

**WRITING WORDS—RIGHT WAY!**

**Literacy and social practice**

**in the**

**Ngaanyatjarra world**

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**Introduction**

In childhood one does not ‘acquire culture’, but one ‘acquires a set of practices that enable one to live in a culture’.<sup>960</sup> Cultural practice results from the acquisition and transmission of everyday social habits and routines over successive generations. Children become culturally competent members of their own social and cultural group by acquiring ‘cultural tools’ and being socialised into the ‘cultural processes’ of the group.<sup>961</sup> Children are apprenticed in cultural processes through observation and ‘guided’ participation in mature community activities.<sup>962</sup> Child development is thus a process of socialisation or enculturation that is ‘inextricably bound to the process of orienting oneself within systems of meaning’.<sup>963</sup> In ‘mainstream’ or literate ‘middle-class’ Western families literacy is integral to cultural practice. Most children in these families acquire literacy as a ‘cultural tool’ because they are socialised into literate systems of meaning, forms of discourse and social practice and they are embedded in ‘a way of life in which reading and writing are integral to communication, recreation and livelihood’.<sup>964</sup>

In this chapter I consider how Ngaanyatjarra children are socialised into oral and cultural practice and I discuss the impact of altered language socialisation processes on Ngaanyatjarra language. I show how literate practices have seeped into cultural processes and how they have been acquired and transmitted over the generations. I use ethnography to make links between social and cultural practice in contexts and locales that affect children and the process of language and literacy acquisition by focusing on the literate practices of children in one family group.

**Socialisation into the Ngaanyatjarra world**

In earlier times Ngaanyatjarra babies were born in the bush and ‘smoking the baby’ was common practice. *Puyungkatja* or *tjunarntatja* refers to someone who has been smoked as a baby ‘so as not to grow up to be a swearer or person who growls a lot’.<sup>965</sup> Typically the

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<sup>960</sup> (Schieffelin 1990: 15).

<sup>961</sup> See (Gee 2004; Levinson et al. 1996; Rogoff 1990; Serpell 1993).

<sup>962</sup> (Rogoff et al. 1993).

<sup>963</sup> (Miller 1996b: 183).

<sup>964</sup> (Rogoff et al. 1993: 10).

<sup>965</sup> (Glass and Hackett 2003: 354).

grandmother (MM) would smoke the baby to ensure that it 'grow up straight', as Louisa describes:

When the baby born in the bush, which rockhole, which spirit come from the baby, when the babies have the birthmark on them, grandmothers have to take responsibility for the baby, put it in a wooden dish in the smoke, then that man never grow up nuisance, he listen to the mother, never talk back to the family.<sup>966</sup>

Now babies are typically born in hospital and return home cosseted in baby clothes and blankets. Young children live in close proximity to their extended kin, often in multigenerational households where childrearing is shared. Sleeping and feeding routines are determined by need and babies are rarely left alone. Children develop into social beings through testing the parameters of autonomy and relatedness intrinsic to sociality in the Ngaanyatjarra, and broader Western Desert, world. According to Myers the communication of appropriate emotional states plays a vital role in the socialisation of Pintupi children into adults. Maturational development depends upon the ability to recognise one's social relatedness to others, and to subdue one's will in order to sustain relatedness and this development is perceived as an increasing ability to 'understand'. Small children do not 'know' (i.e. in Pintupi: *patjarra* or *ramarama* – 'unaware', 'oblivious', 'deaf' or 'unheeding'), so if they do not comprehend the importance of social events, throw tantrums or do not listen to or respond to parents they are considered 'not responsible' for their actions.<sup>967</sup> Children are also not socialised into time and space rule-oriented boundaries, and this contrasts with the discipline expected of children during ceremony time.<sup>968</sup>

## Language socialisation

All children acquire their first language or mother tongue through social interaction, however culturally appropriate 'communicative competence' and language behaviour patterns are acquired through language socialisation.<sup>969</sup> Language plays a critical role in the 'construction of social identity'.<sup>970</sup> As Maisie tells me:

Ngaanyatjarra is important for everyone because it is their birth, number one language and it's important for them not to lose their language, always keep it, it's their point, their own. Because the English is the second and we only use it when talking to the people like you, at shop, office.

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<sup>966</sup> See (Kral and Ward 2000: 147).

<sup>967</sup> (Myers 1986: 107–9).

<sup>968</sup> (Marrkilyi E. pers. comm. April 2006); (Shaw 2002). See also (Burbank 2006; Hamilton 1981) for similar ethnographic observations on Indigenous childrearing practices.

<sup>969</sup> See (Romaine 1984; Snow and Ferguson 1977; Wells 1979). First language learning is seen as a natural process of *acquisition* (Krashen 1976), whereas in the Western pedagogic frame, second language and literacy are more commonly learnt via *instruction* (Ellis 1985). 'Communicative competence' is a sociolinguistic concept deriving from Dell Hymes (Hymes 1972; Hymes 1974) to refer to a speaker's underlying knowledge of the rules of grammar: that is the phonology, grammar, lexicon, and semantics and the rules for their use in socially appropriate circumstances, see (Romaine 1994: 24).

<sup>970</sup> (Ochs 1993).

Language also acts as ‘an agent for the transmission of culture’ and it is through language children ‘acquire the ways and world views of their culture’.<sup>971</sup>

### ***Baby talk***

Ngaanyatjarra language socialisation begins with the arrival of a new baby who is fussed over with much tactile interaction such as cuddling, pinching of cheeks and kissing, in conjunction with the undulating prosodic contours of ‘baby talk’. Observers of Aboriginal baby talk characteristically describe an incremental scaffolding approach to language acquisition in the use of diminutives, reduplication and a specific baby talk lexicon, as well as regular phonological modification of standard adult speech: consonant elision and consonant substitution and accompanying gestural interaction. Ngaanyatjarra baby talk exemplifies similar features:<sup>972</sup>

<b><i>Baby talk form</i></b>	<b><i>Standard Ngaanyatjarra</i></b>	<b><i>English translation</i></b>
<i>akula</i>	<i>ngala!</i>	eat it!
<i>kikila / kikilawu</i>	<i>tjikila!</i>	drink it!
<i>tutula</i>	<i>tjutjurla!</i>	cover it!
<i>ampu</i>	<i>yampula!</i>	hold me! pick me up! hug me!
<i>awulu</i>	<i>ngayulu</i>	I – 1 <sup>st</sup> pers. sing.
<i>utuna</i>	<i>nyuntunya</i>	you – 2 <sup>nd</sup> pers. sing.
<i>atjutjaya</i>	<i>ngarlitutjarra!</i>	poor thing!
<i>nyampi</i>	<i>nyampi</i>	child’s version of a traditional women’s dance/song
<i>uupa</i>	onomatopoeic sound and gesture	‘kiss’
<i>nyam-nyam</i>	onomatopoeic sound and gesture	‘yummy’
<i>nya-nya</i>	onomatopoeic sound and gesture	‘food’

Source: Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis pers. comm. 2006

Studies of baby talk suggest that simplified registers or modifications of adult speech assist in scaffolding the language learning process for young children.<sup>973</sup> Olson asserts that in taking a ‘scaffolded’ approach to language learning caregivers model and objectify language by treating it as an ‘artifact’ that can be segmented, named and analysed. This is seen as an important antecedent to literacy learning, however Olson suggests that ‘nonliterate parents or less literate parents’ may make no assumptions about the scaffolded process of language teaching.<sup>974</sup> Contrary to Olson’s assertion, I would suggest that, irrespective of literacy ability, Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjarra/Pitjantjatjara caregivers are conscious that through

<sup>971</sup> (Romaine 1994: 25; Schieffelin 1990: 14).

<sup>972</sup> (Douglas 1976; Jacobs 1988). Other linguistic studies on Aboriginal child language development note the early stages of verbal communication (Bavin 1991; Hamilton 1981; Lowell et al. 1996), including ‘baby talk’ (Bavin 1993; Hoogenraad 2005; Laughren 1984).

<sup>973</sup> (Ferguson 1977).

<sup>974</sup> (Olson 1984: 188).

talking 'baby talk, soft way' language is scaffolded and children 'learn to speak'.<sup>975</sup> Later in this chapter we see how Ngaanyatjarra caregivers also scaffold written language for young learners.

By participating in social and cultural practice children acquire the linguistic and cognitive orientations of their elders.<sup>976</sup> Like in other Aboriginal settings, the Ngaanyatjarra world is highly social, interactive and verbal.<sup>977</sup> As families sit around the fire or in the shade of verandas and trees they *tjumangkarriku* and *tjumalku* – 'tell stories and gossip'. Story-telling and language play (including speech arts such as rhyming, metaphor, alliteration and onomatopoeia) are intrinsic to everyday discourse.<sup>978</sup> Children are immersed in a language rich environment where they acquire the speech styles and oral narratives of their culture by listening to, and interacting with, those who speak *tjaa yuti* ('strong/clear language')—and increasingly with speakers who 'code-switch' and 'code-mix' between Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra or Pitjantjatjara, and English.<sup>979</sup> From early childhood children also acquire the lexical and gestural vocabulary that denotes kinship relations and the rules that govern social organisation.

Play sheds light on children's growing familiarity with adult oral and cultural practices.<sup>980</sup> Through mimetic actions children work out 'the "scripts" of everyday life—adult skills and roles, values and beliefs'.<sup>981</sup> Childhood play has been noted by researchers as important for the acquisition of language. Romaine, drawing on Hymes' notion of 'communicative competence', suggests that play is 'an important part of the child's development of communicative competence'.<sup>982</sup> Traditionally, unstructured play in the Ngaanyatjarra world involved few material artefacts and was imitative of adult oral discourse and social practice

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<sup>975</sup> (Kral and Ward 2000: 147). See an account of baby talk and language learning in Pitjantjatjara written by a Pitjantjatjara speaker for a Pitjantjatjara story writing contest (Goddard 1994) and (Ellis 2006) for a discussion on Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjarra baby talk and language learning by Ngaatjatjarra linguist Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis.

<sup>976</sup> See (Laughren 1978; Wilkins 1991).

<sup>977</sup> As noted also by Jacobs in her study of Ngaanyatjarra language socialisation (Jacobs 1988) and in other language socialisation studies in Aboriginal Australia (Hamilton 1981; Lowell et al. 1996).

<sup>978</sup> (Douglas 1979: 49).

<sup>979</sup> The term 'code-mixing' indicates that interlocutors may not be aware of mixing languages and the vernacular has become 'mixed and/or simplified' (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005: 28). 'Code-switching' 'typically involves bilinguals who know both languages well but choose to alternate between them' (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005: 85). See (McConvell 1988). At Warburton varieties of spoken English range between, on one end of the continuum, a form resembling Standard Australian English, and at the other end a form of 'interlanguage' (Ellis 1985) used by learners of English as a second language. Bilingual speakers who have spent intensive periods interacting with English speakers tend to have a notable proficiency in English demonstrating broad-ranging grammatical, semantic, prosodic and pragmatic competence, especially middle-aged speakers who have lived in the Eastern Goldfields. Young adults who have grown up in the Eastern Goldfields tend to speak a form of 'Aboriginal English' although many maintain a passive knowledge of Ngaanyatjarra.

<sup>980</sup> (Goodwin 1990; Serpell 1993).

<sup>981</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 298).

<sup>982</sup> (Romaine 1984: 141; Hymes 1972). See also (Bruner and Plattner 1984; Vygotsky 1966).

through children's pretend songs and dances (*tjilkuku turku* and *tjilkuku nyarnpiku*), and pretend hunting (*marlu-marlu*) and 'cubbyhouse' (*wiltja-wiltja*) games.

Play with little spears and pretend they spearing kangaroo. Sand story for girls, long time ago used to get a leaf and tell the story, but we don't see that anymore. But the important one is the people, for man can go and sit down in the school and talk to the kids, tell the stories, dreamtime stories, different things they been doing, they'll know then...it needs to be taught in school. Telling old stories, hard language.

Over time, introduced Western objects have become intrinsic to imitative play and such play is now often nuanced with textual and numerical dimensions as children mimic reading and writing, and the gambling practices of their elders.<sup>983</sup>

### ***Oral narratives***

In many Indigenous cultures oral narratives have been central to instruction and learning in a manner that fostered attention, imagination and metaphoric thinking through the incorporation of 'moral themes and virtuous acts for children to emulate, or strange and fearful myths to deter them from doing wrong'.<sup>984</sup> In the Western Desert, oral memory and the transmission of cultural knowledge and learning through the *tjukurrpa* (in this sense meaning both Law and story) have been critical to the maintenance of a regulatory framework that has bound culture over generational cycles. Children's 'dreamtime stories' or moral tales were told as sanitised versions of the *tjukurrpa*. In the socialisation of Ngaanyatjarra children a fear of *mamu* or 'bad spirits' was (and still is) inculcated to discipline or keep children obedient (*ngurlutjingalku* or *pinangkatjunku*) and to steer them away from sacred objects or locations (*pikangurlu*). *Mamu tjuma*—stories about 'monsters' or scary spirits were used to teach children the 'right way' to act. Stories are still told today, but have a diminishing potency.<sup>985</sup>

Daniele Klapproth suggests that in Western Desert storytelling practice the 'narrative negotiation of culturally relevant concerns' are lexicalised in 'cultural core concepts'.<sup>986</sup> For instance, core cultural concepts such as being led by one's elders and being led 'straight' (i.e. metaphorically along the straight path, the 'right way') are used as structuring principles in narratives. In Ngaanyatjarra, the adjective *tjukarurru* – 'straight' is often used in terms of moral imperatives in sacred and secular domains, that is, to denote the 'proper way' of talking and behaving, or fulfilling obligations and responsibilities. Stories of two brothers—

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<sup>983</sup> (Plant and Viegas 2002). See also (Haagen 1995; Rockchild 1999).

<sup>984</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 292). See also (Basso 1984). In preliterate Europe oral tales were used to instruct children and adults alike and metaphorical norms of conduct were embedded in narratives. It is argued that the introduction of printed fairy tales had an impact on the sociocultural nature of storytelling as the content and nature of the stories were transformed sanitised and simplified literary tales for an audience of children (Klapproth 2004: 61).

<sup>985</sup> Marrkilyi E. pers. comm. 2004.

*tjuma kurtarra-pula* (i.e. ‘story of brother-pair’)—are typically found in the Ngaanyatjarra canon.<sup>987</sup> Here the story schema thematically incorporates the seniority and leadership of the *kurta* (‘elder brother’) over the *marlany(pa)* (‘younger brother’, literally meaning the one coming behind) and is emphasised both as an organising principle of the narrative and a socio-structural metaphor. Through storytelling speech styles and the rules of appropriate interaction are learned. In the ‘two brother’ genre, a *kurta* can, for example, talk straight or make direct requests of a *marlanypa* until the younger brother reaches a certain age, after which time the *kurta* must *tjarlpa wajalku*—communicate indirectly.<sup>988</sup>

Through storytelling, Western Desert children are socialised into cultural understandings by taking on ‘the role of the receptive and attentive listener and observer who, from informed interpretation, arrives at his or her own conclusions about what is going on’.<sup>989</sup> Klapproth suggests that children learn to discern the ambiguous multilayered complexity of stories through a process of ‘retrospective discovery and understanding’ of the moral consequences of protagonists’ actions. Traditional discourse styles emphasise children learning through listening, observing and understanding, as Molly recalls:

It was a very good education for me, strong family, strong teaching, strong inside. They taught me a lot of things those old people, when they taught me a lot of things I learn, I sat down and listened. Every time they taught me...they showed me how to do it, I used to watch them...I think they learn a lot from their older people not from the whitefella, but from their parents. It’s very good strong, you feel you gotta help your people, following, you got it right in your heart whatever they taught you. I listened to my old people and they taught us many things.

Brooks describes a discussion about the process of the cultural transmission of knowledge with an older Ngaanyatjarra man who commented that ‘[w]hen old people give a little bit of story to young people, it works inside their head [to become the full story].’ From this perspective ‘knowledge is real’ and in time can ‘work on the brain’ to reveal itself.<sup>990</sup> Then as children grow they are expected to follow in the footsteps of previous generations, as Molly explains:

To be strong children have to learn the way of the land, in the land. Our Law, to be strong. That’s what we’re teaching our children. We teach them the way they taught us. Same way, not whitefella way.<sup>991</sup>

Many elders struggle to transmit cultural knowledge in the old way so that children can follow in their footsteps. In other families like the ‘Gibson Desert’ families Louisa’s daughters have been ‘learning ceremony’. Louisa’s daughter says ‘my nanna always explain

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<sup>986</sup> (Klapproth 2004: 258–270).

<sup>987</sup> See (Glass and Newberry 1990 [1979]; Murray 1979 [1969]-c).

<sup>988</sup> See (Lester 1981: 28).

<sup>989</sup> (Klapproth 2004: 320–21). See also (Walsh 2006).

<sup>990</sup> (Brooks 2002d: 97–8).

<sup>991</sup> Data from (Kral and Ward 2000).

me and I understand that, they tell me what to do, take me out bush'. Darleen's grandmother tells the girls: 'Oh when you grow up you'll be taking my place when we passed away'.

### *Mirlpatjunku—telling sand stories*

Developmental studies on the acquisition of narrative competence indicate that 'narrative discourse structures are commonly acquired and internalised by age ten in a child's process of socialisation'.<sup>992</sup> We see this exemplified in *mirlpa* the typically female storytelling practice acquired in childhood throughout the Western Desert and across Central Australia.<sup>993</sup> *Mirlpatjunku* is now commonly enacted by girls using the sharp end of a bent 'story wire' that is typically carried slung around the neck—fencing wire having replaced the traditional use of twigs and gum leaves (Fig. 6.1).<sup>994</sup> In this story-telling practice oral narratives accompany drawing in the sand, and iconography, symbolic representations, spoken narrative and gesture are integrated into a 'coherent narrative whole'.<sup>995</sup>

Christine Watson suggests that sand story-telling is a cultural practice that has a 'societal role' as one of the means of 'inculcating the *habitus*' of Aboriginal society in young people. Sand stories illustrate conversations about everyday events, impart life skills and 'a sense of family ties, social mores and folklore' to teach youngsters their family histories.<sup>996</sup> In a Ngaatjatjarra speaking community in the east of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, anthropologist Laurent Dousset notes the use of iconography drawn in the sand to represent the cultural schema of social relationships and genealogies, and in this schema social relationships 'include representations and elements of space-structuration'.<sup>997</sup> Cultural information is transmitted to the next generation as young girls acquire skills, knowledge, and social relationship and kinship rules.

Through story-telling, girls are developing oral communication skills and good story-tellers formulate cohesive narrative discourse rendered in an appropriate prosodic form

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<sup>992</sup> (Klapproth 2004: 57).

<sup>993</sup> Other references to Western Desert sand story practice include (Eickelkamp 2005; Todd Woenne 1973; Wallace and Wallace 1968; Watson 1997). Also see the Warlpiri (Munn 1986 [1973]) and the Arrernte (Green forthcoming; Wilkins 1997). A comparable tradition is noted in the Alaskan Eskimo practice of girls telling 'mud knifing stories' (deMarrais et al. 1992).

<sup>994</sup> *Mirlpa* is the noun form (syn. *milpirnti*, *tjinytja*); and *mirlpatjunku* is the verb form (syn. *milpirntinku*, *tjinytjatjunku*) (Glass and Hackett 2003: 159). A sand story is drawn with fingers and hands or beaten with wire or stick on smoothed ground during oral storytelling. Sam Mollenhauer (pers. comm. May 2006) recalls that in Warburton around 1951 an appropriately shaped gum twig was used and 'the story would be tapped out on a flattened sandy surface, after that each stanza of the story, would again be flattened for the next part'.

<sup>995</sup> (Wilkins 1997: 136). Wilkins describes how Arrernte, narratives told to young children were typically accompanied by drawings in the sand and an auxiliary sign language (Wilkins 1997: 134).

<sup>996</sup> (Watson 1997: 109). Watson's research was conducted at Balgo, a West Australian Aboriginal community to the north of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.



depending on the audience. Numerical and textual elements are also evident in this traditional practice. Writers note the use of a tally of small straight lines used to count each person in the representation of social relatedness, with each relationship set linked by a straight line.<sup>998</sup> I have noticed a similar tally system of counting in a sand drawing about a man with many wives. Ngaanyatjarra mothers and daughters are now writing initials and ‘names on the ground with story wire’ as they tell stories.<sup>999</sup> In this cultural practice girls are verbalising stories, drawing cognitive links and matching these with symbols drawn in the sand—all essential ‘pre-literacy’ skills.

## Language shift

Language socialisation practices have altered, however, and this is accelerating language shift. The introduction of Western schooling and changed social practice has affected Ngaanyatjarra cultural processes. While some oral traditions remain strong, Ngaanyatjarra language is endangered.

Ngaanyatjarra children are now more distanced from first language immersion contexts, for longer, than ever before, Western institutional practices, values and expectations are replacing cultural learning, and schooling has reduced the time spent acquiring and using complex linguistic structures, routines and traditional speech styles.<sup>1000</sup> The discourse structures and stories of past generations are not being transmitted as they once were. English language television and alternative night-time activities occupy the social space previously filled by oral narrative and language play. As Wesley explains:

I think a lot has to do with talking, life before was built around communicating, passing on knowledge, now it’s not like that. In the evenings now somebody is watching TV or listening to music or something like that, you’re not [talking], like I grew up with no TV...you talk a lot, explain how things work and how you achieve things.

Traditional roles are also diminishing, as exemplified in this lament from a Ngaanyatjarra *ngangkari* (‘traditional healer’):

I worry about the new young apprentice *ngangkari* these days. They are not getting the same bush upbringing that we old men did. I worry about them. *Ngangkari* business is too important to lose.<sup>1001</sup>

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<sup>997</sup> (Dousset 2003: 19–20).

<sup>998</sup> (Dousset 2003: 24–5; Watson 1997: 114).

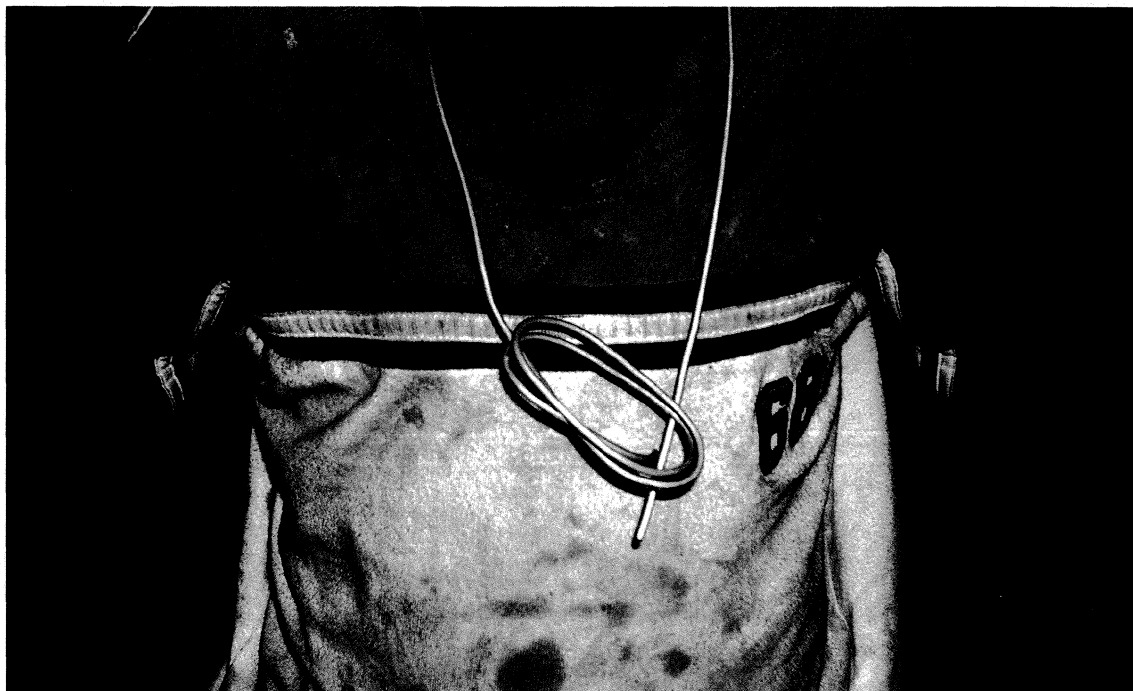
<sup>999</sup> In a presentation at the *Imagining Childhood Symposium* Alice Springs NT, September 2005 Eickelkamp remarked on how contemporary geometric symbols, representative of buildings, and alphabetic symbols had entered the lexicon of symbols she observed at Ernabella, a Pitjantjatjara-speaking community in South Australia (Eickelkamp 2005).

<sup>1000</sup> Shirley Brice Heath comment from presentation at *Imagining Childhood Symposium*, Alice Springs NT, September 2005.

<sup>1001</sup> (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council Aboriginal Corporation 2003: 53).

