking on features of pan-Aboriginality – in other words, if I am to be Aboriginal, and my Kunwinjku background is no longer taught to me, I will look elsewhere while trying to avoid the Balanda world. This is only apparently avoiding the Balanda world however, since it is the medium through which we discover our developing pan-Aboriginal identity.

[3] There is a reaction, sometimes facilitated by Balanda people, which attempts to revitalise an “authentic” feel to Kunwinjku life, and this leads to importing whatever Aboriginal or Balanda processes and ceremonies can be apprehended and which seem different enough from the mainstream. Kunwinjku people now use the English term “traditional” for this kind of resurrected, constructed or imported practice, in effect as a synonym for “Aboriginal”, which is in turn a substitute for “Kunwinjku.” This process in turn threatens pedagogy which may have previously transmitted Kunwinjku life skills.

Those who are still competent at now marketable “traditional” skills are systematically exposed to the most tempting and ideationally invasive of western experiences: For example, in 2005, a group of women was taken to Melbourne and Canberra for string craft exhibitions over several weeks (Hamby, 2005). The skills involved were typically learnt as children and for purely functional reasons. I suggest the women involved may have been attracted to the enterprise despite the high level of Balanda control for powerful economic reasons. Although Balanda motivations towards this cultural enterprise may be commercial, basketry means the opportunity to earn money for people whose only other source of income is the dole. Cultural rationales can be created on demand, but not a wage and the independence it may provide.

I have noted (12.5.1) the way Kunwinjku art has tended to reorganise artists lives for non-pedagogic ends. For both these groups their skills and techniques may be less sought after than their iconic physical presence, since increasingly the Balanda world is able to teach itself how to create the art objects involved. For example, Hamby (2005, pp. 103ff) is detailed and well illustrated enough to be used
as a handbook to teach or create Kunwinjku basketry. So it is the most “authentic” aspects of life that are in fact least authentic in their growing dependency on white advisors, ideas and funding. More significantly, this commoditisation is attracting expertise to economically driven performance and production, and therefore away from intimate pedagogy. In this context, poverty produces art because it produces income. It does not produce the holistic and morally rooted pedagogy of the Kunwinkju past.

[4] The result of these operations is a radical reconstruction of Kunwinjku self, but without stability, since exposure to the mainstream inevitably accelerates and magnifies its attractions, whilst simultaneously raising the barriers to full participation within it. Kunwinjku identity finally becomes an unfeatured identity as “dependent”, unable by definition to suggest or teach a curriculum. Instead, perpetually subject to reconstruction and new learning from Balanda. The view of the self-entailed by these new roles constitutes another factor in the temptation to surrender core responsibilities, which will finally mean a moral passivity, where either consciously or not, the locus of decision making and culpability is sequestered by Balanda as well. This final moral surrender is evidenced in the range of self-destructive and violent behaviours where the once enforced Kunwinjku expectations of reasonable self-control are now missing.

This in turn impacts children, leading to a panicky response to Balanda attention, where parents will use Balanda as a feared authority not merely to be feared but as a photo negative of Kunwinjku identity, which may lead to failing to send children to school, failing to insist on children wearing seat belts, supplying children with tobacco and other acts which are meant perhaps as gestures of defiance or even of self-harm to the adult, but damage children. It may simply be the only recourse left for protest. Whatever the rhetoric however, the consistently low self-regard of Kunwinjku people, even in private conversation about themselves in comparison with the Balanda world and their own ancestors, suggests a sense of moral surrender.

If so, that surrender removes the last obstacle to the loss of adult pedagogic roles. It may explain why some parents disqualify themselves from their pedagogic responsibilities completely, even though they may not intend the reproductive consequences. The brutality of daily economic pressure without job options may also provide reinforcement of this pathologically low self-esteem. For example,
Kunwinjku people play card games, often involving their children from primary age upwards. This has been the subject of some internal criticism within Kunwinjku society, but has taken on a more conscious and explicit financial motivation. Even children will now say they will go to a particular card game as a way of raising cash. Inevitably, younger children of playing mothers attach to the mothers regardless of the venue. No Kunwinjku adult defends this situation except in terms of needing money. The tension between the aspiration inevitable through exposure to Balanda media and the artificially constricted economic opportunities in their community must therefore now be considered a factor in poor school attendance and lack of hearth family teaching.

14.3.3 A Note on Adaptational Psychodynamics and Dependency of Social Groups as Research Areas

I have suggested the locus or origin of pedagogic failure is the minds and volitional capacities of Kunwinjku adults and children. It can be analyses in terms of adaptational psychodynamics as “maladjustment” (Campbell, 1981, p. 12). In Campbell’s terms, the Kunwinjku experience may be an extreme example of “autoplastic” maladjustment (Campbell, 1981, p. 12) due to stressors of previously unresearched dimensions on a small social group and its individuals. There may be a benefit in the long run to focused research on the psychodynamics of recent Kunwinjku social group changes. For example, dependency behaviour is usually described in the individual (Bornstein, 1993 summarised research models). Doi (1973) has suggested that a national society may exhibit dependent behaviours to an unusual degree, but no one has yet researched how a distinct, embedded small community is impacted by enforced dependency. One benefit of psychological modelling of Kunwinjku responses to catastrophic economic relegation may be the correction to Balanda assumptions that Aboriginal people must be treated as incapable of adaptation, a view that overlooks the impact of what may be one of the largest displacements of economic and cognitive universe anyone could experience whether suffered voluntarily, or as in the Kunwinjku case, involuntarily.