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**Fig. 6.1** Story wire for telling sand stories





Previously, complex oral and gestural forms were learned, and used by children, *in situ*, with knowledgeable elders telling stories, noting signs of seasonal change in the flora and fauna, observing animal and human tracks and navigating using directional terminology and spatial orientation skills on land and in the night sky.<sup>1002</sup> Now, with less time spent hunting and gathering, contextualised occasions for talk around tool production, animal behaviour, sign language when stalking prey, or meat and food preparation and distribution according to kinship relationships have diminished. Alongside the dissipation of contexts for oral story-telling, the transformation of oral genres into simplified written versions for children (or translated into English) is also reducing the function of oral narratives as moral or metaphorical cultural guides.<sup>1003</sup> It has been suggested that an outcome of changed practices and schooling in English, is that some Western Desert youngsters are 'losing some of the insightfulness of their own language' and may not be achieving 'adequate self-expression in any language'.<sup>1004</sup>

We still got our culture, you know, we got our culture...that culture is very important...Language is very important for our life too, we can't lose that. But to get together, like to mingle with the white people they have to learn that second language, that second language is that English. But our first language is Ngaanyatjarra. Ngaanyatjarra language is very important.

Clearly, language shift is in process in Western Desert and other Aboriginal languages.<sup>1005</sup> Howell suggests that language change at Warburton has increased in the last few years with more non-Ngaanyatjarra speakers residing there.<sup>1006</sup> Older Ngaanyatjarra speakers note that young people's speech is sounding like 'baby talk' as they tend to revert to using less complex sounds and increased code-mixing. Lexical substitutions for kin terms are

<sup>1002</sup> See (Laughren 1978; Wilkins 1991; Wilkins 2004; Wilkins 2006) on the acquisition and use of spatial and directional terminology in Warlpiri and Arrernte. See also (Wallace and Wallace 1968; Wallace 1968) on Pitjantjatjara children learning and (Lewis 1976) on spatial orientation in the Western Desert and (Lowe 2002) on hunting and tracking in the desert.

<sup>1003</sup> Published collections of Ngaanyatjarra narratives tend to be transcriptions of oral texts. Some are rendered into simplified versions for a general Ngaanyatjarra or European audience such as *Tjuma: Stories from the Western Desert* (Glass and Newberry 1990 [1979]) or academic texts embedded with interlinear glossing such as *Ngaanyatjarra texts* (Glass and Hackett 1979 [1969]). Goddard in his description of a Pitjantjatjara story writing contest in 1988 found that most written stories were based on traditional genres and story-telling practices (*mamu* stories and sand stories) (Goddard 1994: 319). See also (Gale 1995; Klapproth 2004; McGregor 1989).

<sup>1004</sup> (NLLIA 1996: 128, Vol. 2).

<sup>1005</sup> (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005; Glass 1984; Langlois 2004). See also (Fishman 1991; McConvell 1991b; Rigsby 1987).

<sup>1006</sup> Herbert Howell email interview 2004. Howell noted changes occurring in command forms of verbs: *warrpuwa* (hurry!) is often said *warrpura* by younger generations. *Kunmarnarra* has become *kunmarna* or *kumarna/kumana*. The prohibitive verb-infinitive + *maaltu wanti* has become 'don' verb-command' (heard with elided /t/). For example *pampuntjamaaltu wanti!* (don't touch) has become *don' pampula*. Glass has also noted changes in case-marking (Glass 1984). Additionally, the introduction and common usage of English loan words, many of which end in a consonant, has increased the percentage of words with stem-final consonants 'perhaps accelerating the trend for reanalysis of the suffix *-pa*' (which functions as an allomorph of the absolutive case: i.e. 'the citation and unmarked form for all common nouns, adjectives and adverbs with stem-final consonant'). Differing phonotactic patterns in other Western Desert languages (Pitjantjatjara and Pintupi) mean that English loan words with final consonant tend to add a vowel, whereas English loan words in Ngaanyatjarra take *-pa*. For example:

'town'	P. <i>tawuna</i>	Ng. <i>tawunpa</i>
'school'	P. <i>kuula</i>	Ng. <i>kuulpa</i>
'camel'	P. <i>kamula</i>	Ng. <i>kamulpa</i>

common, for example, ‘mum’ or ‘mummy’ is replacing ‘*ngunytju*’ (mother), ‘daddy’ is used for ‘*mama*’ (father) and ‘nanna’ for *kaparli* (grandmother/daughter). Dyadic mother-child code-mixing, sometimes referred to as ‘mix-mix’, reveals the extent of language change as shown below:

<i>sheku papa</i>	her dog	<i>Don't nyakulan.</i>	Don't you look.
<i>meku</i> friend	my friend	Same way <i>yarra!</i>	Go the same way!
<i>whoku</i> name?	whose name?	Brown one <i>mantjila!</i>	Get the brown one!
one <i>girlku</i> name	one girl's name	Don't <i>pampula</i> anything, just <i>nyakuma kutju!</i>	Don't touch anything just look only!
them two <i>ku</i> daughter	their daughter / the daughter of those two	You'll soon <i>tjunku</i> cake <i>pa</i> .	You'll put it in the cake soon.
<i>mumnga</i>	mum+ (ending for name with word-final consonant)	How you know hangman <i>ku?</i>	How come you know how to play hangman?
Headache <i>arringurna</i>	I'm getting a headache	<i>Nyuntuku</i> turn, hot water <i>mantjilku, kuwarri</i> , hot one <i>palunya</i> .	Your turn, get the hot water, now, it's hot water that one.

Language remains, nevertheless, a salient symbol of Aboriginal social identity and cultural heritage, and contemporary speech varieties ‘can reveal a range of creative linguistic and sociolinguistic processes that have brought about the translation and transformation of new indigenous ethnic identities’.<sup>1007</sup> At Areyonga, Langlois notes that in spite of media and Western influences on teenagers’ use of Pitjantjatjara, the impact does not seem to be as extreme as in other Aboriginal language contexts.<sup>1008</sup> Similarly, I found that language remains a strong identity marker and Ngaanyatjarra adolescents are transforming it to suit the contemporary context with some young adults consciously code-switching according to domain.<sup>1009</sup> As Naomi comments:

It's important for us to keep it because that's our culture. Like talking in Ngaanyatjarra, going out bush, sometimes we talk English like when kids go to school, young people working together, when they're not working they can talk Ngaanyatjarra, or go out bush because we have to keep it strong, not to throw it away like a rubbish. Keep it strong, the culture...important for the both, English and Ngaanyatjarra. Have both of them Ngaanyatjarra and English, Ngaanyatjarra is for talking at home, but English when you're working or going out, town.

The 2005 National Indigenous Language Survey rates Ngaanyatjarra as ‘critically endangered’.<sup>1010</sup> Whether or not this assessment is accurate is unclear. It is evident that child language socialisation practices have altered and changed linguistic and cultural

<sup>1007</sup> (Rigsby 1987: 360). See also (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005; McKay 1996).

<sup>1008</sup> (Langlois 2004: 11). Areyonga is Western Desert Pitjantjatjara speaking community in the Northern Territory where Langlois notes two language varieties are spoken: ‘Areyonga Teenage Pitjantjatjara’ and ‘Traditional Pitjantjatjara’.

<sup>1009</sup> See an elaboration of domain theory (Fishman 1972) in relation to Aboriginal languages and education: (Harris 1990b; Harris 1991; McConvell 1991a).

<sup>1010</sup> (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005: 193). The survey also assessed Pitjantjatjara as ‘severely endangered’ (AIATSIS/FATSIL 2005: 189).

factors have impacted on spoken Ngaanyatjarra, but whether this shift will lead to language death is yet to be seen.

### **Home, school and learning**

As noted in Chapter 1, in earlier eras in the Western world families were expected to take more responsibility for childcare and learning to read at home. Childcare often took place alongside adult family members within the workplace and this gave children the chance to observe and ‘make sense of the mature roles of their community’.<sup>1011</sup> Modernity has increasingly institutionalised knowledge, and professionalised expertise, and there is more regulation of social practices than in previous generations. Across remote Aboriginal Australia the intervention of outside ‘experts’ (e.g. teachers, nurses, nutritionists and welfare workers) has been displacing the ‘moral authority’ of the Aboriginal family to prescribe normative childrearing behaviours and practices. Moreover, this is interpolated within a context where there is no cultural model for outside intervention; the traditional model of learning is gerontocratic and one becomes a ‘knowledgable’ adult through a different culturally-grounded system. The domain of child development thus represents a site of conflict between traditional cultural knowledge and introduced professional knowledge.

Schooling is now assumed cultural practice, experienced as possessing an objective reality of its own, as ‘an external and coercive fact’.<sup>1012</sup> It is also the locus around which many child and adult social interactions pivot. Conceptualisations of schooling are, however, drawn from Western cultural premises about child development and institutional learning. Outside educators tend to carry preconceptions about literacy and are imbued with the assumed normativity of the culture of Western schooling. This often precludes them from seeing the ‘webs of significance’ that surround the meaning and connectedness of literacy at deeper cultural and historical levels and few perceive the complex interconnections outside the school boundaries.<sup>1013</sup> With limited knowledge of community processes teachers generally assume that the important learning takes place inside school, and approach their students as *tabula rasa*. It is also commonly assumed that few Ngaanyatjarra adults can read or write and that literacy rarely takes place outside of school. As one Principal claimed: ‘reading and writing ability is totally dependent on school attendance’, and another posited:

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<sup>1011</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 130–40). See also (Giddens 1991).

<sup>1012</sup> (Berger and Luckmann 1975 [1966]).

<sup>1013</sup> (Geertz 1973: 5).

I don't get a sense of there being any real place of literacy...only related to the school when we need to get permission forms...I have thought about this and I just don't see it. There's advertising the movies, there's getting permission forms...I don't know, I have no evidence of it. But I haven't been looking for evidence...I just am not seeing it.<sup>1014</sup>

It may be conjectured that poor school attendance is perhaps a manifestation of families counteracting the undermining of their moral authority as childrearing experts.<sup>1015</sup> The profound diminution of Ngaanyatjarra autonomy is a source of humiliated cultural pride: 'government people and education say Aboriginal people are "no-hopers", but it's not true' a community leader tells me. The Ngaanyatjarra characteristically have a 'predisposition to reject authority', sometimes manifest in resistance to Western institutional domination, as exemplified in the following reaction:<sup>1016</sup>

That Principal is no good, driving around forcing kids to go to school...shouldn't be doing that, forcing [them] to go to school. Just because we're black...shouldn't be coming around and bossing us. White people think they are more clever just because we're black.

It may, however, be considered that from a Ngaanyatjarra perspective schooling imposes constraints on how children are reared and how time is spent. When asked, most Ngaanyatjarra affirm that education is important, as Jim illustrates: 'Education is very important for young people, if you got no education you are nowhere, you'll go nowhere, you need that, it's very important for the future'. But in fact, some adults may be taking on 'a mimetic form' of constructed social practice by stating that 'education is important' (in what Taussig terms the 'space between'—'a space permeated by the colonial tension of mimesis and alterity').<sup>1017</sup> Yet, irrespective of 'school-time', their children commonly accompany them to the store, the office, to work and meetings, to funerals, football, out bush and to 'Business'. In this conflicted space, schooling perhaps represents an 'empty practice' where Western child development outcomes are disconnected from the lived reality of the adult world.<sup>1018</sup> A teacher describes how 'everyone thinks school is important, but they don't really know why'.<sup>1019</sup> Some educators interpret this as indifference to schooling:

Sending kids to school is the most important thing, but adults are not interested in education. Education is not a priority for them and they don't care. They don't support the school. They say they care about education, but it's all words and no action as they don't send their kids to school.<sup>1020</sup>

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<sup>1014</sup> During 2004 three Principals were employed at the school, an indication of the high teacher turn-over rate.

<sup>1015</sup> See (Beresford and Partington 2003; Folds 1987; Schwab 1998; Schwab 2001b) for other analyses of Aboriginal resistance to Western schooling.

<sup>1016</sup> (Brooks and Shaw 2003: 4). Myers interprets Pintupi autonomy as a form of a reluctance to permit others to impose their authority over oneself (Myers 1986: 22).

<sup>1017</sup> (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]: 73; Taussig 1993: 78).

<sup>1018</sup> (Giddens 1991).

<sup>1019</sup> Teacher—Interview 13/6/04.

<sup>1020</sup> Principal pers. comm. 2004.

Despite assumptions about community illiteracy, literate strategies are commonly utilised to communicate between school and home. Children receive award certificates such as 'Reader of the Week' to take home, but they are often lost along the way. Teachers only occasionally assign homework as there is a general expectation that it will not be done. To a certain extent their assessment is correct as homework, and the concomitant unstated expectation that it is the caregiver's role to assist, is not yet taken for granted cultural practice in many families, as the following scenarios illustrate. Kenny tells me that he doesn't know if his seven year old child can read or write because he's never seen it and he has 'no chance' to do any reading or writing with her because 'they just play around, kids, most kids'. Another time I encounter David's granddaughter, aged about nine, walking home from school carrying worksheets labelled 'Homework' inside a plastic sleeve. Next day I ask David if he did the home work with her:

*No, we just have a look and she take it back to school.  
Did her mother help her to do it?  
Don't know, maybe she did.*

I later asked the girl's mother if she had helped her with the home work:

*No didn't help her, she done a little bit but she too busy playing—I told her.*

In other families, however, literate modes are utilised and children are socialised into literate practices. One day Arthur's five year old *kaparli* Leeshana arrives home with a note from her teacher. Arthur assumes that the letter must be from 'Miss Hackett', but Leeshana asserts her comprehension and ownership of the literacy event and responds by saying, *ngayukutju* – 'my one':

L: *Tjamu, ngaanya*, that whitefella//  
A: //Letter that one.  
L: No.  
A: I know that one. That's a letter from Miss Hackett.  
L: No, school.  
A: I know that yellow paper.  
L: Nuh, school one.  
A: *Munta*, school one.  
L: *Ngayukutju*.  
A: *Munta, yuwa*.  
[Arthur reads the note out loud]  
*Dear parents, School finishes at 10 am tomorrow, teachers  
have a meeting in Yulara. School starts again on Monday.*<sup>1021</sup>  
A: Their school teacher going to a meeting, so no school. *Yuwawu!*

Arthur then turns to me and further emphasises that in his family literate behaviours are encouraged:

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<sup>1021</sup> Reading aloud from written text.



I encourage them to go to school...at home she read, she has a lot of little books, get'em from town and bring them, good books...She write her name or drawing like cat, dog. She know how to write her name good way.

We see here how home-school communication is in fact a way of inculcating the young into literate compliance with bureaucracy. Children in literate homes start acquiring a bureaucratic ethos from a young age by observing how adults (like Arthur in this instance) respond to simple administrative literacies such as school-notes. This in turn may develop into a systematic way of dealing with adult administrative literacies (see Chapter 5).

## Family literacy

An overarching frame of deficit is commonly attributed to Aboriginal family learning environments.<sup>1022</sup> This is contiguous with a 'rhetoric of blame' that surrounds the question of family support for literacy and numeracy in many 'non-mainstream' contexts.<sup>1023</sup> Literacy research emphasises the importance of family literacy practices as antecedent to successful literacy acquisition at school where 'success in school is intimately related to the early acquisition of literacy'.<sup>1024</sup> On the one hand, writers such as Olson postulate that in cultures that are primarily oral, children are not gaining the prerequisite 'metalinguistic awareness' for successful literacy learning. That is, they are not learning that language is an object that can be segmented—and the parts of speech analysed and discussed—whereas literate parents are transmitting 'a literate orientation in the process of teaching their children to talk' and 'it is in the metalanguage that the concepts critical to literacy are carried'.<sup>1025</sup>

On the other hand, ethnographic studies of family literacy tend to highlight the strengths of diverse language and literacy socialisation contexts.<sup>1026</sup> A sociolinguistic or anthropological perspective on language, literacy and learning has opened the way to seeing beyond deficit theories (see Chapter 1).<sup>1027</sup> Writers emphasise that literacy is a cultural

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<sup>1022</sup> Some commentators on Aboriginal education express the view that for children from remote communities to 'succeed' at school the behaviour of the parents will have to be changed. Johns suggests that schooling in the remote context is 'concerned with overcoming elements absent in the home: peace and quiet, food, civility, reading skills, discussion, use of the English language and the work ethic' and the 'new emphasis on preschool education is an explicit acknowledgement of making up for those things that are missing in the culture of the home and the community' (Johns 2006: 21).

<sup>1023</sup> (Auerbach 1989; Gee 2004; Wells 1985). Educational anthropologists working in Indigenous contexts have questioned the apparent 'silence' of students as indicative of a cultural and linguistic deficit, see (Briggs 1991; Crago 1992; Dumont 1972; Philips 1983). Alternative paradigms have emerged that interpret classroom silence as 'identity-producing cultural performances' in a broader ideological battle over 'cultural representation' (Foley 1996: 81). Nevertheless a sense of failure has been absorbed, leading students to drop-out of the schooling system, or in Aboriginal Australia with students feeling 'shame' in school (Harkins 1990).

<sup>1024</sup> (Wells 1985: 249).

<sup>1025</sup> (Olson 1984: 170). See also (Wallace 1992: 40-42; Yaden and Templeton 1986).

<sup>1026</sup> (Auerbach 1989; Cairney 2003; Heath 1982b; Heath 1983; Leichter 1984; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988; Taylor 1994 [1983]; Varenne and McDermott 1986; Varenne and McDermott 1999a).

<sup>1027</sup> (Au and Jordan 1981; Cazden and John 1971; Chavajay and Rogoff 2002; Crago 1993; Duranti and Ochs 1986; Heath 1983; Kulick 1992; Ochs 1982; Ochs 1988; Ochs 1990; Ochs 1993; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Schieffelin 1990; Schieffelin and Gilmore 1986; Watson-Gegeo and Boggs 1977).

process that 'everyday practice' is 'a more powerful source of socialization than intentional pedagogy'.<sup>1028</sup>

Children who learn to read successfully do so because, for them, learning to read is a cultural and not primarily an instructed process. Furthermore, this cultural process has long roots at home – roots which have grown strong and firm before the child has walked into school. Children who must learn reading primarily as an instructed process in school are at an acute disadvantage.<sup>1029</sup>

As Varenne and McDermott note, 'one does not "fail" familial literacy' as it is 'all but invisible in the family' and embedded in everyday tasks, where 'literacy as such is not highlighted'.<sup>1030</sup>

Research has identified that children from literate school-oriented families commence school better prepared. Shirley Brice Heath indicates that where children have not been participating in specific school-like oral discourses, literate practices and child-focused instructional activities at home, they are less likely to do well in school after the initial few years.<sup>1031</sup> In Western 'middle-class' homes 'caregiver talk' or 'motherese' tends to parallel 'teacher-talk' used in classrooms.<sup>1032</sup> In both contexts interlocutors scaffold language for children in a literacy-oriented manner.<sup>1033</sup> Heath posits that in such homes children are prepared for schooling through modelled or instructed patterns of language socialisation including dyadic adult-child question and answer routines and ways of talking about books in literacy-oriented activities that correspond with structured periods of child development.<sup>1034</sup> Structured literacy learning activities are organised so children:

...learn the distinctions between contextualized firsthand experiences and decontextualized representations of experience, they come to act like literates before they can read. They acquire the habits of talk associated with written materials, and they use appropriate behaviors for either co-operative negotiation of meaning in book-reading episodes or story creation before they themselves are readers.<sup>1035</sup>

In these ways the continuity between home 'caregiver talk' and the kind of adult-child interactions used in schools is reinforced as children learn the ways of 'taking meaning' from written texts by paying attention to text and having the right interactional style for orally displaying their 'literate orientation'.<sup>1036</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> (Lave 1988: 14).

<sup>1029</sup> (Gee 2004: 13).

<sup>1030</sup> (Varenne and McDermott 1999a: 49).

<sup>1031</sup> (Heath 1982b; Heath 1983).

<sup>1032</sup> (Cazden 1988; Snow and Ferguson 1977).

<sup>1033</sup> The term 'scaffolding' is drawn from Vygotsky's notion of the 'zone of proximal development': as a way of guiding learners to a higher level of understanding (Vygotsky 1978). Literacy researchers have adapted this concept (Ninio and Bruner 1978; Rose et al. 1999).

<sup>1034</sup> (Heath 1982b).

<sup>1035</sup> (Heath 1983: 256).

<sup>1036</sup> (Heath 1982b: 56).

In literate Western middle-class homes routine social practices such as mealtimes and bedtime are taken for granted cultural processes. Mealtimes often provide a context for structured discourse routines that mirror 'school-like conversations'.<sup>1037</sup> This practice emphasises the individual separateness of family members who spend time away from each other and then come together around the dinner table to reflect on their unshared experiences using 'explicit, voluble talk'.<sup>1038</sup> Bedtime story-book reading is also a given in such homes.<sup>1039</sup> Western children tend to sleep in their own bedrooms replete with literacy artefacts, and an array of child-focused objects and toys that foster structured routines like bedtime reading. Bedtime reading is oriented around one-to-one (dyadic) interactions that mirror the dyadic social organisation common to Western schooling.<sup>1040</sup> Additionally, it is intertwined with Western assumptions around the 'proper' care of objects such as books (perceived as 'continuing assets' which must endure into an 'unspecified future time').<sup>1041</sup>

### *Literacy transmission in Ngaanyatjarra families*

In the newly literate Ngaanyatjarra context what is striking is the way in which literacy has become a transmitted practice—a taken for granted cultural process in some Ngaanyatjarra families, mainly the families of the more visible literates, outlined in Chapter 5, whose public roles and identities are intertwined with literacy.<sup>1042</sup> Here literacy artefacts and literate behaviours are permeating the space between public and domestic practice as adults participate in textually mediated events and transmit literacy artefacts and discourse into the home domain, thus children in these families are seeing reading and writing as elemental to everyday life.

As mentioned earlier, most Ngaanyatjarra homes are not 'print rich environments'; bills and miscellaneous papers are not kept on pin-boards or fridges, and children's pictures and school-work are rarely displayed, although some homes have posters, Christian pictures or calendars on the wall.<sup>1043</sup> In Ngaanyatjarra families there are few structured routines around sleeping or eating: children and teenagers eat 'whatever, whenever and wherever they like' and children tend to sleep close to kin in communal spaces.<sup>1044</sup>

Like *yarmangu* families when they newborn when they're on *mimi* and they start crawling and walking parents don't teach them like things like reading and all that. Parents they teach them the other way,

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<sup>1037</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 301–303).

<sup>1038</sup> (Martini 1995).

<sup>1039</sup> (Heath 1982b).

<sup>1040</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 141–147). Western dyadic interactional styles have also been found to contrast with communal Aboriginal communication styles and oral narrative traditions (Walsh 1997).

<sup>1041</sup> (Hamilton 1979: 111–113).

<sup>1042</sup> (Berger and Luckmann 1975 [1966]).

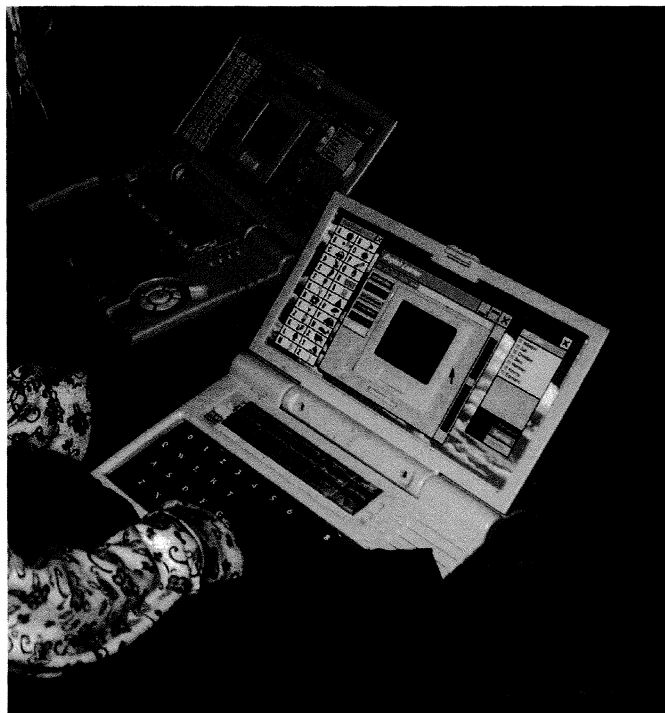
<sup>1043</sup> (Heath 1983; Heath 1982b).

<sup>1044</sup> (Shaw 2002). See also (Burbank 2006; Hamilton 1981).

**Fig. 6.2** Ngaanyatjarra children's books and colouring-in packs



**Fig. 6.3** Children with toy laptop computers





when they must be three, four, Aboriginal ways, going for *maku*, goanna, all that. What we eat, what's right and what's wrong. But in whitefellaku way, *tjiji* little ones grow up they listen to their parents read them bookpa, it's like *nyaapa*, bedtime stories but in Aboriginal way, kids they just lay back, there's no books, just keep the stories in their head, tell the stories, dreamtime story. Whitefellas are different they have the book there...But when Aboriginal kids go to preschool everything is new to them. Look like they're going into another world.<sup>1045</sup>

Consequently, Western-style early literacy activities such as bedtime reading and school-like conversations at mealtimes tend not to be structured into social practice. Instances of structured child-oriented home literacy events are rare in part because of limited access to literacy resources. English children's books from the store are cheap, but not reader friendly. Christian story-books remain important and children are exposed to Christian literacy practices from early childhood. Visits by Glass, Hackett or Mountney are often the impetus for after-school informal literacy events (using Ngaanyatjarra secular and Christian stories, songs and worksheets) and children 'always go over there to buy books and read' (Fig. 6.2).

In some families children have been observing their elders acquiring Ngaanyatjarra literacy for two generations since Glass and Hackett commenced teaching adults in the 1960s. From the 1990s Mountney and Geytenbeek also taught Ngaanyatjarra literacy and 'children were constant visitors' and 'some of the brighter ones learned to read by watching as stories were read to them and trying to read for themselves.'<sup>1046</sup> As Howell notes:

A few adults and several children have been taught by others of their families to read Ngaanyatjarra. Some children have sat with their mothers or grandmothers and learned Ngaanyatjarra literacy from them. Some have somehow picked up literacy in Ngaanyatjarra by applying what they know of English literacy skills to texts printed in Ngaanyatjarra.<sup>1047</sup>

Primarily this is evident in the 'mission families' where literate practices have been building up over three to four generations. Mary and Jack learned to read Ngaanyatjarra from Hackett and Glass in the 1960s. Their daughter Jacinta remembers:

Bibles, that's all, my mum would read it. I can read Ngaanyatjarra language from my mother...When she reads I always see her reading and listening and that's how I got learn.

When Jacinta was a teenager she continued learning to read Ngaanyatjarra with Hackett: 'we would learn every afternoon when she was living here'. In turn, Mary taught her grandchildren to read: 'I used to teach all the little kids in this house, at the tree...teaching the *Mama Godku* book, learning'. She describes how now her grandson Troy can read the Bible:

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<sup>1045</sup> Data from (Kral and Ward 2000).

<sup>1046</sup> (Glass 2000: 4).

<sup>1047</sup> Howell—Email interview 2004.

*Yuwa ninti purlkanya.* I been learning him to do all that...*Yuwa, ngayuku tjamu*...I always sit down and read, sit and read...*ngurrangka*...*Yuwa, ngayuku tjamu*, he know. *Yungarralu readtamalpayi*...*Yuwa, ngayuku tjiji*, his aunty always teach them.

Troy is proud of his own reading and his grandfather's skills:

He know it for English, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara language, three language, he can read, before he used to read. He read newspaper, dictionary, that old first one, first language.

Una, whose interest in reading was stimulated by observing her mother learning Ngaanyatjarra literacy, then read with her children during the 1970s and 1980s:

I read them story-books, like *Three Bears*...We might get it from the secondhand, they come on the truck...some bookspa, not really lot of books. Sometimes there's books from Christmas, always read them...They used to go school then come back. I used to sit down and read: 'Oh I've got a lovely little book here for you.' Then they sit down and listen. And I always tell stories, I love telling stories for my girls when they were little, in English and in Ngaanyatjarra.

Molly says her grandson likes reading because 'we used to keep a book for him all the time, Bible stories...and *Three Bears*, we used to buy reading books in the shop and read to him'. David contributed texts and drawings to a book of published Ngaanyatjarra stories and David's adult son recollects his father teaching him to read from this book.<sup>1048</sup> Jim's wife reads her Bible with her grandchildren every Sunday. Lucy says she keeps her reading and writing strong by observing her mother Patricia: 'when she do it, I look at her when she write and read'. Lucy is also now learning Ngaanyatjarra reading with Hackett and this is the catalyst for home reading with her five year old daughter Shantoya.

It must also be noted that literacy transmission is taking place in families where the encounter with literacy has been more recent and the parent and grandparent generations were unschooled. Louisa was a child when her family came out of the Gibson Desert in the 1960s and represents the first generation in her family to acquire literacy. She tells me:

I read lot Bible, I read any Chapter or any Prophet who wrote Bible...That's how I get my sense back from reading and all that. Because I don't know the hard word in the Bible...I read, trying to read it, but I can't read it cause I have to spell it, then I read it. But I pray and like read straight out. Read all the history in the Bible, New Testament, Old Testament.

Louisa's daughter Darleen has acquired the habit of reading from her mother and describes how her 'favourite thing' is to sometimes 'read Bible with my mother, she got a two Bibles, and it's one youth Bible...young people's, English...because it's got stories in there'.

Family literacy research suggests that literacy transmission often occurs at the 'margins of awareness'.<sup>1049</sup> However, in Dawn's recollection (Family G) of how she used to read with

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<sup>1048</sup> (Glass and Newberry 1990 [1979]).

<sup>1049</sup> (Taylor 1994 [1983]: 58).

her daughters Naomi and Leah, we see a conscious reflection on the process of literacy transmission:

I used to story *watjalpayi*, *tjukurpa* read*tamalpayi*, bedtime stories *kuliljaku* like books*pa*, you know dreamtime stories. *Watjalpayi yuwa*, read*tamalpayi*, *tjaa yutulu* and English. From the, books*pa*, Bible*ku* paper with Miss Hackett and Miss Glass and my kids really liked it...when they come Bible*ku*, [we] used to take it home.

Dawn does not use reading as a contrived instructional activity, but is, nevertheless, aware that children are learning from her. She recalls her children *nyakula nintirringkula* – ‘watching and learning’ – from her as she read the Bible at home at night. Dawn is repeating the process with the next generation of children and claims ‘that’s how she learn*ringu*, she can sing and read*tamalpayi*...songbook*angka*, *yuwa*, *nintirringkupayi*?’. She also comments: ‘now today my little *tjamu*, he really likes the books, *tirtu nyakupayi* and *nintipukalpayinya*, teach him how to talk and read and count’. Leah affirms her mother’s strategies:

On her own in English and in the language, and we sit down and listen to her when she reads and she tell a story. And when she’s singing a song [my son’s] there clapping his hands, he know when she’s singing. Sometimes she sings from that songbook and learn his [her] little grandson, learning him right way.

Research also indicates the importance of memories of literate things in the transmission of a knowingness about literacy from one generation to the next.<sup>1050</sup> Jennifer recalls her mother receiving *Jungle Book* from the missionaries:

My mother always gets some books from the mail...Christian book...I used to get it and just help my mother read it, read it aloud so she can hear. Used to read it all the way, finish. I always tell her: ‘You have to learn us, kids, reading...like giraffe, elephants, lions, monkeys. African stories’.

This same copy of *Jungle Book* is noted by another family member, hence emphasising the importance of such gifts. Jennifer also reflects on her literacy strategies:

I happened to ask mother: ‘What is this?’ That way I got learn, she told me. And I asked her so many question...I used to read, read the Bible, if my mother hasn’t got eyeglass I used to help, even my sister, we help her to read. When she reach fullstop and couldn’t think what that word is we just say it, we help her out.

In Silas’ recollections insights are gained into the tensions that underlie incipient Christian and secular literate practices, and traditional oral practices:

In my after school when I go home my mother used to read a story time, like the Christian story, little baby Jesus...so you know I was learning like the education side, school but my mother was learning on the Christian side Jesus and all the stories. But she also learned me all the Dreamtime stories too. Dreamtimes, you know, because they never lost the Dreamtime stories, like the Seven Sisters...Sometimes when I play up in the camp, in the house when they trying to make me go to sleep, they tell a story then and then after that we go to sleep then. Like a bedtime story.

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<sup>1050</sup> (Taylor 1994 [1983]).



Silas describes how now his wife reads the grandchildren 'bedtime stories like the *Seven Dwarves*, *Snow White*' and he explains characters from European fairy tales within the Ngaanyatjarra cultural frame: 'I tell them "No, it's a story, you know dreamtime story what happened in England"' and I tell them England is a long way, big place'.

These memories and reflections illustrate that the habit of reading has become transmitted social practice in some Ngaanyatjarra families and children are being 'apprenticed' in literacy through observation and 'guided participation' with mature community members.<sup>1051</sup> They also shed light on the significance of iterative social practices such as reading the Ngaanyatjarra-English *New Testament* and singing from the hymnal or 'songbook' in the home domain.<sup>1052</sup> In these communal literacy events anybody can participate, irrespective of literacy competence, either by decoding, or by memorisation and oral recitation.<sup>1053</sup> These children may not be acquiring solitary literacy practices typical found in literate middle class families, nor the dyadic oral and literate skills that match the kind of adult-child interactions used in schools, but they are acquiring the shared, communal literacy skills that match Ngaanyatjarra sociality.

### **Children reading and writing—a special situation**

I now focus on the development of reading and writing with children in one family group. (Their literacy histories can be found in Appendix B—Families D, F and I).<sup>1054</sup> Rosie and Harold were schooled in the mission and now have numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Their granddaughters are proud of the fact that their grandfather 'he read and write and he talks English'. Hackett and Glass have since taught Ngaanyatjarra literacy to three generations in the family. Rosie and Harold's adult daughters (some of whom went away to secondary schooling in the Eastern Goldfields in the assimilation era), still do vernacular literacy lessons and help with Bible translations. Their granddaughter Nancy also sometimes reads the Bible 'with Miss Hackett in language and the singing book...she

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<sup>1051</sup> (Rogoff et al. 1993).

<sup>1052</sup> (Ngaanyatjarra Bible Project 1999; Ngaanyatjarra Bible Project 2003).

<sup>1053</sup> A similar practice is noted among Afro-Americans where non-literate elders assist their grandchildren in learning to read Scripture by activating their memorised oral 'reading' strategies (Dorsey-Gaines and Garnett 1996).

<sup>1054</sup> Over the fieldwork year, and on subsequent visits, I observed the development of children's literacy in one extended family group. The literacy events described in this section came to light as a consequence of social interactions with the family in and around my house and their households. I created an environment in my house where children's books, paper, pencils and crayons and jigsaw puzzles were available. The proximity of my house to their camp meant that family members of all ages often came over to play and read, and the children would regularly borrow books to read at home and return. The children's interest in reading, drawing and writing inspired me to provide more literacy resources. Initially this was not done with the intention of observing the children. With their permission, I began to observe their practices in this resource-rich 'home literacy' environment and made field-notes, took photos of texts, collected texts and recorded some literacy events on mini-disc if it was not obtrusive. Hence I describe this as a 'special situation' as I was participant as much as observer. At the outset I acknowledge that my presence and relationship with the children has influenced the data, as acknowledged in other child socialisation studies (Miller 1996b; Scollon and Scollon 1981).

always give me little book to read'. Rosie and Harold's great-granddaughter Rosina is in the fourth generation to pass through schooling and their granddaughter Nina is in the third. The girls come from a family of visible literates. Nina's other *kaparli* (FM)—Phyllis whom we met in earlier chapters—takes on public roles requiring literacy. Rosina's grandparents Carmel (Rosie and Harold's daughter) and George also assume responsible textually-mediated leadership roles. Rosina's mother Adina went to high school near Kalgoorlie up to Year 10.

Both Nina and Rosina attended the community-run playgroup before starting school in 2004. The playgroup functions as a bridge between the home language socialisation environment and social, oral and literate practices required for 'school readiness'. The girls are bilingual Ngaanyatjarra-English speakers who enjoy going to school and attend regularly.

Hackett recalls how she taught Adina to read Ngaanyatjarra: 'I took her through everything and little 'Rosina' sat there and observed all that we've done'. Adina says she never buys children's books, but takes her Ngaanyatjarra readers home. Pamela (Nina's MZ) borrows children's stories (in Ngaanyatjarra and English) to read to the children as they go to sleep. Mothers commonly sing with their children from the hymnal *Turlku Pirminya*. One day I observe Adina singing with children and following the words in the hymnal with her finger. Afterwards she tells me: 'You know Inge, when they go sleep they singing!' and Rosina responds: '*Nintirringurna ini?*'—I'm learning, aren't I?. Another day I observe Nina sitting by herself reading and singing songs memorised from *Turlku Pirminya*. The iterative experience of singing in church and at home, in both Ngaanyatjarra and English, embeds literacy events within the sensation of affective connectedness to family and community. This generation of children are also observing the parent generation using computers for writing and film production in the '*Nintirringkula* Youth Arts' project and the children participate in computer literacy events and this inspires the purchase of toy laptop computers for Rosina and Nina from the community store (Fig. 6.3).

In April 2004, Rosina is four years and five months old (4.5) and Nina is five years and five months (5.5). Around this time I notice Rosina randomly scribbling alphabet-like letters on walls with a stolen texta. Rosina and Nina are both able to 'write' their names as 'tags' and self-describe: 'I'm writing my name'. Adina tells me that when Rosina was about three years old she taught her to write her name as a 'tag' using the initials of family names 'so she can get learn for the first letters' that represent her name. Nina's mother also taught her

daughter to write her name as the initial letters of her first name, mother's surname and father's surname. As I discussed earlier, social relationships are illustrated and inculcated through oral narratives and *miripa* 'sand story-telling'. Girls acquire the habit of story wire 'writing' in the sand and transfer it to other surfaces with ease. Rosina confidently scrawls graffiti-like letters on any surface and has learned her tag as a representation of kin on the mother's side and the father's side (Fig. 6.4):

R = (initial of first name)

O = (initial of her *father's father's* surname)

M = (initial of her *father's mother's* surname)

S = (initial of her *mother's father's* surname)

L = (initial of her *mother's mother's* surname)<sup>1055</sup>

In this instance, girls are learning to write their name as a representation of their belongingness to the group, a representation of 'insidership'.<sup>1056</sup> This process is about teaching the sociality of what the name represents as much as it is about teaching writing *per se*. In another family, Patricia teaches her granddaughter Shantoya to write her name in a similar manner. Patricia considers it important for children to 'know how to read, write and know the family, family lines, family trees, know where my grandparents come from...know where my mother and father country is'. These children are learning a 'tag' which interconnects them with previous generations, contrasting with Western children who are inculcated into a first-person subjectivity where a child is more likely to learn to write his or her name as a representation of the individual self. Remembering here that English personal names only came into common written usage from the 1960s, contrasting with 'the social meaning' traditionally embedded in the oral evocation of names.<sup>1057</sup> From early on Ngaanyatjarra children are socialised into the web of relationships that will sustain them for life.

When Rosina and Nina started school the girls' teacher noticed that they could write their names as initials and, unlike other children in their cohort, were skilled in letter-formation and drawing and could engage in English story reading question and answer routines. Once at school, Nina soon begins writing her full first name. After three months at school Rosina begins making a transition from writing her name as an initialised tag to writing her full first name. She continues using her tag until around December, when at age 5.1 she is writing her full first name only. The girls exhibit other 'emergent' writing behaviours: concentration, pencil control, letter recognition and sound-symbol correlation, and when

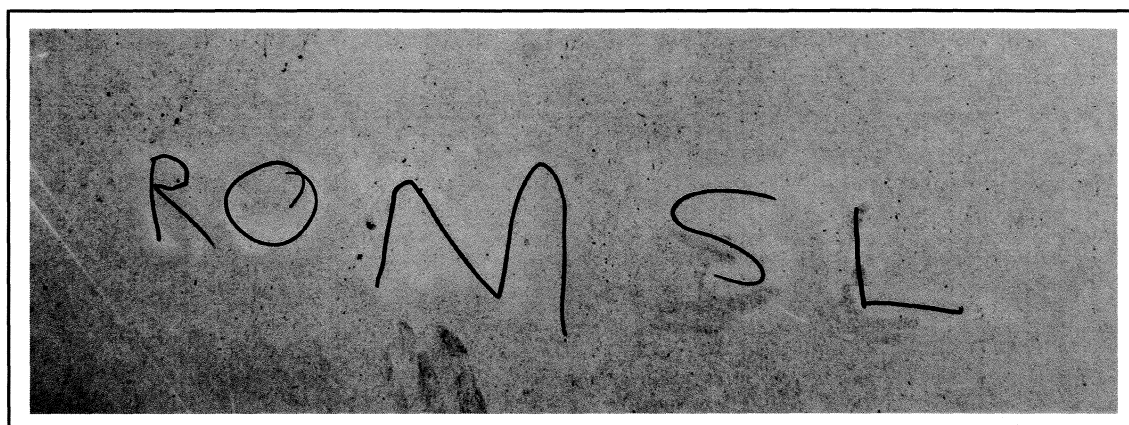
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<sup>1055</sup> The letters represent pseudonyms.

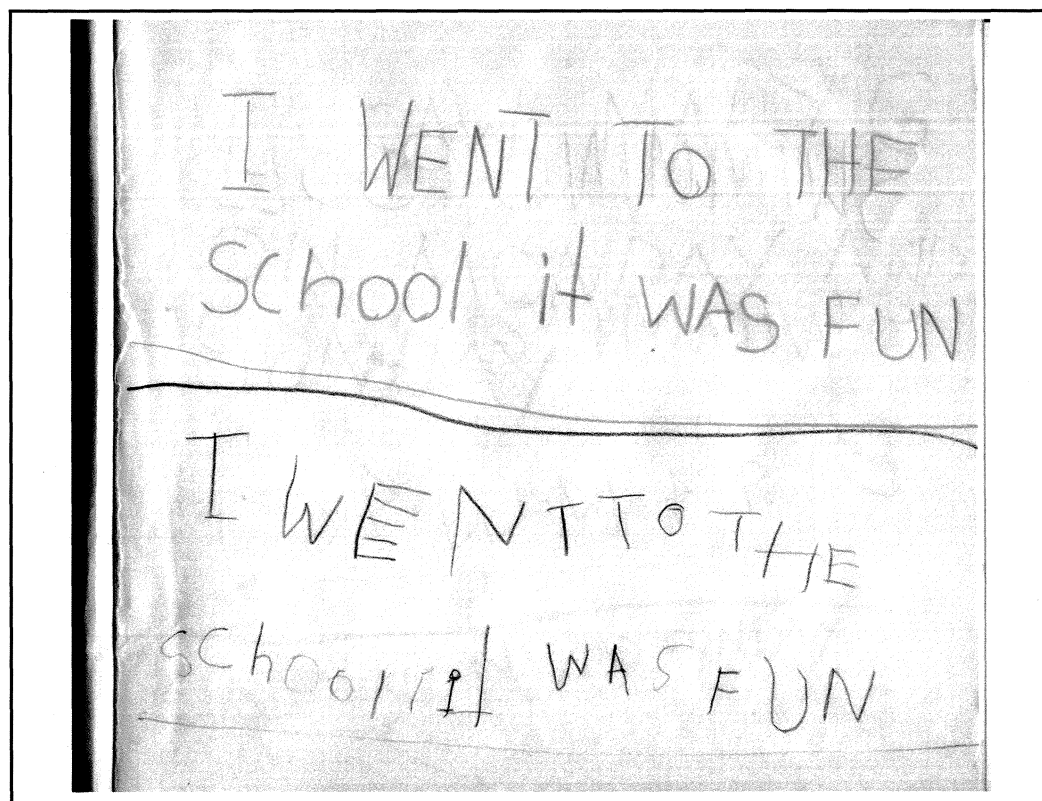
<sup>1056</sup> See (Brooks 2002b).

<sup>1057</sup> (Dousset 1997: 53).

**Fig. 6.4** Rosina (age 4.5) writes her name as initials

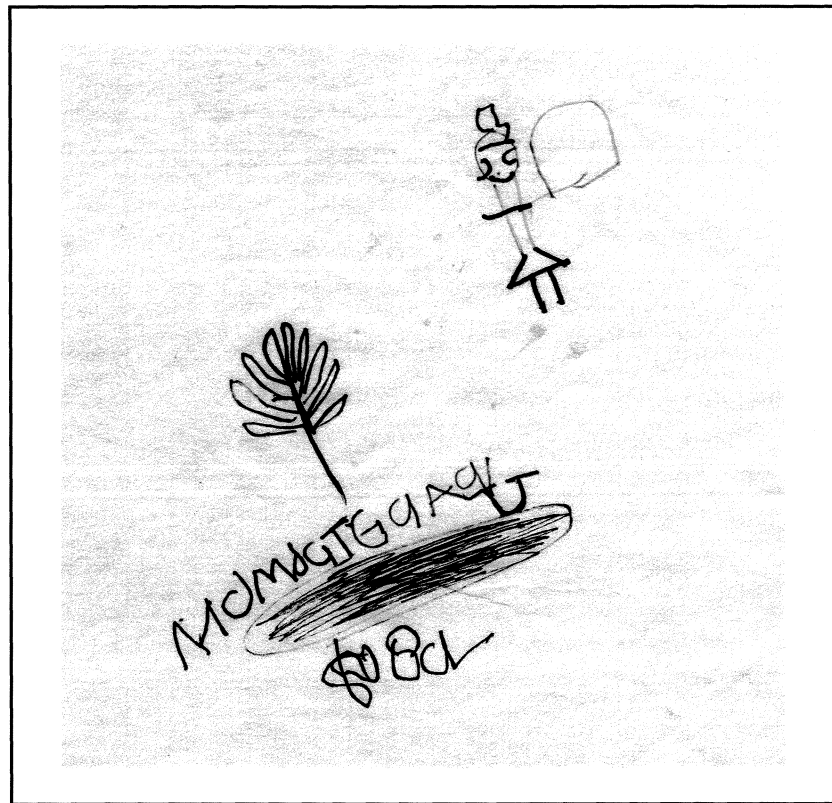


**Fig. 6.5** Rosina (4.6) copies a sentence her mother has written.





**Fig. 6.6** Nina (5.6) writes a story using invented spelling



**Fig. 6.7** Nina (5.11) copies a sentence her MZ has written





'writing' they are aware of left-to-right and top-to-bottom writing conventions as they draw lines to 'write' on.<sup>1058</sup>

### *Girls 'writing'*

Pretend writing and 'invented spellings' (i.e. spontaneous early attempts at writing as children begin hypothesising about spoken and written language using a mix of spelling conventions and mimetic symbols) emerge during the year also.<sup>1059</sup> In May I give out scrapbooks and pencils and watch Adina as she initiates writing sentences to describe Rosina's pictures and words for Rosina to memorise and copy (Fig. 6.5). Nina also draws pictures and uses invented spellings to 'write' a story (Fig. 6.6) and code-mixes as she retells the story: 'I know go to my *warta*. I know go into my *kapi*.'

One day in August when the girls are visiting, Nina asks me: 'Inge how your name?' I spell it out with finger-writing on the table while Adina says: 'I - N for Nancy - G for girl - E for egg'. Adina guides Nina to the initial sounds of common words, reinforcing a sound-symbol correlation and breaking words into segments. She says to Rosina: 'do your name long way, not initials' and Rosina starts finger writing on the table. In October I observe Nina's *ngunytyju* (MZ) Pamela encouraging Nina to 'write' other family names using capital letter first initials. Nina knows most of the letters of the alphabet by now and has a developed knowledge of the English sound system. Pamela guides her and writes: 'I LOVE Mummy' (Fig. 6.7) on a piece of paper and encourages Nina to copy it. By December, Rosina is writing stories using left-to-right and top-to-bottom 'pretend' cursive writing on hand-drawn lines, illustrating her comprehension of 'writing-like' behaviour. She 'reads' the squiggly marks pointing her finger from left to right: 'I like orange. I like apple. I like banana.'

In these instances we see caregivers and children talking about language as having 'an objective existence'. Even though these caregivers may be perceived as 'less literate' by mainstream standards here we see them taking a 'scaffolded' approach to language learning by treating it as an 'artifact' that can be segmented, named and analysed. These children are acquiring a 'metalinguistic awareness' as an important antecedent to literacy learning not just from school, but also from caregivers.<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1058</sup> See (Wells 1985: 237; Hall 1987) for discussions on children's emergent writing practices.

<sup>1059</sup> (Read 1986).

<sup>1060</sup> (Romaine 1984: 173; Olson 1984: 188).



### *Girls 'reading'*

Over the fieldwork period joint story-book reading becomes a regular activity, sometimes I read to the children and sometimes they borrow books and adults read to them at home. At other times children 'read' to themselves or each other. Over the course of the year I observe the ways that these children interact with text and the mediating role that adults play. In September Rosina chooses a maths concept book and snuggles up to her *kaparli* Carmel who starts reading to her. As she completes the final page Carmel asks Rosina: 'How many green cars? How many wheels?'

Rosina knows the routine, but counts the wheels randomly. Immediately Carmel guides her: 'No, you got to do it like this' and scaffolds the literacy event by demonstrating counting in a left-to-right and top-to-bottom motion. In November, Rosina (R) and a non-Aboriginal adult (G) read the same book. In this scaffolded interaction Rosina demonstrates her familiarity with asking and answering book-oriented questions in English:

- R: How many red ones?  
G: How many red ones? 123456789!  
R: How many, which one? Red ones!  
G: Red ones, 12345678! Ooh 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23! 23 red ones!  
Yikes! There's a lot of red isn't there?  
R: Lotsa red, little one, bigges', bigges', bigges', bigges' bigges', bigges', big!  
G: Yeah, look at the stripey one and the spotty one.  
R: Big one, big one, big one.  
G: Biggest one?  
R: Smalles', smalles', smalles', smalles', smalles'.  
G: There's the littlest one right at the end.  
R: Little right on the end.  
G: Yeah, it's the littlest.