14.4 CONCLUSIONS

14.4.1 Summary

Kunwinjku people had a complete, working and satisfying pedagogy. Kunwinjku adults performed a comprehensive and intentional teaching role with their offspring and a curriculum agreed on across the Kunwinkju clans. Formal and informal
elements and a variety of teaching methodologies were used in the range of life settings, intended to produce adults who would in turn teach subsequent generations. This pedagogy was distributed across the whole Kunwinjku community and was the subject of frequent discussion. As in any society, a select group of people had specialist, well-developed theories on human learning and the nature of the curriculum. Special pedagogic venues provided by ritual and ceremony were shared by disparate clans in the interest of a reproducing competent and complete Kunwinjku adults. The general approach incorporating all the Kunwinjku pedagogic preferences can be described as relational: its high level of intimacy, intentional interpersonal scaffolding and mutual cognition reflected a powerful drive to reproduce the self in the child as an ideal Kunwinjku person.

In the lifetime of now middle-aged Kunwinjku people this pedagogy has been displaced, following the displacement of the Old People and the Law as the authorities and codified curriculum for Kunwinjku teaching. Their loss was part of the process of displacement of the timetables and self-reliance that supported pedagogy, replaced by timetables imposed and pressurised by Balanda interventions. These losses were compounded by surrender of the confidence and capacity for intelligent self-governance, and the irreversible acceptance of alcohol and other politically disempowering attractions of the Balanda lifestyle. Finally, the drive for survival in a new economic system which disallowed and devalued traditional economic practices, while excluding Kunwinjku people from full participation in the new economy, has led to psychological effects of underemployed poverty, including the surrender by parents of stakeholder roles in their children’s pedagogy.

Whether we view this pedagogy as a kind of innate drive, or as a local manifestation of general human sociality and cognition, whether we decide it is simply a more complex and conscious form of nurturance seen in non human life, whether it is God given, and especially if it is unique to humans, makes no difference: an adult who cannot express and apply this drive and a child missing this adult teaching is necessarily injured or limited. The damage is personal but there are social group implications as well. Kunwinjku pedagogy was socially cohesive as individual pedagogic agendas overlapped substantially, so its disruption adds cyclically to the fragmentation induced by new kinds of economic competition.

14.4.2 Applying this Research on Children’s Behalf
The focus of this research, and of the responses from all my informants, has been the teaching and learning world of children. This suggests the welfare of those children demands some speculation as to what might be gleaned from this thesis of benefit to them. I suggest there are three different kinds of answer.

[1] Firstly, given the level of displacement and disruption Kunwinkju people have diagnosed as impacting their pedagogy, and given their previous attempts to adapt schooling as a kind of response, research into another wave of experiment within schools should be suggested. Specifically, given the divergences in parental aspiration reflected in variable attendance and home life patterns, the school could underwrite a stranded approach to allow longer term pedagogic relationships between selected teachers and those children who attend well. This is a kind of educational triage admitting the inevitability of school failure by those outside these classes while thereby freeing relational and other resources to be focussed on children who have a better prospect of success at school learning. Optimally, they could succeed in ways that are exemplic to some other families.

[2] Secondly, given the way some aspirational parents have availed themselves of funding for secondary boarding schools for their children, governments should explore funding for children whose families elect to place them with friends in major centres (a kind of family based boarding system). In addition, given the need for children to be acculturated into school learning before their teen years, governments should also explore options for boarding pre-secondary aged children. Adjacent, short term accommodation for a family member could be subsidized for younger children moving into boarding situations.

As a kind of half way house towards schooling away from the community, funding should be found to allow experimental boarding for short periods for groups of children in a “learning house” in the remote communities. This would allow “live in” teachers who would run for, say, a week for each group, a curriculum of general schoolwork but include household and mainstream social knowledge including intensive immersion style English. It may not be possible to have children sleeping overnight in such an arrangement, given the considerable difficulties in isolating and protecting them, but the potential immersion learning experience for most of each day should be assessed.

[3] The above suggestions recognize that the underlying economic and social problems of remote indigenous communities like Oenpelli are unlikely to improve.
This may well predict an acceleration in the numbers of people moving for longer periods or permanently into urban areas. Whether pedagogic concerns about their children are part of the motivational mix driving this movement is not yet obvious. Whatever the case, governments must anticipate and plan for engaging geographically (and socially) displaced Kunwinjku and other remote children in urban schools and the job economy embedding those schools.

14.4.3 Whose Children?
This research may be analytically productive for educational theoreticians, and may even have practical benefits to those grappling with the nitty gritty of cross-cultural teaching roles. A relational approach to pedagogic thinking may focus attention on the nature of teacher-student and adult-child relationships as the crucible for methodological selection and the focus for analysis of pedagogic success and failure whether in domestic or school based pedagogy and the formal and informal modes used in both.

However, this research must also have political significance. Apart from the various state laws on compulsory education for children, Australia’s adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) includes a commitment on the part of governments to children’s pedagogy that potentially overrules the roles and rights of parents, whether individuals or in small embedded social groups (United Nations, 1948, article 26). The federal referendum of 1967 gave the Australian government power over states and territories in regard to Aboriginal issues (Attwood, 1997). The fact that many Kunwinjku parents have disqualified themselves from pedagogic roles with their children means an increased not a decreased obligation on governments to intervene, and to find a means of supporting those parents who are still motivated by their children’s pedagogic best interests as a first priority, regardless of the policy difficulties involved in attacking economic causes of this stakeholder resignation. The general and specifically educational welfare of children is, under our national law, the litmus test of policy.
Chapter Fourteen: Some Speculative Conclusions
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ITEMS CITED IN THESIS
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF REFERENCES CITED

I have included here only the works actually cited in the text of the thesis. Many more work consulted. A more comprehensive list is included as Working Bibliography as Appendix Four on the attached CD.


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