The children in the neighbourhood listen to stories often and Rosina and Nina, in particular, rapidly memorise them. The story-book *Bamboozled* (Fig. 6.8) became a favourite because of the 'funny' pictures and references to familiar lexical items.<sup>1061</sup> In the following literacy event Rosina is reading *Bamboozled* with (G). (G) does not read the story word-by-word as the English is too complex, instead she intuitively paraphrases, using the pictures to bring the story alive. She asks questions and moves the focus away from the story-book itself by drawing on Rosina's real world knowledge. In this instance, what Heath terms 'immediate and tangible links between book materials and real life', are made by the adult reader and extended by Rosina.<sup>1062</sup> (G) also uses a few Ngaanyatjarra words and this triggers Rosina's attempt to 'teach' her the meaning of the word *tjurlpu* ('bird'):

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<sup>1061</sup> (Legge 1994).

<sup>1062</sup> (Heath 1983: 224).

**Fig. 6.8** Bamboozled

## Bamboozled

I love my granddad. I visit him every week. And every week, things are the same. But *last* week when I arrived, something seemed odd.

We sat down, as usual, and chatted for a while. Then Grandad poured the tea and we ate fresh cakes he'd baked that morning.

We played cards, and as always, he won.

We went through his old photo albums and I listened as he told stories about The Good Old Days.

I helped him with the housework, but all the while something bothered me.

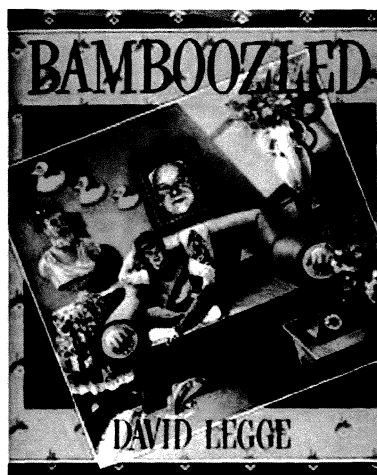
We worked in the garden, and I planted bulbs in the flower bed. I pushed the wheelbarrow while Grandad pruned the roses. And still, something seemed strange. It niggled and niggled at the back of my mind. 'You are quiet today,' Grandad said as he fed the cat. 'I know,' I said. I can't make it out. There's something I can't put my finger on. Something, today seems odd.'

'Well – I've redecorated the hallway.' No it wasn't that.

I've bought two new fish.' No it wasn't that either.

Then, just as we were saying our goodbyes on the doorstep, it suddenly struck me.

'Grandad!' I said. *That's* what it is. You're wearing odd socks!'  
Silly granddad. We *did* laugh.



Source: (Legge 1994).



- R: He's knockin' on th' door.  
 G: He's knockin' on the door? Oh yeah.  
 R: There now, her//  
 G: //and open the door, must be his *tjamu*.  
 R: She been knock, gran'pa  
 G: Oh, lot of things! Is that a snake? *Lirru!*  
 R: Funny house!  
 G: *Yuwu*, funny house alright!  
 R: Look, he's talking.  
 G: *Yuwu!* And look at all the cake.  
 R: *Tjurpu*, *tjurpu* is the bird.  
 G: *Tjurpu* yeah, bird.  
 R: 'Nother bird.  
 G: And a fishing rod.  
 R: And a fishing.  
 G: That's when they go and catch the fish.  
 G: That's when they go and catch the fish.  
 R: Fishing rod, and monkey.  
 G: And monkey in a cot.  
 R: And rabbit.  
 G: And lawn mower cutting the grass.  
 R: And lawn... look there, that's a tree one, 'nother one, somewhere here, there. I'm here, this girl, I'm here!  
 G: Is that you?  
 R: Yeah  
 G: Ooh, you must be having fun. OK, see you, you're a good reader!

By the end of the event Rosina is so involved in the story that she has even inserted herself into the narrative.<sup>1063</sup> At age five she is demonstrating that she knows 'not only how to take meaning from books, but also how to talk about it'.<sup>1064</sup> In comparison, on another occasion Adina reads *Bamboozled* to Rosina and in so doing displays a prosodic form that differs from that used by the non-Aboriginal reader above. Adina considers reading to her daughter a 'good thing' and is well able to decode the words, but engages in no dyadic question and answer interaction. Instead she reads word-by-word using a slow and halting articulation of the sentences and instructs her daughter to *watjala!* ('say it!'). Rosina conforms and copies each utterance:

- A: *Watjala*. I helped him  
 R: I helped him  
 A: with the housework  
 R: with the housework  
 A: but all the while  
 R: but all the while  
 A: something bothered me  
 R: something bothered me  
 A: we worked in the garden, *watjala*  
 R: worked in the garden...

And so forth, page after page, until Rosina makes an attempt to engage in a question and answer interaction herself as she is tiring of the repetition:

<sup>1063</sup> Scollon and Scollon describe how Athabaskan children learn and are taught 'the fictionalization of self required for the modern consciousness and essayist literacy' (Scollon and Scollon 1981: 57).

<sup>1064</sup> (Heath 1982b: 56).

- A: at the back of my mind.  
 R: at the back—mummy how many, *gamepa?*  
 A: shh, shh *watjala...*

Studies indicate that joint story-book reading plays an important role in the attainment of early literacy skills.<sup>1065</sup> These scenarios illustrate that story-book reading is emerging as social practice in this context. However, as Wells notes, ‘it is not the reading of stories on its own that leads children toward the reflective, disembedded thinking that is so necessary for success in school, but the total interaction in which the story is embedded’ and ‘a competent adult’ is needed ‘to mediate, as reader and writer, between themselves and the text’. Additionally when ‘decoding and encoding for themselves’, children ‘need help in interpreting the stories they hear and read’.<sup>1066</sup> Reading out loud is a learned skill and it can’t be assumed that it is a given, as Wells continues, for ‘mainstream’ parents reading a story can be an unrewarding chore, performed with difficulty and consequently ‘[t]heir rendering is halting and without expression—not such as to enthrall a young listener’ nor encourage ways of taking meaning from texts.<sup>1067</sup>

The English text in *Bamboozled* is strange and at first glance too complex for these children, yet the affective experience of repeat readings and associated picture-talk with adults leads Nina to exhibit her ‘memory reading’ skills.<sup>1068</sup> One evening I find her sitting in my house, quietly reading to herself. I hear her announce the literacy event with a formulaic convention for the English genre (not in the text): ‘Once u/t/on a time...’

As an aside, in Chapter 4 I mentioned that the first generation of Ngaanyatjarra literates used a temporal dimension in the formulaic convention ‘long time ago’ that more closely resembled the Ngaanyatjarra oral narrative form *kutjulpirtu*—‘previously’ or ‘in the olden days’. Interestingly, in Nina’s use of the formulaic English narrative device ‘once upon a time’ it is evident that in just three generations a literate orientation has evolved that draws on English, rather than Ngaanyatjarra oral narrative practice.

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<sup>1065</sup> (Debaryshe 1993; Moerk 1985; Ninio and Bruner 1978; Olson 1984; Senechal 1997).

<sup>1066</sup> (Wells 1985: 253-54).

<sup>1067</sup> This raises the issue of well-intentioned community sector groups distributing story-books and literacy backpacks to families in remote Aboriginal communities on the assumption that these texts will be read in a manner that will support children’s literacy development.

<sup>1068</sup> The illustrations in this story are vibrant and affective focusing on the social interaction between the girl and her grandfather and their encounters with strange objects in the domestic space. This story encouraged children to ‘read the illustrations’ and make up richly nuanced stories ‘inclusive of fine details’ rendered in the illustrations rather than the written text. Heath discusses research that notes the importance of ‘pictures that aid both comprehension and recall of stories’. This draws attention to the importance of illustrations in texts for emergent readers in communities that are highly visual. Heath notes that reading research suggests that there are ‘three ways or levels of extracting meaning from print: attending to the text itself, bringing in experiences or knowledge related to the text, and interpreting beyond the text into a creative/imaginative realm or to achieve a new synthesis of information from the text and reader experience’ (Heath 1983: 385-86).

Nina proceeds to 'read' the story by following the picture cues as she turns the pages:

Hello gran/f/a, I visit all day.<sup>1069</sup>  
We. We, we, we, weeee. We sa' down. We /f/oured the cake.  
No, /f/oured the tea.  
We sat down, we /f/oured the cake, we eat the cake, eat the all, eat the good.  
We play cards. She won!  
We. We, did she? We play card, she won.  
Oh, she read 'ole story with tha' kid.  
'Ow far? 'Ow far? She show 'im.  
We help the, we help the yard, we clean.  
We help the yard, 'n we do a cubby'ouse, tha' little jail man do.  
She feed the pussycat. She feeding the food, pussy cat. No, that's tiger!  
We kep' shoes, kep' shoes to the paper.  
She happy lookin' the cake. Look oven.  
*Kamurl*  
What's this? What's this?  
Penguin? Penguin.  
How? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 8, 8, 9, 10.  
With that girl an' man.  
We got new fish. Two new, two fish.  
We sit down lookin' tha' TV.  
*Purtu nyaku kamurl, purtu nyaku monkey, purtu nyaku tiger, duck, penguin, duck marnkurrpa,*  
*elephantpa.*  
*Purtu nyaku fishpa. Purtu nyaku milk pirni. Purtu nyaku flowers.*  
Make them fas'.  
Oh gran'pa, we laugh.  
We laugh together. We laugh, we laugh together.

Nina exhibits her familiarity with 'school-like' reading in the manner described by Rogoff:

Children with experience of books and literate stories develop a sense of how text should sound (such as how short and long sentences should alternate for variety and what sentences with subordinate clauses sound like). They imitate the narrative framework, at first without coherent content... They copy adult intonation and phrasing in pretending to read books, irrespective of sense they sound like stories as they run pages smoothly using appropriate cadence, with repetition, contrast, counting, and exaggeration.<sup>1070</sup>

She imitates the prosody associated with reading out loud and uses 'reading aloud' intonation contours.<sup>1071</sup> As she reads she points to the text on the page using left-to-right and top-to-bottom strategies. She uses English confidently and at one point self-corrects the collocation of the verb 'poured' with the nominal 'cake', as follows:

We /f/oured the cake,  
No, /f/oured the tea.

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<sup>1069</sup> In this example Nina uses *gran/fa/* instead of *gran/pa/* and later */f/oured* instead of */p/oured*. This form of hypercorrection is typically found in the Western Desert. It may also derive from the word 'grandfather' as 'grandpa' is not commonly used in Aboriginal English (Marrkilyi E. April 2006 pers. comm.). Nina also uses 'she' rather than he to refer to the grandfather. Western Desert speakers commonly do not distinguish between gender when using the English 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. singular pronouns he/she/it. In Ngaanyatjarra bound pronouns, rather than free are generally used as suffixes and gender is not distinguished with he/she/it subject pronouns having zero ending. In other Western Desert dialects such as Pitjantjatjara *paluru* means he/she/it and gender is not distinguished.

<sup>1070</sup> (Rogoff 2003: 303). Studies have shown that teachers expect children to mark their narratives with particular elements. Narratives considered structurally appropriate in a school context tend to be tightly structured and centred on a single topic (Heath 1983: 393). See also (Michaels 1981; Michaels and Cazden 1986).

<sup>1071</sup> Scollon and Scollon suggest that: 'Reading intonation represents intermediate prosody. The intonation structure is evident in the text itself because the text is written. Reading intonation, then, must introduce prosodic features of

She also asks and answers her own interactive questions:

What's this? What's this?

Penguin? Penguin.

How? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 8, 8, 9, 10.

Another evening Nina arrives with the children's book *Aladdin* that she received as a 'reward' from her teacher for going to school every day. The text is too complex to read word-by-word, so I paraphrase a simple story to match the pictures. Nina quickly perceives my strange reading prosody and no engagement with the text and tells me that I'm 'cheater reading', and looks for another book. She finds the *Three Little Pigs* with simple, large font text and cloze sentences marked with graphics. We read it together and Nina immediately engages by cross-referencing her textual and real life experiences by asking me: 'Who did this book?' Her *kaparli* (FM) Phyllis (whom I introduced in Chapter 4) has written a published Ngaanyatjarra version of the *Three Little Pigs* and it's a favourite. She finds this Ngaanyatjarra version on the shelf and reads her grandmother's name on the cover comparing it with the English author's name.

By the end of 2004 these two children are confidently using oral and written discourse in 'school-like' ways. They know and write letters, numbers and ordinals, they recognise patterns and colours, sequence sizes and use 'telling the time' conventions. When playing games they make up rhymes and use English commands and concepts: 'first', 'next', 'my turn', 'you turn', 'same card', 'different card', 'pair', 'put'em right way'. They demonstrate reading-like behaviour and exhibit the decoding-encoding conventions associated with learning to read and write: left-to-right and top-to-bottom progression, letter identification and formation.<sup>1072</sup> They distinguish between conversational prosody and oral reading prosody and display other behaviours indicative of an emerging literate orientation.<sup>1073</sup>

On return trips in April and September 2006 I again informally observe the literacy practices of these two girls. By this stage Nina is seven years old and Rosina is six. In the camp I notice a metal tucker box emblazoned with graffiti-like text, evidently written by the girls:

*Nina*  
*Rosina*  
*to*  
*GLy*

---

ordinary speech for the sake of sounding "natural" but at the same time must not signal ordinary conversational processes such as turn taking.' (Scollon and Scollon 1981: 67).

<sup>1072</sup> (Wells 1985: 237).

<sup>1073</sup> See (Olson 1984).

I decode this early attempt at graffiti as:

*Nina*  
*Rosina*  
*two*  
*girls only*

Graffiti scribbling, as a form of textual play redolent of *mirhpa*, is acquired by observing the practices of older siblings, as I describe in the next chapter.

Both girls still exhibit an insatiable interest in story-book reading and engage during any chance visit to an out-of-school location replete with literacy resources. By April Nina is decoding unknown words as she ‘reads’ stories out loud using picture cues and predictive story schemata, while Rosina is finding and counting hidden objects embedded in pictures. Both girls also play word games like their teenage relatives: they spell names out loud, write them down, and recall and write known sight words or names of relatives. They also avidly copy and trace words from books, labels, stickers, and instructions on packets and even brand names on objects as obscure as ‘Staedtler’ on pencils and ‘Arnotts’ on biscuits (Fig. 6.9). Words are superimposed onto ‘lines’ that renders the page a visual imitation of a cohesive piece of written text. By September both girls are independently writing simple sentences. A sequence of independently composed sentences, written by Rosina, are illustrated in (Fig. 6.10a–c) and (Fig. 6.11a–c). In these examples we see Rosina deliberately segmenting sentences into word parts (Fig. 6.10c):

See / me / at / my / house

Also in (6.11b):

you · can · see · me · at · shop · at · WaButon

In (Fig. 6.11c) she plays a ‘tricky writing’ games by segmenting the separate letters and tracing them in dot-form in the phrase: TEAM BUSqBall (‘Team Basketball’) and asking us— ‘What’s this tricky word?’—before writing over the traced letters.

In many communities in remote Aboriginal Australia formal literacy learning in school has been experienced by only a few generations. This is a short time for the habits, attitudes and practices that underpin success at school to seep into family life and for intergenerational transmission to take hold. Yet in this ‘special situation’ we see emergent literacy practices—including the objectification of language as an artefact that can be segmented—in this generation of children. This situation may be atypical in the



Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and in the remote Aboriginal context generally, nonetheless, this case study indicates that literacy is being acquired and transmitted in ‘out-of-school’ contexts.<sup>1074</sup>

### **The birthday party— socialisation into a Western literate ethos**

In the final section of this chapter I want to draw the focus back to literacy as cultural practice. I use the occasion of the ‘birthday party’ to exemplify how Western practice is being incorporated into Ngaanyatjarra cultural processes and how through the birthday party ritual some children are participating in home literacy and numeracy events. In Western society, birthdays, like many social rituals performed in the family, provide an occasion for children to be ‘apprenticed’ in the social practices of the community.<sup>1075</sup>

During 2004 I was invited to four children’s birthday parties within one extended family network. I will discuss two birthday parties and focus on two aspects: the birthday party as a literacy event, and how the structuring of birthday party represents new norms of individual identity socialisation. Rosina and Nina have birthdays a few days apart and in 2004 Rosina turned five and Nina turned six. Both girls know their birthdays and how old they are.

Nina’s sixth birthday party was organised by all her *ngunytju* (M and MZ) and her *kaparli* (MM). The day before the party the women ordered a birthday cake and sandwiches at the Warburton Roadhouse.<sup>1076</sup> On the morning of Nina’s birthday party chips, lollies, fruit, cordial, paper cups, plates and bowls are bought. A birthday card for a six year old is also purchased.<sup>1077</sup> One of Nina’s adult *tjurtu* asks me to help write the appropriate text, she signs it and organises for the rest of the family to sign it. When the food arrives from the Roadhouse the children are ordered out of the house and the women prepare the food, cover the kitchen table with a cloth and lay out the food, carefully placing the chocolate cake with *Happy Birthday* written in icing on the table. When preparations are ready everyone comes into the kitchen. *Happy Birthday* is sung before lining up to select a plate of party food.

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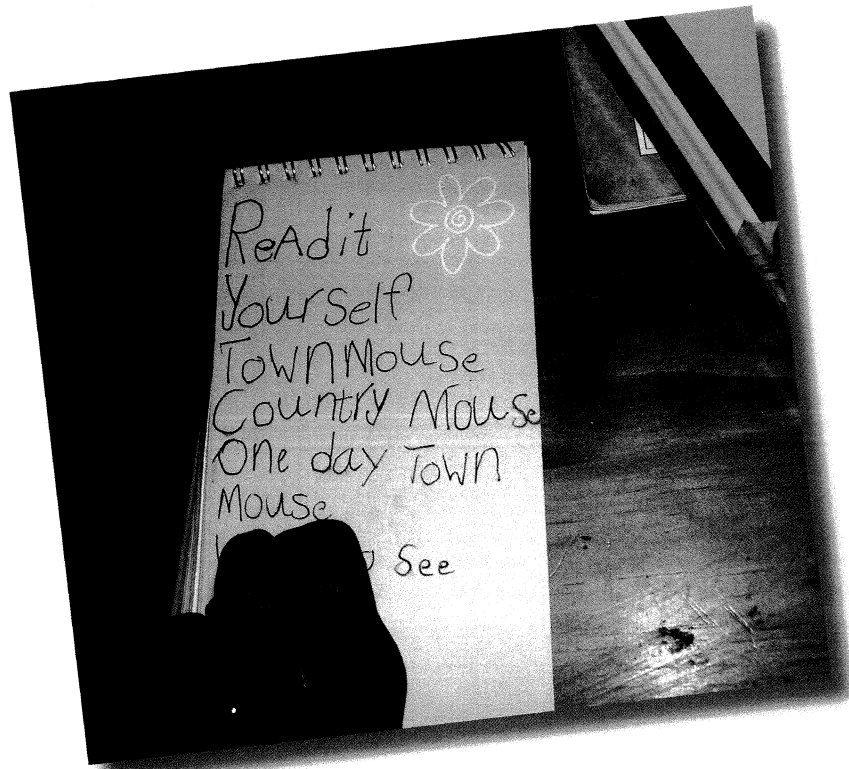
<sup>1074</sup> (Hull and Schultz 2002).

<sup>1075</sup> (Gee 2004: 34).

<sup>1076</sup> Warburton Roadhouse is an entity under the Ngaanyatjarra Council that operates as a commercial enterprise on the Great Central Road just outside the community perimeter. It services the passing tourist trade with a store, camping ground and accommodation. It also provides an alternative shop, and catering service for the community.

<sup>1077</sup> The Warburton store sells a range of cards including birthday cards. It is still relatively rare for people to receive birthday cards, although people who are related to family in the Eastern Goldfields were more likely to receive birthday cards from their urban kin. I also witnessed the receipt of a card from Kalgoorlie announcing the birth of a new baby.

Fig. 6.9 Nina (age 7.5) copies words and phrases





**Fig. 6.10a-c** Rosina writing own sentences: (a) age 6.8;  
(b-c) age 6.10

(a)

hat Dog  
IN IN  
The The  
Box:Basket

(b)

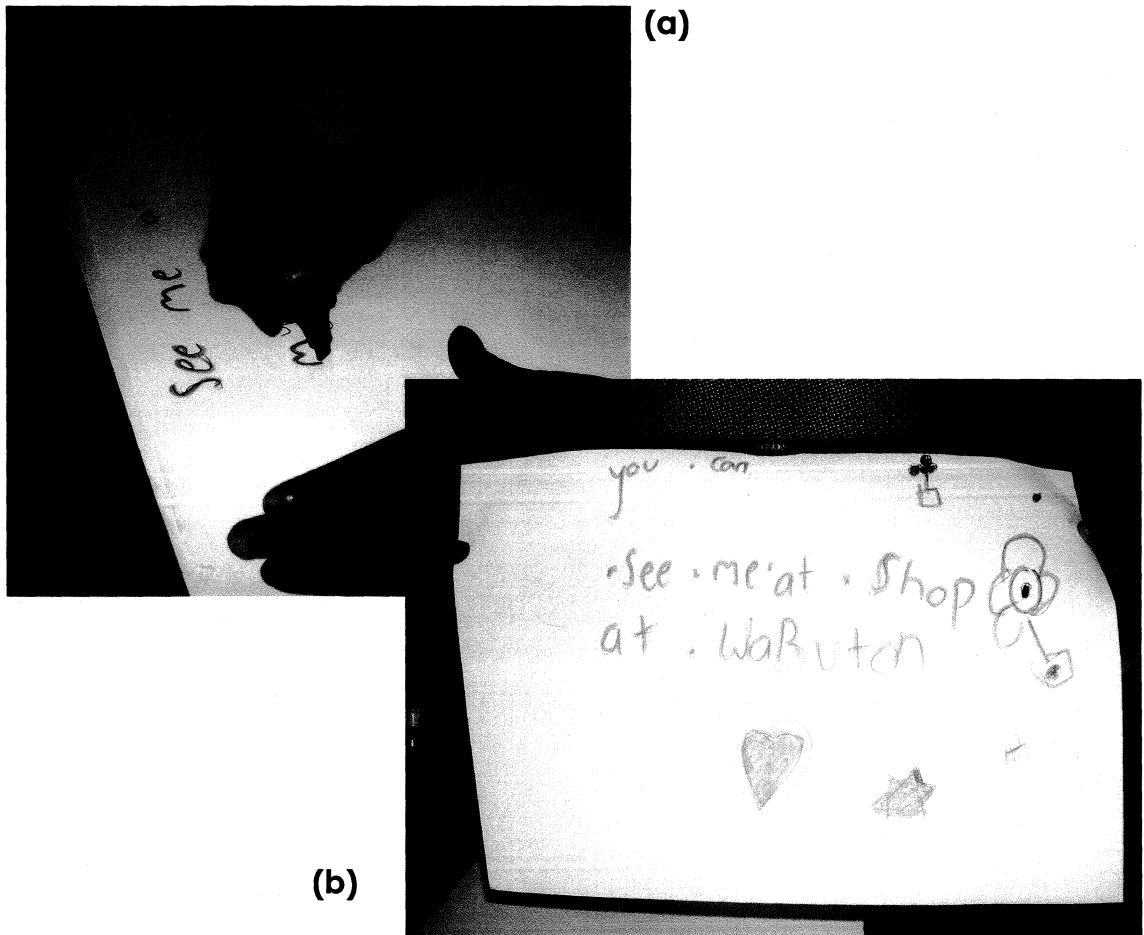
I went  
Wak With  
my friends.

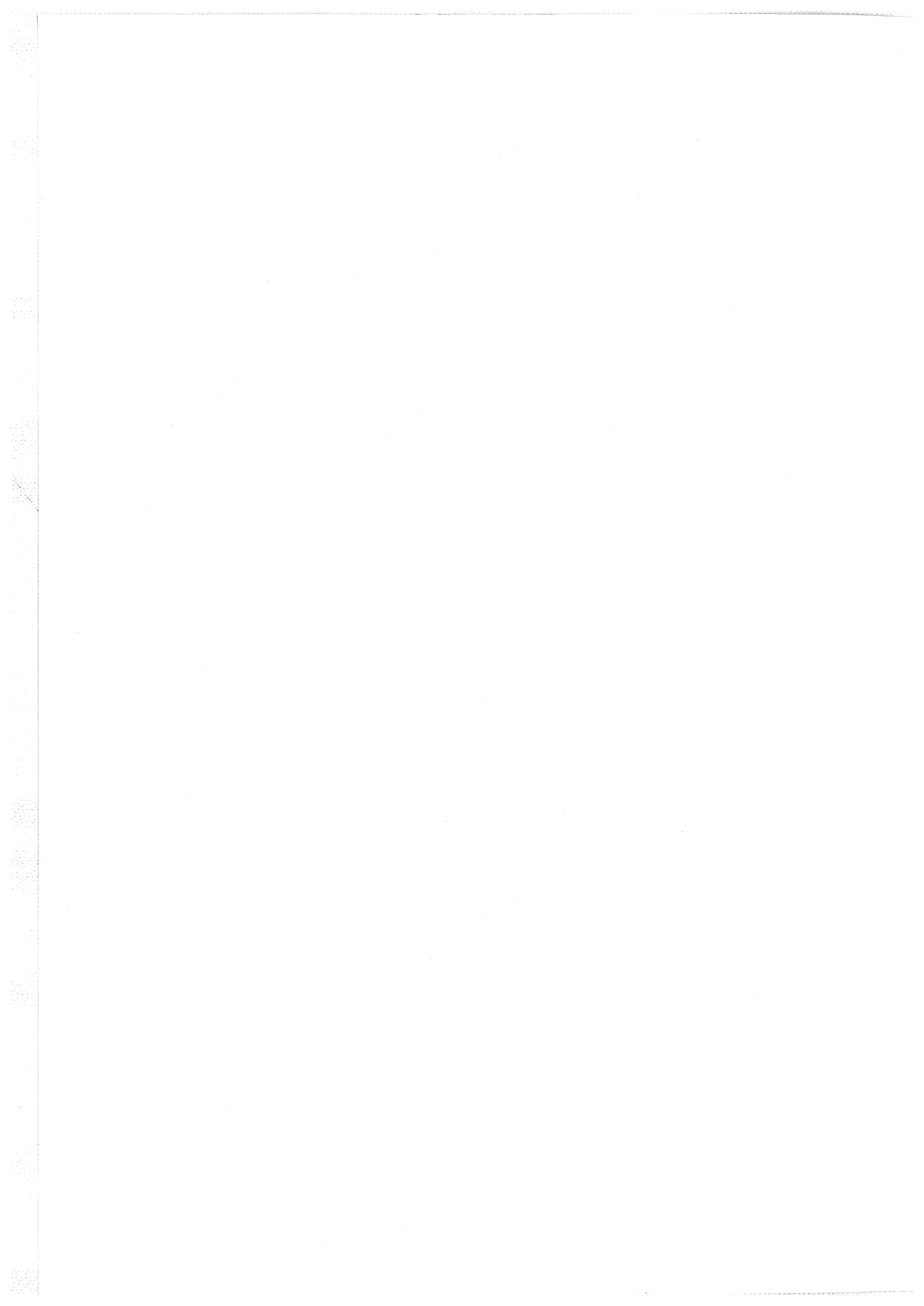
(c)

Seelme lat 1 mglhouse



Fig. 6.11a-c Rosina (age 6.10) writing own sentences





A few days later Rosina announces: 'It's my happy birthday today, November 9', as we drive back to Warburton from another community. When we return in the afternoon, Adina has organised a birthday party for her daughter. She has bought an ice cream birthday cake from the store replete with five birthday candles, cooked special 'cupcakes' and prepared cut up fruit, lollies, sandwiches and cordial. Children from the neighbourhood come, along with a few young adults. The event is based on familiar routines associated with the birthday ritual: the children are kept outside until the preparations are complete and when they enter *Happy Birthday* is sung, then the children are told to 'line up' by the adults before selecting food and drink.

The Ngaanyatjarra have been imbibing the norms of behaviour particular to the 'party' ritual, including concomitant textual and numerical elements, since the mission time.<sup>1078</sup> In Chapter 5 I discussed the interrelationship between social practice and how 'inside' space is used and the accompanying domestic socio-spatial corporeal and linguistic routines. Mostly, this generation of young mothers did not grow up in houses, yet they are incorporating Western socio-spatial practices in the way in which they are 'growing up' their own children, as exemplified in the way some young mothers celebrate their children's birthdays. In this domestic practice female caregivers plan, prepare, and enact this Western ritual for their children. Everyday food preparation is generally a response to the demand of hunger rather than an organised temporal routine around mealtimes. In contrast, the birthday party (like other ceremonial rituals) is a planned affair with unspoken rules about presentation, order and routines. It could be suggested that the birthday party represents an atypical social event which allows adults to enforce 'school-like' rules around delayed gratification: keeping the children outside until preparations are complete and regulatory control of children through 'lining up' and taking food 'one-by-one'.

Significantly, the 'birthday party' reveals the extent to which literacy and numeracy have permeated social practice in events not initiated by 'whitefellas'. For instance, the planning phase involves estimating the quantity of food and drink required, ordering the catering and saving sufficient money to pay for the party fare. Before the party, birthday messages are encoded on the cake and candles are counted out. Birthday cards are also written and

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<sup>1078</sup> Musharbash in her anthropological analysis of Warlpiri birthday parties suggests that birthdays are a 'relatively new occurrence' and that they 'contrast starkly to Western ones' (Musharbash 2004: 12). At Mt Margaret Mission the Christmas party ritual had been introduced by the 1940s with parties, prizes and associated textual elements such as Bible readings, letters, gifts and Christmas cards (*United Aborigines Messenger* February 1948: 12) and by the late 1950s birthdays were celebrated in the Graham Home (Marks 1960). It can be assumed that these Western rituals were also celebrated in the Baker Home at Warburton Ranges Mission. In addition, teenagers who lived in the residential hostels in Esperance,



signed. Leah, a young mother from a different family, told me, ‘when there’s party, [I] get a card and sit down and write’ but ‘not much people do like that, but I do’. All of these literacy and numeracy events are English-based, as is the ‘ritual speech’ enacted during the event with the singing the *Happy Birthday* song and the blowing out of candles.<sup>1079</sup> As in Western birthday parties, the ‘birthday cake’ has become an important signifier: a ‘birthday cake is a material object, but it is also an immaterial sign or symbol of kinship’.<sup>1080</sup> Birthday cakes have embedded literacy aspects either in the message signified in icing or in the common practice of making ‘packet cakes’. Baking packet cakes involves either reading the simplified English instructions on the packet, decoding the graphic symbols or simply guessing. On another occasion, Rosemary bakes a packet cake at my house for her baby daughter’s first birthday. Her baking process involves guesswork. Rather than scanning the packet for the instructed temperature setting or cooking time, she cooks two packet mixes in one cake tin. Another time Adina brings two packet cakes to bake in my oven. Her approach to baking also does not involve reading the instructions on the packet, and again two cake mixes are cooked in one tin and the cooking is not timed. After the mixture spills over and burns in the oven, her response is a characteristically Ngaanyatjarra, ‘He be right’. And it is!

As I mentioned earlier, school notes perform the function of socialising youngsters into literate administrative practices. Similarly, the celebration of birth, based on ‘date of birth’ as the signifying feature, introduces the child to Western bureaucratic notions. Ngaanyatjarra systems of classification, or taxonomies, were traditionally oriented around *tjukurrpa*, place, seasons and events and the connection between individuals and birth place bears significant cultural resonance.<sup>1081</sup> When an individual is born he or she becomes ‘imbued with the identity or essence (*kuurti*)’ of the particular Dreaming associated with place and the newborn is interconnected with the country of a ‘grouping’ of relatives.<sup>1082</sup> In Ngaanyatjarra culture a ‘time-since-birth’ measure of age and development was not a significant cultural marker. More important was the concept of seniority demonstrated lexically by the terms *kurta* for senior or elder brother and *tjurtu* for elder sister, and *marlany(pa)* (the one coming behind) for younger brother or sister.<sup>1083</sup>

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Kalgoorlie and Leonora during the 1960s and 70s would have been participants in party-focused festivities. Community life since the 1970s has further consolidated the annual ritual of parties around Christmas, Easter and birthdays.

<sup>1079</sup> (Weil 1986).

<sup>1080</sup> (Gee 2004: 33).

<sup>1081</sup> (Brooks 2002c; Douglas 1976). See also (Hamilton 1979; Merlan 1998; Myers 1986)

<sup>1082</sup> (Brooks 2002c: 19–21).

<sup>1083</sup> Prior to the middle of the 1800s people often did not know or have records of their birthdate and it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that birthdays began to be celebrated, with birthday cards not appearing until 1910. The focus on age as a way to divide the lifestream is also recent practice in terms of the history of humanity (Rogoff 2003: 154–56).

Fig. 6.12 Rosina's 'Happy Birthday' glass plate





A function of the Western birthday party is to inculcate youngsters into 'a taxonomy of time'.<sup>1084</sup> In the Western cultural frame, 'the child must learn a temporal biography of self that will enter him within the continuous flow of cultural time' (i.e. linear, segmented time) and make him 'responsive to the taxonomic break between age-categories based on the units of the year'.<sup>1085</sup> Ngaanyatjarra families with experience of participation in Western bureaucratic norms are sensitive to these requirements, as illustrated by April who is dismayed that one daughter 'doesn't even know her birthday, I got to keep on reminding her'.

The 'individuation' of the birthday child is another feature of the Western birthday party.<sup>1086</sup> This situation runs counter to most other Ngaanyatjarra social norms where people tend to avoid focusing on the individual person, although there are exceptions such as the individuated focus on babies and on the 'special boy' during ceremony time.<sup>1087</sup> The availability of toys, bikes, clothes, books, pencils, scrapbooks and birthday cards at the store means that people have access to the materiality needed for Western gift-giving practices and this has ushered in a new form of individualised reciprocity. Other forms of gift-giving are emerging. When Nina and Rosina had their birthdays young mothers in the Nintirringkula youth arts project were making art glass. Spontaneously, the mothers (M and MZ) made glass plates inscribed with birthday messages. Pamela encoded the first plate with the message 'Happy Birthday Nina' and this plate was given to Nina's *kaparli* (FM). A few nights later Adina also made a plate (Fig. 6.12) and inscribed the message:

*Happy Birthday Rosina*

*November 9 2004*

The plates represent a new creative celebration of date of birth, with the glass acting as a textual surface for emblazoning names and dates emblematic of the celebrated individual.

In summary, through the birthday party ritual we can see that some Ngaanyatjarra children are imbibing a Western 'literate' orientation by classifying the self by temporal age since birth references, rather than spatial referents. The knowledge of one's own numerical age and date of birth are 'basic indexes of individual competence' in the Western world and Ngaanyatjarra children who are participating in this social practice are learning to enumerate their age and date of birth.<sup>1088</sup>

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<sup>1084</sup> (Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman 1991: 293–4).

<sup>1085</sup> (Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman 1991: 294).

<sup>1086</sup> (Weil 1986)

<sup>1087</sup> (Brooks 2002b); (Marrkilyi E. pers. comm. 2006).

<sup>1088</sup> (Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman 1991).

## Conclusion

The introduction of Western schooling and changed social practice has altered Ngaanyatjarra cultural processes. While some oral traditions remain strong, Ngaanyatjarra language is endangered. It is conjectured that the moral authority of the family and traditional childrearing and language socialisation practices are being eroded by the authority of outside experts and the normative expectations of schooling and a Western developmental trajectory. Nevertheless just under the surface key cultural processes such as kinship, language and the significance of the *tjukurrpa* remain and impact on the present.

In some families, story-book reading has become second nature and is being incorporated into social practice. By focusing on the children who are in the third and fourth generation to experience formal schooling it has been possible to analyse the intergenerational transmission of literate behaviours and practices and the evolution of a literate orientation. It has been shown that a knowingness about story-book reading derives from exposure to Christian and secular children's stories. Ngaanyatjarra children are not socialised into literacy practices through contrived learning activities, but are absorbing the values, skills and mannerisms that their kin associate with literacy. It can also be conjectured that adults don't 'prepare' children for school with pre-literacy activities because *teaching* literacy is seen to be the school's job, yet if resources are available child-oriented literacy events happen.

In the community context there are few literacy resources in the domestic space so families take advantage of literacy resources and literate mediators when they are available. In families where literacy has become a taken for granted cultural process it may be more likely that these children will acquire the habits and values of literacy than children in other families. Research clearly indicates the importance of family literacy as antecedent to school success. However, if children only witness non-Aboriginal people in literate roles then the likelihood of literacy being acquired as social practice by the next generation is lessened and literacy learning through formal schooling alone may be less effective. Hence, children need also to be observing and participating in activities where literacy has meaning in the mature practices of their own community.

**Introduction**

In this penultimate chapter I turn my attention to the children of the 'Native Welfare' generation who are now young adults and parents themselves. These children were born into the petrol sniffing and alcohol-related social disruption and grief of the 1970s and 1980s. In the absence of mission- and Native Welfare-imposed compulsion, their families were expected to regulate school attendance, with virtually no prior experience of doing so. As a consequence, many in the young adult generation experienced interrupted schooling routines and diminished control over the domestic space.

The everyday social practices of the current generation of young adults are drawn from myriad intercultural influences. Connection to kin and country and the enduring relationship between place and identity remain strong—for some young adults the first contact their parents had with the Western world was in the 1960s, so the past remains close. Concomitantly, remoteness no longer isolates youth from wider culture influences. In this generation we are seeing continuities and transformations as young adults hold onto their 'Aboriginality' while simultaneously immersing themselves in the 'global cultural flow'.<sup>1089</sup> I consider also how young adults in Warburton are now on a developmental trajectory that differs not only from traditional norms within their own community, but also from the normative trajectory of their mainstream peers. In the public discourse (see Chapter 1) Aboriginal youth are commonly portrayed as failing in the education and training system. Rarely do such accounts portray the agency and creative adaptability that young adults are bringing to bear in contemporary circumstances. In this chapter I consider how new influences are shaping the literacy practices that young people participate in and I show how young adults engage in learning and working when stimulated by youth arts activities.

**Altered maturational cycles**

Prior to European contact Ngaanyatjarra society was, as Brooks describes it, 'strongly rule-bound, complementary, concrete, sanctified, inter-locking and predictable'. The regulatory environment of mission schooling and Native Welfare times provided continuity with the rule-bound parameters of traditional Ngaanyatjarra society. In contrast, the contemporary

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<sup>1089</sup> (Appadurai 1996).

social world is perceived as 'open-ended, proliferating, seemingly rule-less and unpredictable'.<sup>1090</sup> The production and reproduction of cultural dispositions and norms began altering with the arrival of the mission and the inception of schooling. Schooling introduced a life-span division between childhood and adulthood that has shaped a new social category—'adolescence'.<sup>1091</sup> It has contributed to the inexorable erosion of pre-contact maturation cycles and the diminution of 'rule-bound' practices. It has also institutionalised the close proximity of mixed gender, age-graded cohorts and peer, rather than multigenerational, relations have intensified the opportunity for Western-influenced 'love-way' relationships.<sup>1092</sup>

Previously, young men who had been through the Law experienced a long period of pre-marriage independence, a 'liminal' period in which they went into the outside world to test themselves and assert autonomy, but this began to alter after the arrival of the mission.<sup>1093</sup> In the immediate post-contact period adolescent male life-experiences in many ways paralleled the traditional maturational cycle. The seasonality of station work, for instance, was conducive to traditional temporal cycles and the summer period of ceremonial activity and travel across the Western Desert. There now exists a disjuncture between Ngaanyatjarra expectations of adolescent development and the school's expectation of normative maturational stages and this is exemplified in low attendance and retention rates in the secondary years. The expectations of the two cultural systems are placing oppositional demands on adolescent males who also need to be free to participate in ceremonial obligations and not be bound by a web of rules and demands pertaining to the childhood-associated school domain. In the past going through the stages of the Law was a time-consuming imperative for young men. Although it remains a significant cultural process, the experience is no longer sufficiently enduring or robust to provide the full complement of skills needed for future social paradigms or circumstances. Yet the alternative Western male trajectory of institutional learning—schooling and VET sector

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<sup>1090</sup> (Brooks and Shaw 2003: 15).

<sup>1091</sup> Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'adolescence' as a developmental period in Western culture was unknown and virtually inconceivable (James 1993: 180). Adolescence as a concept appeared by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in tandem with the transformation from agricultural orientations to an urban industrial orientation and the beginning of so-called 'youth culture' peer groups (Rogoff 2003: 171–74).

<sup>1092</sup> Rogoff highlights the emphasis on age-graded institutions where same age interactions take precedence over multigenerational family and community relations in Western society. Social interaction has changed since 'colonial America' when large families often did not segment into separate generations, but spanned different ages and generations. As segmentation took place youth spent more time with each other in age-graded schools and recreation activities and this also made marital relations more of a peer relation (Rogoff 2003: 125–28). See also (Chudacoff 1989).

<sup>1093</sup> As I mention in Chapter 2, noticeable by its absence in this Chapter also are descriptions of events surrounding young men's participation in the Law Business. As I describe further in the post script at the end of the Methodology in Appendix A, these were deleted at the last minute by community request. See (Myers 1986; Peterson 2000; Sackett 1977; Stanton 1983; Tonkinson 1974). See anthropologist Victor Turner (Turner 1969) for a discussion on the notion of liminal transformations.

training—is not offering a substitute trajectory that makes sense either, so young men are struggling to find relevant identity formation processes.

It has been suggested that for young Aboriginal men prison has become a replacement rite of passage into manhood, although other research refutes this perspective.<sup>1094</sup> What is apparent, however, is that prison is holding some allure as a site for young men to test themselves. In prison young men encounter adults from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and gain experience negotiating complex social interactions as individuals. In this way young men are making connections that parallel events in the traditional maturational cycle. They are also observing a new regulatory norm, by adhering to the compulsion associated with the institutionalised boundaries of prison (or the requirement to pay off community hours) and this disciplined context offers a site for formal adult education that is difficult to replicate in everyday life.

Places and strangers are now no longer feared as they once were and reprisals for cultural transgressions are less potent, consequently young people are fearless in a way that their antecedents were not.<sup>1095</sup> Simultaneously, with the passing on of significant senior men—alongside diminished fear of sorcery, supernatural, and the dark (with street lights young people roam fearlessly at night)—the authority and regulatory capacity of the gerontocracy is less powerful than in the past. Paradoxically, however, as the boundaries of the known world have expanded, trust in the outside world has diminished. Families perceive that the chances of young people getting into trouble have been enhanced.

Assertions of autonomy are still typified in young men's speech, they say: 'you're not the boss for me', or *kuurti yungarranya* – 'I'm an independent spirit/individual', or *kurrumpa yungarralu palyara* – 'I'm doing it my way'.<sup>1096</sup> However, as Jim notes, unlike in his day when men worked outside of the Lands, now 'they all stop home...they must be want to stay close to their family or their families don't want them to go'. McLean concurs: 'one of the biggest problems with young blokes is that now their mothers don't let them go in the way that they did traditionally'.<sup>1097</sup> Unmarried adult sons 'stay with their mother and father all the time' and families are accused of 'spoiling' them. Families who led a more independent life in the Eastern Goldfields maintain that it is important for young men to 'to be self'. As

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<sup>1094</sup> (Beresford and Omaji 1996; Biles 1983; Ogilvie and Van Zyl 2001).

<sup>1095</sup> See also (Merlan 1998: 89; Myers 2002: 115).

<sup>1096</sup> (Marrkilyi E. pers. comm. April 2006).

<sup>1097</sup> McLean—Interview 9/9/04.



Molly declares: 'I let my sons or grandsons go out on their own to other places, but other families they chase up their adult children in town'...<sup>1098</sup>

...teenagers they really close to their mother and father nowadays...In those days people go out from the mother in the bush people go out when they grow into teenager, travel around with the mate they meet. Go out, must be find a girl from bit long way. They go well away, they got to show that they free man. They was more independent, they look after themselves, they know how to hunt kangaroo, rabbit, goanna. Nowadays the government took over, everything is free look like it, give, give, give. Something different, stop home...Young people they stop home and when they want to go out on their own but their mother and father chase him up and bring them back again. They frightened they might die there get hurt. More scared. They don't let them out in the world self and...they worry, mother, father. And the young people they like to stop home with their parents too, even if they have a kid and a wife.<sup>1099</sup>

In summary, the break in the maturational cycle—losing the period of premarital independence and marrying younger—is placing pressure on the identity formation processes of adolescent males. This contrasts with young women where the cultural imperative of childbirth and motherhood is allowing young women to maintain predictable cultural patterns.

Young women are maintaining a cultural logic in the process of identity formation that is inextricably linked to young motherhood and this also runs counter to the expectations of mainstream secondary schooling. Traditionally most food was prepared by women while young men camped 'rather haphazardly'.<sup>1100</sup> Now young mothers spend time with multigenerational matri-kin, looking after children, washing, shopping and feeding. At this time they lose the freedom that young men tend to retain, as Rosemary (A) and her sister (B) illustrate:

A: When I get my money I just buy a lot of feed for the families, like kids... Something for the baby, buy Kimbie something like that<sup>1101</sup>...I save some for next day, when we run out of feed...we always buy flour to last us, the bread will finish quick so make a damper. I always keep my money for me in my wallet.

*If you need more money where can you get it from?*

A: Just play cards

*Is that the only way to get more money?*

A: Yeah, win, in cards, just play card all day.

*Do the young fellas spend their money on food and clothes for the kids?*

A: They just get a smoke and cool drink. That's what they get. They just go play cards, finish their money with cards. They always go for drugs, other communities when they get their money, especially young fellas. Sometimes ladies too play cards, young girls.

*Are young fellas a little bit more free?*

A: Yeah, they just go, do what they like, go for drugs, buy drugs, come back home, with no money, look for feed.

*Who gives them feed?*

A: I don't know they just go, like that, no feed.

*Don't worry about feed?*

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<sup>1098</sup> *Wati* is a polysemous noun meaning either a man who has passed through the manhood making ceremonies; or in this context it refers to a member of a *warmarla* 'revenge party'.

<sup>1099</sup> Data from (Kral and Ward 2000).

<sup>1100</sup> (Myers 1986: 43). Hamilton suggests a 'covert model' for the eastern Western Desert region in which 'females remain still and never move about, while males move a lot and seldom stay still' (Hamilton 1979: 36).

<sup>1101</sup> Brand name for disposable nappies.

A: They just only get a cool drink and a pie for the road, enough for their guts.  
*They don't buy the flour for the damper?*  
B: Nooo, they don't like a damper.  
*So they never buy any of that?*  
B: Nooooo!  
*It's up to you girls is it?*  
A and B: Yeah.

In the mission time, Maisie explains, 'girls just given away, straight away to a man to be married'. In the 1960s it was noted that marriages at Warburton that violated the section system were rare, and despite the missionaries efforts to discourage the practice, 13 out of 94 recorded marriages were polygynous.<sup>1102</sup> In the early 1980s the typical family profile was still polygynous, and there was stability and predictability in partnerships and marrying 'proper way':

Family groupings still consisted of a husband and sometimes one, mostly two and often three wives whereas now the domestic environment constitutes a dramatically different social arrangement with only a few polygynous marriages amongst some older people and a number of single mothers and men are marrying significantly younger, often ten years younger than in previous times. In the past a young pregnant woman would have been married off to an older man and young husbands were unknown as men had a discrete period of bachelorhood before marriage.<sup>1103</sup>

Now, asserts McLean, 'it's hard to see a stable "traditional" family unit'. The traditional practice of 'promised' unions between older men and younger women, and polygynous marriages—senior first wife, then a younger junior wife or wives—no longer exists among the younger generation. Nevertheless, some older women still consider that women with older husbands are 'lucky', primarily because young husbands often 'don't know what they are doing, they get too jealous, always running around getting into jealous fights'. The transition within the last few decades from greater mobility and *wiltja* living to more stable residence in houses has thrown the generations together in bounded spaces. This has exacerbated family tensions and challenged the boundaries of social etiquette including the intensified proximity of those in avoidance relationships.

The reshaping of traditional marriage patterns has arisen in part as a consequence of same-age, mixed gender adolescent cohorts spending substantial periods of time together. Previously, strict social rules applied, mixed gender groupings at night were rare and illicit liaisons punished. Older women like Katherine recall that when they were young 'girls were shy of boys, not like now'. *Kurmta* ('shame') previously operated as a form of regulatory control over young people, as did the authority of senior men. Yet, as noted in Chapter 2, challenges to traditional marriage practices began in the 1950s with some in the first

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<sup>1102</sup> (Gould 1969: 108–184).

<sup>1103</sup> McLean—Interview 9/9/04.

generation of mission-educated girls running away from marriages to older men to seek same age unions (but still 'right way' according to the section system). Young adults now tend to be more outgoing and able to deal with an increasingly complex range of intercultural social interactions. Relationships are more overt with public 'boyfriend-girlfriend' unions, an increased number of single mothers and a discourse in the public space around previously private subjects such as pregnancy, domestic violence and sexual health. New terminology has entered the lexicon to deal with the change: *kurri* means spouse, but the now popular term *yamatji* encompasses the concept: 'boyfriend/girlfriend'.

Importantly, unions that violate the section system are still unusual, 'love-way' unions are generally with a partner who is of the 'right skin' (see Chapter 2, Fig. 2.3). 'Wrong way' partnerships are more serious. As noted in Chapter 2 generational moiety division remains central to the 'social and symbolic order' of Ngaanyatjarra life as in the *tjirntulukultul(pa)* ('sun side') and *ngumpalurrungkatja* ('shade side') generational moiety division.<sup>1104</sup> The rules surrounding generational moiety interaction are still strictly enforced and govern ceremonial activity and marriage rules. To marry '*yinyurrpa* way' (i.e. to a person of the other generational moiety) represents 'the worst violation of rules relating to marriage partners' and such 'wrong way' marriages 'strain the rules of acceptability, particularly for the older generation'.<sup>1105</sup>

Ultimately, the divergence of the developmental trajectory of youth away from traditional cultural norms is placing pressure on the social fabric of Ngaanyatjarra society. At the same time, the different social meanings attached to the Ngaanyatjarra adolescent maturation period run counter to the requirements of Western institutional settings.

### ***'Follow in our footsteps'***

The impact of major change on the traditional life course is represented in the language of older people:

Young people today have no respect for elders. There is no discipline, they are stubborn people, can't listen to the parents...I'm really glad I got learn the hard way.

In some families personal experiences of the past are 'codified' into 'a recognisable set of moral messages' reiterated in older people's public elaboration of young people's purported lack of education, work ethic and leadership potential.<sup>1106</sup>

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<sup>1104</sup> (Brooks 2002b: 39–41).

<sup>1105</sup> (Brooks 2002b: 40). See also (Hamilton 1979: 301; White 1981).

<sup>1106</sup> (Newman 1996: 380).

It's just different because in our days we used to just work like them. But like today, nowadays they just, they just there, doing their own ways or own way. You know they sniffing, or doing something bad, throwing rocks at people or anywhere, children arguing and fighting.

As Arthur comments:

Young men now...can't even work on their own like with a white man...they got different ways I think, our way was, we was like forced, now it's a sort of free way for anyone to live now...Nowadays young people can't work they, it's money there already for them.

Adults in the leadership cohort described in Chapter 4 who effectively integrated literacy and governance skills into everyday practice expect young people to assert similar skills without the intervening life experiences. When these expectations are unfulfilled they articulate their disappointment. Wesley emphasises that his generation went through 'an era where we had to fight, but these young ones have got it too easy'.

Like nowadays it's easier to get from A to B, there's a lot more vehicles, they can be lazy, drive around, watch TV, watch video...do whatever they want to do, there's access to all that kind of things, white man things that came in. They don't really need to do much 'cause there's access to everything the outside world provides.

Elders express frustration when they perceive young adults not following in their footsteps. Clem laments: 'The world is changing the government is changing, we're crying out: who'll take on in our footsteps, who'll do that? We believe that only through education our people will survive.' This despair is echoed repeatedly, by elders like Arthur:

I learnt a lot...I don't see young people nowadays doing what I been doing...They can't work or learn about anything...You know that's what we try to do to them, always telling them you should be learn, to be better than us. That's what I tell the young people, but no-one doing it.

As Patricia explains, elders must:

...learn the little grandchildren to be strong, you know, leading young peoples. Adults have to be strong in pushing younger ones. They have to have their knowledge and to keep pushing young people to know how to read and write so when they are adults they must be get tired and you know, we want our younger generation to work along too...and they can follow along, footsteps, you know, grandparents, *tjammu*, *nanna*, footsteps.

However, the cultural logic of the gerontocracy works against young people doing much until they reach an appropriate stage in the maturational cycle. In Western Desert society increased status is gained by males through progression in ritual knowledge throughout the span of the male life cycle. As Myers notes 'putting oneself forward and taking responsibility' are 'important dimensions of an older man's identity...the privileges of full adulthood'.<sup>1107</sup> April comments that 'they like to enjoy themselves when they 16 or 20, but when they 30, that's the time they start thinking: Oh I better start doing little bit of work because the older people who is in front won't be around anymore, they might get sick and

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<sup>1107</sup> (Myers 1986: 246).

finish'. Following on from this, I would suggest that the precedent for good governance was set earlier by the leadership cohort and some young adults are emulating this, but within a new paradigm.

Older people emphasise the obligation that young people have to preserve and pass on the Ngaanyatjarra identity and way of life to successive generations:

We're holding the hopes for the children, we've got to give them hope...we got to teach them...our hope is our future, to know the country and to have strong leaders.<sup>1108</sup>

Yet institutional models of schooling, training, work, and government administration have changed constantly and the outside world has not offered any certainty. Consequently, the young adult generation is unable to absorb many cues from their elders on how to deal with the new world and young people are having to figure out paradigms for contemporary living for themselves. Anthropologist Margaret Mead suggests that when there has been a profound break between the experiences of the old and the experiences of the young (as exemplified in the transitional upheaval from nomadism, to mission time, Native Welfare time, and to contemporary community life) cultural transmission and socialisation patterns are challenged.<sup>1109</sup> In Mead's terms, Ngaanyatjarra society was 'postfigurative' and depended for continuity 'upon the expectations of the old and upon the almost ineradicable imprint of those expectations upon the young'.<sup>1110</sup> However, as noted earlier, traditional multigenerational kin-affiliated norms have been challenged by introduced peer-affiliated age-graded groupings. Instead of the old transmitting knowledge and teaching the young, in many instances what is happening now is that it is the young who are 'prefiguratively' enculturating the old into the ways of modernity. Although still learning from their elders, young people are also becoming 'cofigurative' or peer learners, learning what they need for the new world from each other and absorbing new styles and ways of interacting. 'Prefiguratively' they are also providing new models for each other and for the children who will follow in their footsteps. It is these young adults who increasingly represent what the future holds, rather than their parents or grandparents.<sup>1111</sup> Young adults are becoming the self-appointed definers of new forms of cultural competence in groups that are configured around both peer-affiliations and kin-affiliations, revealing that they are

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<sup>1108</sup> Warburton Community Meeting—August 2004.

<sup>1109</sup> (Mead 1978 [1970]: 17). In the 1970s Mead developed a theoretical model for considering notions of cultural transmission and change based on three key forms: *postfigurative* (when the future repeats the past, change is slow and the old cannot conceive of any other future for their children other than their own past lives); *cofigurative* (in which the present is the guide to future expectations); and *prefigurative* (for the kind of culture in which the elders have to learn from the children about experiences which they never had) (Mead 1978 [1970]: 13).

<sup>1110</sup> (Mead 1978 [1970]: 17).

<sup>1111</sup> (Mead 1978 [1970]: 83).

adroit in adapting to, and incorporating, change. From this perspective contemporary life is challenging the cultural process of leadership by elders.

### **‘Working for your own living’**

Despite the moral messages articulated above, I would suggest that an ethos that values ‘working for your own living’ has, in fact, been transmitted. In some families the ‘habitualized’ work practices of the mission and station days have become ‘institutionalized’ practice possessing a reality of its own, ‘a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact’.<sup>1112</sup> George tells me that: ‘it’s important for young people to work, gotta work, work, you know, making money, earning your own living’:

Like early days people used to go out *kuka*, hunting every day, and mothers and fathers...Now, it’s like this, young people got to learn to work on time and all that, wake up early, same like hunting, got to learn to work right time and knock off right time. And for that they got to learn all them things like how to know how to work on time, attitude, initiative, all those things. They got to be educated with all that, then they know...I just want to pass that on for young people so they can learn, learn about working. And put it into like when old people used to go out, *marluku*, hard, hot day, they still look for it. It’s like that when you go to work it’s like going out hunting, but this one here we’re working for money to get what we want, we got to work for it.

A similar ethos is repeated by his daughter-in-law Adina: ‘it’s good for you to work for your own living instead of staying home and laying around’. Leah describes how she also imbibed a working ethos from her mission family:

They been working before, that’s why I know how to work, do course. That why I learn from them, by watching them when I was little, been going school right through. Then I finish here schooling then I change my mind to go into college-ing in the town schools, in Wongatha CAPS two years.

Likewise Kenny says of his father (who walked out of the desert in the 1960s, worked on stations and at Desert Farm):

I just see it in my father, start following him, like this, I work like him. He force me, he told me: “Oh work, we got to work’, tell me to help him out, do this. Like that.

Some young people say they want to work because they ‘want to take over’ and ‘keep learning, pass it on to the little ones, so they can pass it on to them so they can keep learning’. However, the young can no longer rely on the obsolete work paradigm transmitted from previous generations. It can be speculated that the industrious survival imperative of hunting and gathering was replicated in station work and in the manner in which people established the Ngaanyatjarra communities in the 1970s and early 1980s. At that time basic schooling met the requirements of semi- or unskilled labour. Following on from this, I would suggest that the older generation also transmitted the sense that through

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<sup>1112</sup> (Berger and Luckmann 1975 [1966]: 70–85).

education youngsters could get what they wanted. However over time, as described in earlier chapters, the meritocratic rewards promised by education have become more illusive, and as a corollary, schooling has become progressively less relevant. In Chapter 4 I comment on how Wells suggests that there appeared to be ‘more job opportunities’ in the 1970s and early 1980s, whereas recently youth ‘haven’t had sufficient schooling’ to cope with the increasingly complex requirements of the work environment. In the early days technology was simpler and there was less disparity between the two worlds. Undoubtedly, more locals were employed in the offices, stores and schools because their skills matched the work requirements at that time. Since then the advent of globalisation and technology since the 1970s has dramatically changed the expectations of employment—all over the world.<sup>1113</sup> As an aside, Giddens notes how globalisation happened concomitantly with an ‘acceleration’ of the idea that humans can ‘control nature’.<sup>1114</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the centrality and constancy of the *tjukurrpa* deriving from a changeless, timeless past is fundamental to the Ngaanyatjarra world view.<sup>1115</sup> The immediate post-encounter generation took on the new world as a logical system within a cultural framework of non-change. It can now be speculated that modernity has wrought a schism in the Ngaanyatjarra world view by also introducing the notion that individuals have choice and control, rather than events being determined by the *tjukurrpa*, but within unpredictable and often incomprehensible contemporary parameters.

Even though many adults reiterate that ‘getting a job’ is an important education outcome, a profound mismatch exists between expectation and reality. This is illustrated by Darren who had virtually no schooling himself:

Young people got to go to school to learn something. Must be learn about mechanic, or something else, sister or doctor... They got to go to school to learn properly and you know, write properly, read and write properly. And they got to get a good job. Must be training, something, fixing motor car, or sister, or doctor, anythings, so they can help people.

False expectations about what education can achieve in the short-term continue to be perpetuated. For instance, at a school assembly a principal reinforces a virtually unattainable connection between attendance, school performance and outcomes: ‘If you send your kids to school they will go to university and become lawyers and doctors, and school principals and stand up here instead of me’. I conjecture that, despite the fact that people say that schooling is important, their understanding of what ‘successful’ schooling is does not match mainstream conceptions. Successful schooling outcomes are, in fact, more

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<sup>1113</sup> (Gee 2000; Giddens 1991; Hulsemeier 2003).

<sup>1114</sup> (Giddens 1991: 144).

<sup>1115</sup> See (Brooks 2002c).

commonly tied to the local context. As Patricia illustrates: 'school is important for your children to know how to read, write, so when they get older they can get whatever job they want, they might work in the office or school, clinic'. Young people have imbibed the idea that going to school might give them 'jobs in town'. Rosemary repeats the cultural script that she thinks I want to hear: 'go to school, get learn more, get a job somewhere in the city or town, be a school teacher, get a house there.' However these Western outcomes are disconnected from the lived reality of the Ngaanyatjarra world. Rosemary continues:

Hey, we don't want to do that, I want to stay here, I grew up in this place. This is my home, stay with my families.

Young people unanimously express the importance of their connection to Warburton by describing it as a 'good place, better than town'.

The relationship between education, CDEP and employment (as well as money, gambling and the social economy) in the remote context is a complex one and there is insufficient space to explore it further in this thesis.<sup>1116</sup> However, counter to common assumptions I found that on the whole young people seek to engage in meaningful activity and if it is not provided through the institutional structures of CDEP, training or youth-oriented events, they initiate their own activities, including sport and music.<sup>1117</sup> A trainer also describes how young people 'want to do stuff, but work is not at the top of their list of priorities'. May tells me emphatically:

There's too many different things going on see, so they have to leave that job, they have to go somewhere, come back, too many distractions. Everyday life...football, funerals, something happening over there everybody has to go...Well, there's no jobs anyway, there's no work for them. They just do certain years in school then they drop out, get married, settle down and the same cycle goes around again.

One young man tells me that often 'young fellas' have 'got too many other things to think about, like girlfriends, family and Business' to engage in projects suggested by whitefellas.<sup>1118</sup>

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<sup>1116</sup> See (Altman 1985; Brady 2004).

<sup>1117</sup> Playing, recording and performing at music festivals have been significant in Ngaanyatjarra youth culture for a long time. Some of the previous bands in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands include, Mantamaru Band, Red 4 Danger (R4D), Mirlirtjarra Band, Warburton Rangers Band, Blackstone Band, Warakurna Spirit and Warrunyina Band. Bands have recorded at the recording studio associated with Warburton Arts Project and performed at music festivals throughout the Western Desert. Also see Ase Ottoson's PhD thesis on Aboriginal men and contemporary music in Central Australia (Ottoson 2006).

<sup>1118</sup> Burbank posits that school and work 'simply do not engage' many Aboriginal people because of 'the emotional incompatibility of the cultural self with a Western arrangement with others; thus the sense of senselessness when many Aboriginal people engage in Western acts' (Burbank 2006: 7). Folds similarly concludes that the Pintupi engage 'selectively and creatively with the contemporary world' (Folds 2001: 181).



Troy talks about wanting to work, but is held back by the shame factor associated with standing out from the crowd:

They'll look at me, laugh at me, they'll talk about: 'Look at Troy, he's working, got a good job.' They say it like that.

Finally, I want to draw attention to a factor that has been noted repeatedly. Commentators often explained that 'there are no jobs when they leave school'. Simultaneously, young adults are commonly criticised for not working: 'loafers...sit round, go to the shop, phone, go for walk' or 'sit around and do nothing...just sit back and win money from the card'. Some young people participate in vocational training, but completion rates are low (see Appendix I). This is hardly surprising if there is accuracy in the notion, as suggested in Chapter 5, that there is insufficient work under CDEP for all those who receive training. With the post-school young adult learning environment oriented primarily around accredited vocational training, there is little scope for the additional learning that young people need to competently deal with the other requirements of everyday life in the future, especially in a context where there are so few employment options.

At this point it is important to highlight—as a consequence of low school attendance and retention rates and limited participation in post-school training—how little concentrated time adolescents are spending in institutional learning contexts.<sup>1119</sup> At Warburton adolescents as young as twelve are claiming: 'I'm too old for school and I've had enough'. Out of a community cohort of approximately 50 school-aged teenagers only around five to ten attend regularly. There are 'an awful lot of twelve year olds not coming to school' and none older than thirteen or fourteen years of age.<sup>1120</sup> As mentioned, earlier male adolescents tend to drop out of school when they go through the Law and females when they get pregnant. It is also assumed cultural practice that school ceases by sixteen years of age when adolescents can sign on for CDEP, although some young adults take up post-school vocational training options. Consequently, youth have large amounts of discretionary time and unlike in previous generations, everyday life is increasingly self-regulated. Older people consider that youth spend their time doing 'basically nothing' and 'play' has become the norm for how time is spent:

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<sup>1119</sup> An audit of 12–16 year olds across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands schools in 2006 found that approximately one-third of 14 year olds do not participate (at all) in school, nor do about one half of 15 year olds and 'essentially' no 16 year olds (Gordon 2006: 6). In addition only 25% of 12 year olds and 5% of 15 year olds were found to have 'passable' attendance rates (*ibid*: 7). Department of Education personnel attribute low academic performance to 'absenteeism, transience, lack of family and parental support and lack of discipline' (Goddard et al. 2005: 13).

<sup>1120</sup> Principal—Interview 27/11/04. It is understood that the annual cost of funding for schools in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands is approximately \$17 million for a total enrolment in 2005, for example, of 417 students (Goddard et al. 2005: 37).

Play everywhere, basketball. Go to the college, play around on the lawn, play cards on the computer... Games or anything, basketball, telling stories, bike, play with boys or girls, kids, or playing card.

April remembers how previously youth had fewer resources compared with now:

Like nowadays they have bluelight disco for the kids and all those sort of things... But I never used to do that 'cause it was only a mission... We had no time to do those things because weren't allowed... for the young ones now, they got everything just about. They got all like this sort of stuff here... We never used to do those sort of things.

Weekend leisure-time in the 1970s and 1980s was still generally spent out bush in multigenerational family groupings.<sup>1121</sup>

The arrival of electricity in 1962 created a sector of the day that could be devoted to leisure.<sup>1122</sup> The arrival of YMCA youth workers in 1979 saw the beginning of structured diversionary recreation activities aimed at ameliorating 'youth problems'—petrol sniffing, domestic violence and sexual abuse. Youth programmes still tend to be framed around the 'youth as problem' narrative.<sup>1123</sup> Ironically, however, for youth who drop out of institutional learning, many of their social and learning needs are now met by alternative sources, including youth programmes.<sup>1124</sup> The Warburton youth programme includes a Drop in Centre most evenings, sports activities at the oval and swimming pool, discos and school holiday programmes. At the Drop in Centre adolescents are acquiring a complex of computer and interactive multimedia skills and participating in peer learning activities in a space where they feel a sense of belonging. James Gee posits that computer games and video games are exposing youngsters to 'language and other symbols connected to modern technologies and media' and that these are often 'more compelling and motivating' than school language and literacy learning activities.<sup>1125</sup> Similarly, a youth worker notes how play stations in the Drop in Centre are prompting youngsters to read, poor readers are also learning to 'read' the visual cues and symbols embedded in the games and when they cannot read the alphabetic instructions, those who can read 'instruct other kids'.<sup>1126</sup>

It can be concluded that the correlation between institutional learning and employment does not match the cultural context. In mainstream Australia there is a cultural logic to the

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<sup>1121</sup> Paget—Interview 22/5/04.

<sup>1122</sup> (Young 1988: 223).

<sup>1123</sup> Police, juvenile justice, parole and probation officers and local community leaders have initiated and supported petrol sniffing prevention programmes and diversionary resources in the form of activities like sport and recreation and youth drop in centres. Ngaanyatjarra Health Service and NPY Women's Council have also been instrumental in funding youth programmes aimed at the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse and domestic violence.

<sup>1124</sup> Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands youth workers are employed by the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku and the NPY Women's Council.

<sup>1125</sup> (Gee 2004: 37). See (Eidman-Aadahl 2002: 244) for a discussion of the value of discretionary time and non-school attendance among American teenagers and the role that youth groups play in providing important learning environments.

<sup>1126</sup> Youth Development Officer—Interview 1/3/04.

pursuit of credentials and the assumed linearity of the transition from school to training and employment in the labour market economy.<sup>1127</sup> In the Ngaanyatjarra context the normative logic of this sequenced pathway is less clear. Different social meanings are attached to the adolescent maturation period, and the purpose of vocational training is less apparent when there are not sufficient jobs. This raises the important question of finding ways of setting young adults on meaningful learning trajectories in an environment where there is limited employment, yet a critical need for engagement in purposeful activity that will build up the skills needed for the future. I return to this point later in the chapter.

## New influences

This generation is exploring and internalising, as Merlan terms it, new and diverse 'intercultural arenas of social practice' to forge an emerging identity not based on models reproduced within cultural memory, but on a synthesised multiplicity of influences.<sup>1128</sup>

Remoteness no longer isolates youth from wider culture influences:

This generation can be in Kalgoorlie or Perth in a few hours. Huge impact, what they say, how they dress, what they do with their time. When you look at what young kids are wearing out here you could probably transport them to the city and they'd probably look the same. Even though the person out here had kangaroo for dinner and went out hunting, they sort of look the same. Influence from outside. *Eminem* song released a month beforehand can be playing in Warburton a month later. Previously never happening—'we're remote, we're remote'. Now you have kids coming in from Kalgoorlie and they bring new change and new ways of doing things and people here get into it. They embrace change.<sup>1129</sup>

New influences are also shaping the literacy practices that young people engage in, and as have indicated in earlier chapters some practices are also redolent of a cultural schema that marks these literacy practices as somehow Ngaanyatjarra.

## Youth literacy

In this section I look at two instances of youth literacy—graffiti and diary writing. In the ethnographic literature it is suggested that graffiti opens the door to non-standard literacy practices and operates as a 'counterliteracy' or 'borderland discourse' for those marginalised from mainstream literacy practices.<sup>1130</sup> As Conquergood notes:

While official literacy is associated with detachment, distance, disclosure, and a scene of solo production and reception—(writing and reading are typically figured as private, contemplative activities)—graffiti writing is characterized by contact, coding, collaboration, and collusion.<sup>1131</sup>

Warburton graffiti is situated in an interconnected web of adolescent graffiti expression across remote Australia.<sup>1132</sup> In the walking-around, night-time space, adolescents write their

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<sup>1127</sup> (Smyth and Hattam 2004).

<sup>1128</sup> (Merlan 1998: 145).

<sup>1129</sup> Youth Development Officer—Interview 1/3/04.

<sup>1130</sup> (Conquergood 1997; Wilson 2000b).

world as a form of 'street literacy' as tags—initials, symbols or phrases—scrawled on myriad surfaces in the public domain.<sup>1133</sup> Unlike the older generation, adolescents display a corporeal confidence in the built environment and they know the material world. The built environment is replete with spaces and surfaces that provide the 'co-ordinates' for social relationships and a 'structured sequence of settings' where social interactions can be enacted, encoded and decoded.<sup>1134</sup> Writing is deliberate, not random, and everywhere, every surface is daubed with textual scribbles, patterns, icons and authorising marks.<sup>1135</sup> Youth do not discriminate between surfaces, but interact with all materials of the built environment—brick, concrete, plastic, metal, and paper—as surfaces to be filled with written expressions of self. Tags are smoked onto ceilings with cigarette lighters, rendered in texta on plastic bottles and in petrol on the bitumen road on sniffing nights, welded as initials on metal benches, drawn in dust on car windows and on refrigerator condensation, carved on trees, scrawled in charcoal on cement floors, etched onto skin as tattoos, and traced in the sand during storytelling. Teenage girls spend extended leisure hours, especially late into the summer evenings, sitting on the concrete pavement around town chipping text into the concrete with the sharp end of a story wire; these peckings, redolent of traditional rock pectroglyphs, become a permanent reminder of the moment. This rendering of symbols is transferred into other forms of leisure-time graffiti 'tagging' and compulsive 'scribbling' as teenage girls play word games such as writing 'all friends name' and 'name game on the paper'.<sup>1136</sup> Paralinguistic tags, or alphabetic icons, are also signed in the air signifying a nuanced substitution when the voiced full name of the recently deceased cannot be spoken. These alphabetic initials—representative of full names—often become the permanent vocative.

At night, teenagers are 'night prowlers' (often chronic non-school-attenders who hide away during the day and emerge at night) and they tag the walls, declaring allegiances to 'gangs' and announcing their 'love-way' relationships to the world. Interactions with boyfriends (in the past possibly punishable with spearings in the leg) are now inscribed on walls in public

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<sup>1131</sup> (Conquergood 1997: 358).

<sup>1132</sup> See (Martin 1993; Nicholls 2000; von Sturmer 2002).

<sup>1133</sup> (Conquergood 1997; Pardue 2004: 425).

<sup>1134</sup> (Duranti 1997: 321-323).

<sup>1135</sup> See (Menezes de Souza 2003).

<sup>1136</sup> School-aged girls in Warburton play an English language word game they call 'FLAMES' using the first letters of the descending words **F**riendship, **L**ove, **A**ctions, **M**arriage, **E**nemies, **S**ex. They explain the instructions: Take the first name of yourself and a boy you like, then cross out the letters F-L-A-M-E-S from both names. Add up the number of letters remaining and count that number through the FLAMES words above until you get to the last number and word. That word then defines what you, and the boy in question, will mean to each other (School girls pers. comm. 2004).

spaces for all to see.<sup>1137</sup> These public textual announcements can escalate into community brawls if individuals feel wronged or shamed. Graffiti, as a form of social literacy, is crucial for acceptance and participation in ‘gangways’—fluid, mainly female ‘gangs’ where jealousy and feuding regularly redefine the group. Throughout 2004 one ‘gangways’—a group of teenage girls aged 16 and 17—fluctuate between being ‘best friends’ and ‘enemies’. Darleen, Leanne, Anthea and the other girls dropped out of school the year before and now spend most days hanging around public phones, gossiping, giggling and waiting for their boyfriends to ring, or ‘cruising around’ in cars. No matter how hot, the *de rigueur* dress for adolescents is baggy polyester hiphop-influenced ‘Snoop Dogg’, ‘Eminem’ or ‘50 cent’ logo shorts, t-shirts, baseball caps and multiple plastic bangles. Anthea says she can read and write a little: ‘I do some, but I don’t like doing it’. She did reading ‘long time’ ago, but doesn’t write, ‘only my name and my friends’ name’. In contrast, when I meet Leanne I gain an insight into the night-time creativity of the gangways:

They walk around all night with textas, if one person has texta they all ask: ‘Oh can I use it so I can write my name?’ And they’ll be writing their name. They’ll ask that other person if they can borrow it so they can write their name all fancy styles, some they just write their friend’s name and their boyfriend or girlfriend’s name, or if they’re from Warburton, so that they can let them know that it’s that person. I did this one here, that’s my name up the side.

Leanne indicates various secret names on the wall. Coded sequences of four capital letters represent the last letter of first name, second name, father’s surname, mother’s surname. Three and four letter tags representing kinship identity are commonly represented in Ngaanyatjarra graffiti:<sup>1138</sup>

NVTW	APMW
EQU T	AKMN
ONLY 2 FOREVER	2004

In gangways graffiti the self is ‘announced’ in and out of relationships with kin, gangways and lovers—expressed in self-defined ‘fancy writing’, ‘tricky writing’, coding and word games (Fig. 7.1).<sup>1139</sup> Gangways invent and reinvent codes to disguise their identity; they write ‘short way, tricky way so they can’t read it, but us girls we can read it’. In some sequences different letter combinations are represented: one girl’s name is entwined with

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<sup>1137</sup> Similarly, Ahearn describes how in Nepal, traditional social systems are being challenged by young people and this is being expressed in love letters, an emerging literacy practice that poses a potential threat to the pattern of extended patrilineal families as writers negotiate new identities indicative of increasingly westernised concepts of personhood and romantic love (Ahearn 2000; Ahearn 2001a).

<sup>1138</sup> A similar graffiti form has been noted among Warlpiri adolescents and Nicholls suggests that ‘autograph graffiti’ extends beyond individual identity. She suggests that this ‘coding of subjectivity’ has a particularity whereby ‘the sense of self or identity’ is almost invariably group defined’ and ‘emphasises connection, kinship and engagement with others through language’ unlike the subjectivity of Anglo-European adolescent graffiti where a stronger sense of first-person subjectivity and individualism is asserted (Nicholls 2000: 91–92).

<sup>1139</sup> (von Sturmer 2002). Similar to the ‘short-way’ secret language, a vernacular oral code used by mainly female older Pitjantjatjara teenagers at Areyonga ‘usually to talk about their boyfriends’ (Langlois 2004: 16). Other examples of ‘secret’ Aboriginal languages have been documented e.g. an Arandic secret back-to-front language termed ‘Akarre Rabbit Talk’ (Turner and Breen 1984).

Fig. 7.1 Warburton graffiti 2003-2006





her boyfriend's by counting letters from the front of alphabet and transposing them with the mirror image letters counted from the back of the alphabet. As Leanne explains:

So they'll be thinking hard who could this person would be but that person won't show them how they do it, they'll be thinking hard: 'Who's this person, they got a lovely fancy writing?' So they'll start copying that person.

Colluded codings are used when girls have boyfriends:<sup>1140</sup>

*OTLVS*  
*OTLVS ALWAYS WILL BE 4EVER*

when girls are 'best friends':

$\triangleleft = O3BF\ 4EVER = \triangleright$   
*ONLY 3 BEST COUSINS*  
*ONLY 5 FAMILY'S*  
*O3Gs*  
*O2SFE*  
*O5B Friends*

or when 'they're enemies' and girls 'get wild, jealous for each other, for their boyfriend' and rub each other's names out or write 'dirty things about them'. Warnings are signalled to girls from other communities to read 'letting them know so can't get jealous for them'. Coding is also used when they're 'the only one without no boyfriend':

*ONLY 1 GIRL OKAY*  
*ONLY ONE NO LOVERS*  
*OAONLIE GIRL 4EVER and EVER OK-AY*  
*1.A.ONLY IN 20T4 S.D.G.J*  
*ONLY 1 4 NONE*

Anthropologist John von Sturmer suggests that the oft-repeated *OAO* – *One and Only* tag at Warburton represents an 'assertion of personhood', not 'an instance of untidy or imperfect English'.<sup>1141</sup>

By the end of the year the social organisation of the gangways changes as girls 'get married', or are 'waiting' for babies and so transferring their social orientation to their husbands. Within a year this generation of graffiti writers has faded and been replaced by a younger gang with a new style of coding equally as impenetrable to outsiders, displaying coding similar to SMS mobile phone messaging by urban youngsters.<sup>1142</sup>

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<sup>1140</sup> Codings were copied directly off surfaces and can be interpreted as:

*OTLVS* = (Only Two LoVerS)

*O3Gs* = (Only 3 Girls)

*O2SFE* = (Only 2 Sisters For Ever)

*O5B Friends* = (Only 5 Best Friends)

*1.A.ONLY IN 20T4 S.D.G.J* = (One and only in 2004 So Don't Get Jealous)

<sup>1141</sup> (von Sturmer 2002: 6).

<sup>1142</sup> See (Gibian 2003). The codings are interpreted as:



ICU4URQT

SS  
♥s  
◁ = SOQT = ▷

Adolescent writing ‘out of school’ (including graffiti and other forms that differ from the essay text model) is often treated as ‘rebellious’ or ‘inadequate attempts at proper literacy’.<sup>1143</sup> According to mainstream standards of literacy, adolescent sub-groups appear to be failing, yet they produce their own creative literacies. Writers highlight the proliferation of everyday, non-standard uses of reading and writing.<sup>1144</sup> Camitta’s study in particular reveals how informal, often private, writings are representative of the cultural group rather than of formal or institutional standards of written expression. Cushman describes so-called ‘hybrid literacies’ that combine elements of oral and written discourse: storytelling, dialogue, letter-writing and personal journals that unite print and illustration and employ multiple meanings and social representations of self.<sup>1145</sup>

Graffiti apart, adolescent literacy practices at Warburton are relatively invisible and it is commonly assumed by elders like Arthur that ‘some of these young people can’t even write their names, not like us’ and others concur: ‘teenagers can’t read and write, hard-pressed to just sign their name and they don’t know their date of birth’. Yet I found young adults disclosing private writing practices. Troy describes how he writes his own stories in a book:

Scrapbooks, the little scrapbooks. Write my own stories, write my names. All sort of things. I bought it at the roadhouse and I always kept it in my bag but people going through my bag and stealing, that’s why. Somebody stole that, I don’t know which one. My own diary, but they steal it, one of my brothers steal it or my sister.

I also gave ‘diaries’ to some of the young women in the neighbourhood including Leanne and Adina. They later tell me that when they try writing at home at night the family always ask: ‘What are you doing?’, so the diaries are left at my house. These instances illustrate, as noted in Chapter 5, that adolescent literacies are also inhibited by the difficulty of accessing and storing resources to enact practices outside of institutional settings and in finding cultural acceptance of solitary literacy practices.

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ICU4URQT = I see you for you are cute  
And: SS ‘loves’ some one cutie

<sup>1143</sup> (Street 1994: 146). See also Hull and Schultz’s (Hull and Schultz 2002) edited collection exploring ‘out-of-school’ literacies.

<sup>1144</sup> See writers’ accounts of adolescent ‘vernacular literacies’ (Camitta 1993), ‘hybrid literacies’ (Cushman and Emmons 2002), ‘sub-rosa’ or secret literacies (Gilmore 1986) and diary writing (Finders 1997; Shuman 1986; Shuman 1993). See also (Blake 2004; Heath 1998; Pardue 2004).

'My private diary', as Adina names hers, is a textual space to record 'the discourse of social life'.<sup>1146</sup> Diaries are filled with names, jottings, signatures, word games, recipes, photos, addresses and phone numbers, as well as longer cohesive texts. These texts are not confessional recounts of personal dilemmas, but social narratives, pages of everyday social interaction narrated in a written rather than oral mode. Texts are written in the third person often with fictitious or cartoon characters using reported speech to depict real life stories and distance the writers from the firsthand, ongoing experience (Fig. 7.2).<sup>1147</sup> As I discuss above, the stability of traditional marriage has been replaced by new forms of interpersonal relating: 'love-way' relationships, multiple partners, and relationships where alcohol or petrol sniffing may lead to domestic violence. The privacy of diary writing gives Leanne and Adina the space to explore a storytelling genre where their fictitious characters tell 'everyone's story' while also attempting to write 'a new story' about relationships and the boundaries of selfhood. Camitta describes a similar scenario with adolescent writing she has studied:

Adolescents act on experience by writing it. They control, shape, and manipulate its properties – time, space and inhabitants – through texts and their use. Adolescents actively seek to change experience through writing, to act upon it by creating alternative realms through their texts.<sup>1148</sup>

In the next section I discuss further how adolescent writing typically incorporates 'vernacular' or 'hybrid' textual expressions or divergent, non-standard 'literacies'.<sup>1149</sup> In the youth arts example I show how young adults, many of whom may not be considered highly literate when measured against mainstream standards, are adapting oral narrative skills and using text in multimedia events.

### **Warburton youth arts**

In 2004 a confluence of youth-oriented activities for approximately sixty 16–25 year old young adults merged and built on an existing foundation of training, work and arts-based practice at Warburton.<sup>1150</sup> The acquisition of multimedia skills was already underway for a

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<sup>1145</sup> (Cushman and Emmons 2002).

<sup>1146</sup> (Camitta 1993: 229).

<sup>1147</sup> See (Shuman 1986).

<sup>1148</sup> (Camitta 1993: 240).

<sup>1149</sup> (Blake 2004; Camitta 1993; Cushman and Emmons 2002).

<sup>1150</sup> Many in this generation spent their formative years observing their parent or grandparent generation participating in arts-based activities at the Warburton Arts Project and Women's Centre. Some young people have also participated in accredited Vocational Education and Training (including Tourism and Hospitality, Hairdressing and Office Skills) through Ngaanyatjarra Community College, the local Registered Training Organisation. The 2004-5 projects included the *Nintirringkula Youth Arts Project* auspiced by the Warburton Arts Project; *Kungkaku Yangupalaku Tjukurrpa Project*, a Ngaanyatjarra Health Service sexual health strategy for young adults; Ngaanyatjarra Lands Youth Transition Unit (a nationally-funded Department of Education Science and Training school-to-work transitions project for Aboriginal youth auspiced by the Ngaanyatjarra Council). The Ngaanyatjarra Youth Transition Unit simultaneously focused on multimedia activities in conjunction with enterprise training in the café at the Tjulyuru Civic and Cultural Centre.

small group of trainees enrolled in the *Certificate III in Broadcasting (Remote Area Operations)*.<sup>1151</sup> For the rest of the cohort computer and film skills are attained through self-regulated, non-accredited multimedia training workshops (Fig. 7.3).<sup>1152</sup>

Mastery of multimedia skills comes easily as young people experiment with digital stills and video cameras, storyboard sequences, plan shoots, and edit films and slide shows. The immediacy of the digital medium matches their creative energy by allowing multiple images to be shot and viewed, then surreptitiously deleted or downloaded for instant replay and communal repeat viewings. Young people burst with pride and excitement about what they are doing and how they have control of the process. Film nights in the community hall showcase their work. The rough, grungy vitality of the films accentuates their determination to do something that matters. DVDs are made of the films and become coveted possessions. From a rapidly growing bank of photos individuals compile personal folders of meaningful images. The surfeit of images challenges the cultural orthodoxy regarding photographed images of people, but the community accommodates this transformed cultural practice, as illustrated by Clem at a youth arts meeting:

You fellas grow up in a different world, in a different way. Not your mother and father way, it's important you can video it for other children.

A shift in the presentation of self in the public space takes place as a new 'performativity' through fashion, film and writing evolves.<sup>1153</sup> I draw on the concept of 'performativity' to consider how youth are 'performing' themselves differently from their parents and grandparents. Unlike previous generations who were more bounded by the parameters of ceremonial performance, over recent decades Ngaanyatjarra people have progressively been exposed to a greater range of 'performance' genres—sport, gospel bands, popular music, film, TV, music videos—as observers and participants. Young people's exposure to new genres and forms of communication has extended the boundaries of possibility, as George reflects:

Mostly we see'em on TV, catwalk, you know all the fashion model, and mostly all the white people. But...this the first time for this community here, setting it up like this, challenge for them young people, but really good, you know. Get them young people, break the barrier of shame, you know *kurnta*. They can walk out in front of big mob, lot of people, *kurru pirni* you know, they all looking...Give them more confidence next time when they go out to meet big mob, or talk in front of big mob, they can face that because they been through that.

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<sup>1151</sup> *Certificate III in Broadcasting (Remote Area Operations)* is a nationally accredited Training Package delivered jointly by Ngaanyatjarra Media and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE).

<sup>1152</sup> Trainers from Ngaanyatjarra Media assisted with the multimedia workshops. Training began on word processing computers at Ngaanyatjarra Community College. Warburton Arts Project (with funding from LotteryWest and the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku) purchased Macintosh computers and software (*iPhoto*, *iMovie*, *iDVD* and *Photoshop Elements* and *InDesign*), as well as digital stills cameras, digital video cameras, a scanner and a printer.

<sup>1153</sup> Judith Butler uses the term 'performativity' (Butler 1977) which she has adopted from speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) and later echoed in the work of performance-oriented linguists (Bauman 1986; Bauman and Briggs 1990).

Fig. 7.2 Diary writing

SALLY & MICHAEL

THIS STORY IS ABOUT A GIRL WHO LOVED HER HUBAND SO MUCH BUT HE LOVED PLAYING FOOTBALL ON SATURDAY NIGHT HE WENT TO THE HALL AND THIS ONE GIRL FEEL IN LOVE WITH HIM AND THEY WENT OUT together and his WIFE WAS LOOKING for him she went to the HALL BUT HE WASNT Ther so she looked everywere Then she saw them in the old house having a sex a she ran off then the that girl was gone her Communitie

The End.

page 1

Wayne and Charlotte

me and my man was in town and I was home and he went and got lots of drink and they went Bush and all the girls went with Him they was drinking then that Girl was looking for her man she went and start he car she went every wher and one man said they was drinking at the dam then she went to the dam and she saw Him with all the girls at the dam and she went mad then she got a big stick for them but they gave her hiding she went hospital then he went round and visit her. then she said no I don't want you any more okay he was crying for her she said you got lots of girls why cant you marry them she said he said NO!! then her mom and Dad came and picked her up then she got Married with Patrick.

NOTHER GIRL

HE'S WIFE AND 2 KIDS

HE'S WIFE WENT AND VISIT HIM HE DIDNT TOLD HER SHE DIDNT then 2 week past he NO WHAT WAS DIED Thru that GOING ON FOOTBALL TIME

SICKNESS




Fig. 7.3 Multimedia workshop poster





**Fig. 7.4** Wilurarra Youth Arts Festival, Warburton, April 2005



WARBURTON COMMUNITY  
invites you to the opening of

**WILURARRA YOUTH ARTS FESTIVAL**  
A series of arts, music, fashion,  
sports, dance, language, film and  
cultural events 15-27 April 2005

on Wed 20 April 2005 5:30pm  
Tjulyura Cultural and Civic Centre

by Mr Ian Ward, Warburton Community Chairman

*Refreshments to be served*

RSVP by 11 April - Kelli De Koven T 08 9954 9011  
E [kjulyura@warburton.com.au](mailto:kjulyura@warburton.com.au)

**WILURARRA YOUTH ARTS FESTIVAL**  
**WARBURTON RANGES W.A. 15 – 27 APRIL 2005**  
*Kurra! Wilurarra Style - Best in the West*

**Festival:** This is our first youth arts festival. It's got everything all the young people have been doing. We're putting it together for this one big event. We like to show it to the community and everybody else. Enjoy the festival, come and show us your talent, join in and have fun.

**Youth:** They got different style and they got something to say. Kurra! Wilurarra Style – Best in the West.

**Music:** They like music that fit the lifestyle, music you can dance to.

**Hand Signs:** We can talk with our hands and our bodies. It's like a language, it's part of the fashion.

**Photo:** They learned to take photos of friends 'gangways', family and themselves. Maybe you can think about it and get some new ideas for yourself.

**Film:** We did it! We made these films from our own little stories.

**Computer:** It's not just for offices or for any big government person. Young people can take pictures for themselves, make slideshows for everyone to see. More stories, more ideas!

**Style:** We've got our own style. WILURARRA STYLE!

**Fashion:** Looking good. They like the fashion, they like dressing up, it's fun – and they look flash!





Fig. 7.5 Nintirringkula Newsletter

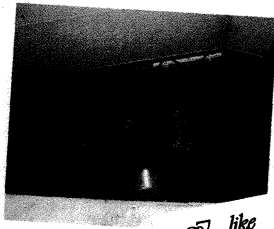


# NINTIRRINGKULA YOUTH ARTS

## FASHION AND MUSIC

On Wednesday we went to the Culture Centre and had a meeting with the Shire. Then we went to Albie's office looking through the photos on the computer until lunch-time. After lunch we told all the young mens to come and do the fashion at the Hall. So the young fellas came and it was great. It was first time for the fellas. So they loved it and we had the band players there. They was practising too for the Carnival too. We will be having a great time and fun. It's great to have young girls and fellas doing different things like.

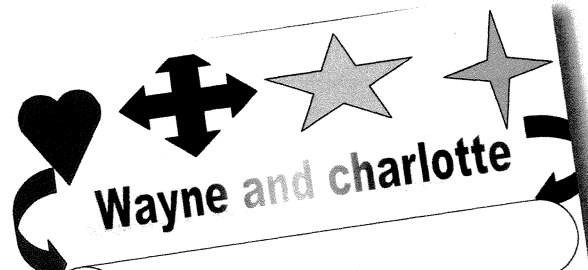
fashion-  
music-  
band-  
typing-  
cooking-  
stories-  
camera,s-  
taking photos.-



I like to learu more thing to type on the computer and make book on the computer and write story learu about video and video and learu softball rules. Painting and art music write song cooking on wedensday all the mans and woman play football and softball at the oval some time all man play basketball sometime I like to play softball because its good to play on the weekend warburton girls won the softball the kids learu cooking and spor evray night all the young people go to the dropin center they play on the poolalade and game watch video I with the girls to the oval to play softball some tmie I go out bush with my family for hunting

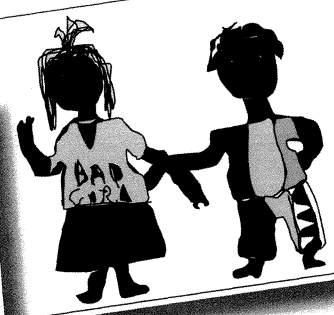



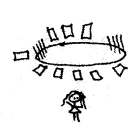
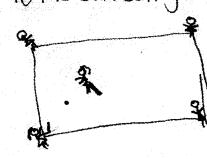



Fig. 7.6 Cartoon stories



# Wayne and Charlotte

Me and my man was in town and I was home and he went and brought a lot of drink and went bush and all the girls went with him they was drinking then that girl was looking for her man she went and started the car she went every where and one man said they was drinking at the dam and then she went to the dam and saw him with all the girls at the dam and then she went mad then she got a big stick for them but they gave her hiding she went to hospital then he went round and visit her then she said no I don't want you any more okay he was crying for her she said you got lots of girlfriends why can't you marry them she said he said no then her mum and dad came and picked her up.



<p>On saturday this girl had a shower</p> 	<p>then she went to the Oval</p> 
<p>THEN SHE WALK OVER TO THE SOFTBALL GROUND</p> 	<p>then that night they had a band. She was dancing</p> 
<p>then he went out WITH HER</p> 	<p>A MAN WAS WATCHING HER</p> 

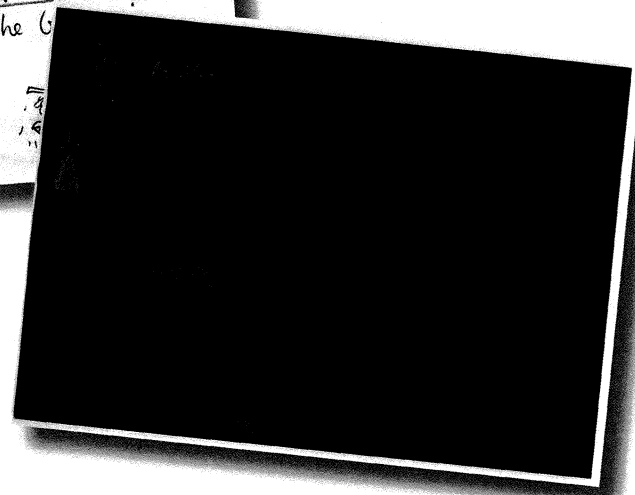




Fig. 7.7 Songs and scripts

Man's story - That's how life goes...

1. In a dream I seen a man and a woman. This is a story about the man and woman.
2. One day he found a date with this girl and every night they go out.
3. Then the man was married to her. The woman got married to the wrong kind a man.
4. She was looking after him good way.
5. Then she found out when the man came home late and he said to make a feed.
6. That night the man's brother he came along and said, "Hey bro, you coming for a ride?" And he said, "Yeah, what for?" And he said, "Oh you want some drugs?" And he said "Okay, I'm coming." But his wife said, "Don't go." And he said, "Wait, I'll be back."
7. But his wife was worrying too much.
8. Later that night he came home drunk and stoned.
9. Then he woke his wife and said, "I want some food." And she said, "No food there."
10. And he got wild and start swearing at her all sort and she was scared

...not more wild and start hitting her all night.  
 ...her a hitting and she called her brother.  
 ...went to the police station and put a report  
 ...  
 ...that he was doing. He was hitting her in  
 ...  
 ...round to the house, he was full asleep,  
 ...house  
 ...of the police van.  
 ...man and they took him to the police  
 ...  
 ...the judge gave him a 18 months.  
 ...his wife and family.  
 ...with prison.  
 ...of things  
 ...wife. I should not do that to her."  
 ...ks to his friends. They say to  
 ...to her or what?"  
 ...prison?"  
 ...a big stick and she chucked him

...et to her" they ask him.  
 ...I did that for. Must be jealous of some  
 ...wife."  
 ...months. He sit down and think hard to  
 ...to come back home.  
 ...he sees the razor wire round and he  
 ...some more space. He thinks it's too  
 ...ere.  
 ...ns he made a phone call to her house.  
 ...cked the phone up.  
 ...the phone and that man said,  
 ...e about what happened back there  
 ...you back there."  
 ...I am going to leave you. You'll  
 ...to another place and stay there  
 ...back to you."

*Silm*  
 ...'s Film ALL IN ONE DISC....  
 Melissa and mark and Selina got married to mark  
 → Melissa tried her best trying to get mark but Selina kept taking mark away from Melissa....  
 ↓  
 melissa didn't worry for him she just went and found a nother man....  
 The End of the Story!!....

...s. story  
 Couple adays latter they all went to the festival and mark saw melissa with a nother man he was tall and he had green eyes and mark got really Jefouse..!! for him. and they had a  
 the End!! Fight...x

*Ngurra Kutjara*  
 KUNGA Kutjara WATI Palunya  
 PUTU NGURRA WATI Palunya  
 YANU KUNGA Kutjara  
 CHORUS ~~KUNGA~~  
 WATI Palunya YANU  
 NGURRA WILURRA KUNGA  
 Palunya ~~Kati~~ Katingu  
 KUNGA Palunya Nyinarr putu Kutjara  
 WATI Palunya KUNGA Kutjara  
 KATINGAKA NGURRA WILURRA



Fig. 7.8 Scribbling and doodling







This generation is prepared to be singled out, to be on public show, to be praised though the receipt of certificates and awards, and to have their images and names enter the public space—a manifestation of *kurmta* in transformation.

The expression of self through fashion, initially a female activity, becomes a collaborative mixed gender event. Two young men say:

A: What about young fellas, we want to do for fashion.

B: Yeah we missed out. Fashion style walking. Every man want to do it.

A: Not just for girls, for young fellas too.

In the ‘fellas’ fashion’ events the presence of the local community band injects an aura of masculinity. For males and females alike, the fashion clothes are costumes that enable performativity in the projection of self. Public performances take place in film nights and fashion parades throughout 2004 and in the ‘*Wilurarra* Youth Arts Festival’ in Warburton in April 2005 (Fig. 7.4).<sup>1154</sup> These events validate the transformation of personhood and the process is approved by the community.

### ***Textuality***

In the multimedia-oriented projects the visual image has initial primacy, and then almost seamlessly, written text is incorporated. Through the workshops young adults gain unique access to the spatial and material resources that literacy events require. The space gives them the individual privacy to write, but within a collective context. In Chapter 5 I show the findings of NRS English LLN assessments for the young adult cohort at Warburton.<sup>1155</sup> By relying solely on this data a one-dimensional picture of literacy competence is gained. In the following ethnographic description I demonstrate that literacy use among young adults is in fact rich, nuanced and contingent upon social context and stimulus. I suggest that a level of competence lies dormant, because in everyday life there are few sites or activities that that allow unbounded reading and writing practices. By shifting the focus of literacy away from the assessment of the individual learner, we can see literacy activated for participation in a meaningful social world.

Early texts are mimetic of school practice and young people write of loving learning, being happy and proud, and of Warburton being a good place. Some young adults write texts of one phrase or one sentence and are oblivious of the formal conventions of the written register, while others write longer texts, mindful of grammar, punctuation and layout. Texts

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<sup>1154</sup> (Lawson 2005).

<sup>1155</sup> Table 5.4 in Chapter 5 shows data from the CDEP Skills Audit English NRS (Coates et al. 1995) assessments undertaken in Warburton on 57 young adults in the 16–25 year old age group (roughly equivalent to the 60-odd young adults in the youth arts cohort).

are written predominately in English with insertions of emblematic Ngaanyatjarra words and phrases. It is mainly females who write longer texts, often drawing on the discourse style of their English-language schooling experiences. Leah spontaneously writes about a fellas' fashion event using a report writing genre. Arthur's daughter Maxine writes a three page personal narrative and takes photos to fit the text. Writers utilise a range of strategies: some draft texts on paper, then transfer them onto computer where spacing and fonts are adjusted, layout formatted, and punctuation, grammar and spelling checked. Coherence is sought; drafts are read out loud and decisions are made about content, sequencing and layout to 'check it to make it correct' explains Leanne. Through image and text young people document their world: football, softball, the band, fashion, family and each other. Some texts are published in their own newsletter, the *Nintirringkula News* (Fig. 7.5) and distributed around the community.<sup>1156</sup>

Leanne and Adina communicate visually and textually moving easily between the two modes:

- L: I been finish it mines, I did a whole page. Some they only do a little page.  
A: Me and Leanne we went there first, no last, and we been finish our writing first.  
L: And [she] got a shock: 'Eeeh, did long page!' That's why I been do mines, 5 page.

In a media workshop their skill range is extended and they watch attentively, absorbing new information and applying it immediately. The girls need no assistance in enhancing photos and producing cartoons, drawings and graffiti-like texts other than the structure within which to work. Their narrative writing style develops over a year or more. Diary stories are transposed into cartoon evocations and scripts (Fig. 7.6). They use the computer graphics software *Photoshop Elements* to display unique innovation, transforming digital photos into art pieces bursting with colour, pattern and text. Young people are also introduced to the art glass medium—moulding slump glass platters in the kilns at the Warburton Arts Project.<sup>1157</sup> Not content with re-rendering the traditional iconic motifs used by older people, they create their own expressions of selfhood and identity and form new images that push the boundaries of the glass medium. Adina soon produces a triptych of glass platters on the theme of male-female relationships and her figurative work is replete with text. Later, using photos of the three glass platters she makes a slide show in *iMovie* based on her iterative relationships theme. Simultaneously, Adina drafts a script and sketches out scenes and this script is later typed into *iMovie* and enhanced with music.

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<sup>1156</sup> *Nintirringkula* can be translated into English as 'learning'.

<sup>1157</sup> Art glass has been a successful medium for older artists at the Warburton Arts Project for many years. See (Thompson 2000) and <http://www.warburtonarts.com/site/glass.php>

Songs are a different textual space, often written not on paper but 'in the mind'. Songs are affective oral texts and in song-writing Ngaanyatjarra language is dominant. Although young men have tended to be the song 'writers' and band members, the youth arts project has opened the space for young women to emerge as singer-songwriters.<sup>1158</sup> In music workshops a synergy is found between song-writing, recording and filming 'video clips'. Trainees from Ngaanyatjarra Media storyboard and film a video clip for a youth arts song recording. This inspires another group to make their own film: 'we wanna do a make up story, but real story for everybody' declare a small mixed-gender group. Young men also engage enthusiastically in writing their own narrative, yet the themes are recursive and through storytelling personal relationships are negotiated and alternative endings created (Fig. 7.7). These ideas are storyboarded but never realised in film as the group moves on to the next event.

### *Writing 'style way'*

Adolescents around the world commonly use language as an important identity marker, often characterised by the development of patterns of linguistic variation or inventive teenage slang.<sup>1159</sup> In adolescent cohorts in the Western Desert comparable identity-associated language features have been documented.<sup>1160</sup> Writers note also how 'multimodal' textual practices often draw on traditional cultural elements with the innovative adolescent 'appropriation of words and phrases from oral tradition, popular culture or literary texts'.<sup>1161</sup> Through storytelling, social identity is structured and negotiated and the 'shape and content of narratives' provide insights into how young people are visualising and constructing their sense of themselves.<sup>1162</sup>

For adolescents, writing is personal and social, an act of invention in which everyday actions are shaped and influenced by the content and by the symbolic value of written texts. Adolescents appropriate cultural materials and incorporate and transform them into their own written texts. They collaborate with other individuals in the construction of those texts. And they work out their identities against the experience of others through performance or publication of their texts.<sup>1163</sup>

Writers suggest that 'hiphop' is now a globalised signifying practice and recent work on adolescent writing has documented the development of 'hiphop literacies'.<sup>1164</sup> The popular

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<sup>1158</sup> Youth arts music workshops in 2006 led to a recording of a CD of songs by the youth arts performers.

<sup>1159</sup> (Eckert 1988; Gibian 2003).

<sup>1160</sup> Langlois describes 'Areyonga Teenage Pitjantjatjara' and notes the development of a Pitjantjatjara slang or 'short-way' language spoken within cohorts of older (mainly female) teenagers aged from 14–19 (Langlois 2004: 160).

<sup>1161</sup> (Camitta 1993: 239; Menezes de Souza 2003).

<sup>1162</sup> (Heath and McLaughlin 1993b: 3). See also (Bauman 1986; Bauman and Briggs 1990).

<sup>1163</sup> (Camitta 1993: 243).

<sup>1164</sup> (Mitchell 2001; Mitchell 2003; Pennycook 2003; Pardue 2004; Stavrias 2005; Richardson 2006). Pardue describes an education project in Brazil that uses hip hop as a new form of expression that is a potential medium for 'learning and community building' that reaches urban youth previously isolated from public education (Pardue 2004: 411).

culture styling of hiphop has also flowed into the cultural and linguistic landscape of the remote Ngaanyatjarra world.

The verbal arts are central to Ngaanyatjarra social interaction. While they work, young people engage in oral banter: clever word play, simile, metaphor, and jesting merges with the ever-present *iTunes* music soundscape. After any work session, scraps of paper covered in ‘scribbles’ or doodles litter the room. In these doodles we see an embedding of identity in ‘text bytes’ (Fig. 7.8): scribbled patterns, symbols, initials, own names, names of family, friends or hiphop musicians, and slogans such as ‘fashion for mens and girls’, ‘Warburton *Nintirringkula* Team 4ever’). The unconscious doodling of young people is a social activity, a form of textual play redolent of traditional *mirrpa* or sand stories—discussed in Chapter 6. Sand story-telling integrate symbolic and pictorial representations with spoken narrative and gesture in a ‘coherent narrative whole’ within a single ‘frame’, and this narrative schemata is easily adapted to new multimedia forms.<sup>1165</sup>

The youth arts group coin the term ‘Style way—*Wilurarra* style’ to embody the expression of their new style and expression of self through fashion, film and language. In this ‘semiotic social space’ the term ‘*wilurarra*’ embodies polysemous, multilayered references.<sup>1166</sup> It refers to the cardinal direction ‘west’ and young people’s location physically in Western Australia, as well as their figurative location in modernity and the Western world, concomitant with hiphop popular culture references to the *West* side of the Bronx. The new ‘style way’ form evident in young people’s multimodal expressions displays an overlapping of various communication systems. In slide shows and films social identity is structured and negotiated through storytelling, and image, sound, text, and ‘doodlings’ are all transferred into cartoon narratives and slideshow frames with ease. In April 2004 Leah initiates a stream of consciousness word play that continues over a year. She begins by ‘fashioning’ slogans and rhymes to overlay images cut from magazines: ‘bad girls, bat girls, mad girls, smokey way, sexy lips, think twice’. This oral word play is compiled in a scrap book of slogans and over the following year resurfaces as a poem in the newsletter, and a film on the *Wilurarra Style Film* DVD:

— PRESENTS<sup>1167</sup>  
ORANGE CRUSH  
MISs WaRbUrTon  
&  
LOVE IS LIVE  
FELLAS IN STYLE  
NeVeR eNoUgH fReEdOm

---

<sup>1165</sup> (Wilkins 1997: 144).

<sup>1166</sup> (Gee 2005).

<sup>1167</sup> All personal names have been deleted and replaced by —.

ALL YOU NEED IS (LOVING HEART)  
 COME ON TIGERS  
 LOVE the FASHION 4 ever  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
 SMILE FOR MILES  
 BAD BOYS  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 KEEP IT IN FASHION 2005  
 \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
 THINK PINK THINK TWICE  
 #####  
 MISs WaRbUrToN  
 CAFÉ FELLAS  
 'WTYA' THREE GANGS  
 girls signs  
 TIGERS IS THE BEST  
 CHEERING CHILDREN  
 BaSkEtBaLL TeAm  
 ))(((  
 IM AN AUSTRALIAN  
 \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
 BEST FRIENDS  
 \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_  
 #####  
 SMILE for a day  
 \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
 Be happy in the WESTSIDE  
 WILURARRA STYLE  
 COPYRIGHT 2005  
 WARBURTON YOUTH ARTS

Another young woman makes a slide show about gesture and signs for the *Wilurarra Style* Film DVD. Not content with the music available on *iTunes* she returns with the latest hiphop sound. The film is optimistic, stylish and laden with an intertextual layering of image, text, song and gesture. A clever interplay of rhyming phrases, slogans and metaphor overlays textual and gestural references to living on the *West* side alongside 'gangways' interposed with 'gangsters', 'peace gang', 'gang with style'. The images portray the changing nature of gesture with young people's hand signs blending new meanings with old.<sup>1168</sup> The text is also infused with relatedness and local identity markers such as 'Go Tigers!' (the Warburton football and softball teams).

KURRA  
 GANGWAYS!  
 A FILM ABOUT  
 GANGSTER  
 SIGNS.  
 PRESENTED BY  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 THUG LIFE  
 PEACE SIGN  
 BEST BUDS  
 GANGWAYS FROM THE WEST  
 TWO BRO'S  
 GANGSTERS  
 THUGS  
 WILURARRA STYLE  
 SHOW THE REST SO PUT IT TO THE TEST  
 Eest meet West  
 TWO GIRLS FROM WARBO  
 FOUR BOYS WITH STYLE  
 GOT THAT SESTER!

<sup>1168</sup> Paralinguistic or nonverbal codes such as gesture, gaze and hand signs are integral to everyday discourse. Traditional auxiliary sign languages are found across Aboriginal Australia, see (Kendon 1988). Hand signs from contemporary US black youth and hiphop culture have also been absorbed by Aboriginal youth.

WESTSIDE GANG!  
 SISTERS  
 WITH STYLE  
 Eestside to the Westside  
 Come to the west and show it the rest  
 BEST IN THE WEST FEST  
 PEACE UP  
 BE HAPPY  
 PLAY IT LIKE THIS  
 WESTSIDE!  
 NIGHT STYLE  
 BE HAPPY IN THE WEST  
 PEACE GANG  
 WHAT'S UP  
 PEACE BRO  
 KEEP SMILING  
 KURRA!  
 THUMBS UP!  
 GO WESTSIDE!  
 GANG WITH STYLE  
 STYLEY WAY  
 GO TIGERS!  
 THAT'S ALL FOR YOU FOLKS!!!!!!  
 THE END  
 BY \_\_\_\_\_

Through the incorporation of intercultural elements—global hiphop and local Ngaanyatjarra language, gesture and style—young people are forming ‘semiotic reconstructions’ and forging new cultural identities, perspectives and understandings.<sup>1169</sup> They are challenging stereotypes and creating less bounded constructs of Aboriginality.

### **Alternative ways of learning and engaging**

The indications are that, in addition to schooling and VET sector training, alternative environments for learning and engagement are needed that fit the cultural paradigm and the CDEP employment context. It is crucial to consider learning environments that are attractive to youth, where they can gain a positive experience of ongoing learning and participate in activities that meet community goals and aspirations. In the next section I analyse the factors that contribute to the success of the arts-based approach, outlined above. I suggest that its success hinges firstly on the pivotal creative multimedia aspect, and also on the fact that the distinction between ‘learning’ and ‘work’ is blurred. Lastly, the process is not imposed from the outside and works within, rather than against, the existing social and cultural patterns and rhythms.<sup>1170</sup>

### ***Arts-based approach***

For many in the young adult generation participation in mainstream learning has been sporadic as McLean indicates at a youth arts meeting:

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<sup>1169</sup> (Pennycook 2003: 527).

<sup>1170</sup> In this section quotes come from informal interviews with facilitators from Warburton Arts Project, Ngaanyatjarra Media, Ngaanyatjarra Community College, the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, Ngaanyatjarra Youth Transitions Unit and the *Kungkaku Yangupalaku Tjukurpa Project*, who provided the mentoring, training and resources that supported the youth arts projects.

When all you mob went to school, you went to school in the '80s and early '90s and in Warburton at that time there was a lot of sniffing and too many people drinking, there was a lot of violence and a lot of problems and all you people didn't get a lot of support when you went to school. Nobody made sure you went, nobody took much interest in what you did in school. That was a difficult time to be a school kid. And a lot of people said: 'Oh that mob they missed out on school, anyway we'll look to the next generation.' And sort of wrote you guys off and said: 'Can't fit you into education.' Now with this project you guys got back into education, you're back into learning and you're back into doing things that are really important for you. And also really good for the kids who are coming behind to see you doing it, because they'll learn from that and they'll think: 'Oh if they can do that, I can do that too.' And it will give them confidence and they'll know that they can do it too.<sup>1171</sup>

It has been suggested by Albie Viegas that arts-based activities are important for the slow cumulative development of skills and relationships where the focus is on the 'individual and their growth, not the teaching of content knowledge'. In these projects the aim was to explore different media for self-expression and to 'generate new ideas through learning and doing'.<sup>1172</sup> The arts provide an arena of expression, expectation and production that is both individual and collaborative. The process of media training works because it takes place within the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, in the local environment where young people are confident. In addition, as Ngaanyatjarra Media trainers suggest, 'media' is the perfect vehicle as it provides a framework for the articulation of ideas that matter to youth.

Furthermore, as in the studies of arts-based learning noted in Chapter 1, these young people have also developed 'high aspirations' and 'firm expectations of what they can achieve' through operating within an environment of 'respect, responsibility and relevance', as well as 'community, connection and commitment'.<sup>1173</sup> Young people participate in processes that demand reflection, relevance, decision-making, planning, organising, discipline, time management and evaluation. As facilitators, adults create environments where learners experience affirmation, group achievement, and mutual expectations of high quality. A media trainer explains how young people 'gain confidence':

Pick up a camera, there's football, shoot it, chop it up, edit it, decision-making from start to end, preproduction to production. Organisation, decision-making, seeking relevance, time management, everything. Working as team, dealing with contingencies—footage they shot is not OK, they find this is OK, this is not OK, not enough detail to connect the footage. So let's go back again, take the trouble of going back, get the people who acted, make them act again, bring back a little more footage to connect with what they have. OK, so whatever they want to do they want to do it perfect.

Through media production young people gain pride in themselves as learners and as producers of visual media desired by their community. They also establish their own aesthetic, define their talents, focus on their own specialisations and attain high expectations of their own technical expertise and literacy competence.

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<sup>1171</sup> McLean, Youth Arts meeting—13/12/04.

<sup>1172</sup> Albie Viegas, Co-ordinator of Warburton Arts Project (pers. comm. 2004).

<sup>1173</sup> See (Heath 1998: 12-13).



## *Learning and working*

New skills are learned and interpreted as 'real work' because young people have real roles and responsibilities. Naomi suggests that 'sometimes you're learning at the same time as you're working, that's what I do when I'm working'. The youth arts workers are paid for the CDEP hours worked. The work generates its own momentum; young people work long hours, through lunch, into the evenings and over weekends, often asking: 'can we do work today?' Contemporaneously, many of the same cohort participate in the Youth Transitions programme where hospitality training and 'employment' skills are gained. This group are the 'café workers' and they also represent themselves as workers on film, described by the Youth Transitions co-ordinator as 'picturing yourself as a worker':

It was fascinating to watch how these young people moved into the workplace and introduced their own style, music, technology, sociality. They created a model of work which was permanently captured on video, shared with the broader community throughout the editing process and again during public screenings in the hall, validated and held up as a new, modern model of work.

One group of young men on the fringes of formal learning are described as the 'least likely to succeed'. They are introduced to the youth arts approach and within three days learn how to take photos and make their own innovative films. This learning is interpreted as 'work' because young people are acquiring and using many of the skills and competencies required of the 'workplace' such as confidence, initiative, task completion, time-management, working in teams and individually, meeting deadlines, hypothesising and problem solving. They also know how to use computers, the internet, and digital cameras—all the sort of vocational skills expected of workers. Significantly, the level of enthusiasm and engagement in 'work' demonstrated in youth arts activities is often difficult to replicate in other vocational training or CDEP contexts.

In the arts-related activities formal teaching is minimal, instead the learning and development of skills and knowledge is activated through doing something meaningful. Because it is meaningful participants turn up, concentrate, complete tasks and work independently. This method of learning is not outcomes-based and there is no prescribed curriculum or compulsory timetable. Projects tap into what young people are interested in. This method of learning is, however, chaotic, unpredictable and responsive—elements not usually found in education and training institutions. As one facilitator expressed it: with 'no end in sight', it 'grew like topsy, so many hungry to do something, girls, fellas, babies, dogs!' and the ideas multiplied. A media trainer noted that the difference between this and compulsory training is that young adults 'are here because they want to be', consequently they are 'more relaxed, friendly' and 'a buzz happens, run out of time because so much is

happening'. Babies and toddlers are brought along to events, and young mothers are not excluded as the self-regulated aspect gives them the freedom to co-ordinate the day around shopping, feeding children and other social obligations.<sup>1174</sup>

This approach requires special adults who can work with young people as facilitators or mentors. Studies of youth learning emphasise the important role that 'wizards' or 'non-formal adult mentors' play in the process of engagement and learning.<sup>1175</sup> Similarly, in the youth arts process facilitators 'who can think outside the box, have a vision and make it happen' are critical. In this case:

Facilitators need to be unshockable, to treat people as adults and be interested in their ideas and letting them have a go and follow whatever it is that interests young people, rather than own agenda. Pushing them beyond skill base, trusting them, pushing them to a level of responsibility, like those digital cameras are just cruising around the community and they always came back, football didn't, but digital cameras did!

Facilitators were also aware that they needed to be mindful of working in an 'adult environment', by being 'vigilant, but flexible' by giving 'freedom and space, but structure as well'. Facilitators describe how they 'take a gentle low key approach, getting alongside, rather than in front' and are 'sensitive to where adolescents are at'. This involves being conscious of what youngsters want to learn and waiting, being open to their suggestions and the different tangents, filling in the gaps, but not pushing learners in any direction.

Caring, trusting, often long-term, relationships are developed with mentors. In this environment young people are participating in bilingual-bicultural social and linguistic interactions with adults. To sustain turn-taking interactions with adults, adolescents develop the communication skills needed for negotiating, problem solving, seeking relevance and decision-making. They also need to listen to and comprehend complex instructional utterances, often in English as a second language:

You get the idea, the next step is for you guys to pick the photos you think would be really good together and make it longer and pick the music you want to go with it. You want to put words in there, so you click the place where you want to type.

Importantly, the mentors are both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Mick is in his late 30s and has worked with young people over many years at the Drop in Centre and with musicians at the recording studio and music festivals. He is a co-worker in the Youth

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<sup>1174</sup> In many instances domestic responsibilities inhibit a young woman's capacity to be a worker or a trainee. A working mother or trainee is torn between two obligations, her primary responsibility to look after her family and her secondary responsibility to meet the temporal requirements of work or training commitments. Most houses do not have fridges, so fresh food must be bought daily and this is a time-consuming activity. The store is open from 9am-5pm and closed at lunchtime.

<sup>1175</sup> (McLaughlin et al. 1994; Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003).

Transitions Unit and is an important leader for the *Nintirringkula* Team. The involvement of older people like Mick validates the process and he mediates social interactions, jealousies or conflicts.

Arts-based practice engages young adults in peer learning and collaborative 'situated learning'.<sup>1176</sup> In the process they learn not only from adults, but also from each other in participatory activities. In the words of one media trainer young people, 'teach themselves' and 'teach each other' because they are 'hungry' for involvement. Young people are not scared of the technology and learn complex computer and multimedia skills 'co-figuratively' through a process of 'peer learning'.<sup>1177</sup> In an early multimedia training workshop learners were told...

...only about two or three things, then went with it themselves, figured it out. Having a particular purpose driven by them was fundamental to it working so well. We went with the flow. People were engaged, busy, sitting at a computer or at a desk with a piece of paper working on something, they'd come up with questions when they got to a point where they needed to know something else, they'd find that out, ask someone else, progress. I guess that's learning. Enthusiasm, people came back, there was interest that grew on itself.

In peer learning, collaborative task-based oral interactions characteristically require 'critical judgement and systematic reasoning skills', such as 'hypothesising and posing problems, devising methods, specifying parts and steps and using appropriate vocabulary'.<sup>1178</sup> In the following dialogue Adina and Leanne collaboratively figure out how to use the computer and teach Nancy how to do graffiti-like 'fancy writing':

- A: See look at this, it should be here, look right here look, that line here. Go to that line here and click one of them buttons. Nuh, try another one. Try all that.
- L: Somewhere round here, other side. There, *ngaany*, I been find it!
- A: Where?
- L: There!
- A: Oh yeah that way, she found it.  
Which one you want N.?
- [back to L.]  
Pick it that many colour one, press it and go OK.
- L: OK.
- A: No, cancel that. And you got to go//
- L: //I'll do it, *kurra, ngaanya!* First, no go back up.
- A: Take that off for while.
- L: Go this way, to your name first.
- A: Go that way to you name.
- L: Click it and just press it and over it till it go really black. *Ngaanya* just press over it.
- A: Hold the button down and go across.
- L: Go across, yeah, like that, go top, same way.
- A: Go up.
- L: *Yuwa* like that, now pick any one, colourful one.
- A: Then OK
- L: And OK, OK, there!
- A: Tell her to rub that one on top there.

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<sup>1176</sup> (Lave and Wenger 1991).

<sup>1177</sup> Shirley Brice Heath—*Imagining Childhood Symposium*, Alice Springs 2005 drawing on (Mead 1978 [1970]).

<sup>1178</sup> (Heath 1998: 7).

- L: And click it, yeah, click right out, and press 'yuuwa', and go down, or tray and click this way, yuuwa click it. Kurra, I'll show you.  
 [she takes the mouse]  
 There now!
- A: Make it.
- L: Nyaapa.
- A: Go here, go right on here, do it on there.
- L: Kurra, kurra.
- A: And get any sort of letters, see all that there, fancy one like that.
- L: Pick any writing, running writing.
- A: Which one you want? All the good ones, palunya, fancy one.
- L: This one?
- N: Yuwa.
- L: There now, try it out, should do it.

Oracy and literacy skills are extended through reading instructions on screen, explaining how to do tasks, listening to and using sequential or instructional language, seeking relevance and making decisions regarding images or music. In another example, a pair of girls assist each other with spelling on the computer screen:

- A: There go that way, proper one, which one you gotta put?
- B: You gotta press this?
- A: That one, capital letter.
- B: Ngaanya.
- A: Namepa, where this 'u', it should be showing up.

Youth arts activities provide an opportunity for young people to construct knowledge jointly in active learning situations and through participation and collaboration specific linguistic and abstract thinking skills are activated.<sup>1179</sup>

### ***Working within the sociality***

Social relatedness underpins all interaction in the Ngaanyatjarra world and the youth arts projects work within this cultural framework. A sense of relatedness with each other and with significant adults is integral to the process. Young adults identify as members of the *Nintirringkula* Team and engender a positive 'social solidarity' between participants.<sup>1180</sup>

Multigenerational involvement and support assists the process. Approval from the gerontocracy is valued and sought; older people were present and participating in activities or meetings, as onlookers, as fashion parade judges, or as conduits to the senior leadership. In turn, elders like Clem express pride in young people:

When I first seen that [films], I seen it in the hall. My daughter told me a little bit about it, she said: 'Oh you gotta go and see that whole thing'. So I went down there and that was really good... See them young people wanting to do things, because the world is changing, everything is changing, government changing and we can't change things, we're getting too old. But I'm sure you young people can get involved, so it makes me happy, you young people are doing really good. Doing something for yourselves, and not just for yourselves but also for your children and the people here. You getting a good name for the people... and gradually the people who run the government coming in here. They'll be seeing it and thinking: 'Oh Warburton good'. They'll be thinking differently now. They won't be thinking about sniffers, they won't be thinking about bad things, but

<sup>1179</sup> (Heath and Langman 1994).

<sup>1180</sup> (Newman 1996).

thinking about good things, what's happening in Warburton. Well keep going. Like I said I'll support you all the way until I die!

Ngaanyatjarra leaders like George are aware of the necessity to support young people: 'I help the young people step forward so [they] can grow up and be leaders too, *ngula*'.

George emphasises the importance of learning and overcoming challenges:

Even though some never win a prize, but they still got it in their heart, you know...That's how young people got to be today, keep on going, you win the prize and you go on to the next one, like that. But you got to do it yourself, but they got to have people to help them, encourage them, setting up the opportunity for them...Like making a play, young people like say: 'No to sniffing', you can act it out on stage front of big mob of people and families can come along. They can learn through that and young people who do that act they get more confidence in themselves too and other kids looking at what they acting and they can learn from that. They can say: 'Oh I can say no to that'. Learn from others too...it's important for them to work, gotta work.

George is mindful of the fact that younger children will look to this generation as role models and the children of the next generation will follow in their footsteps.

Community or arts-based practice offers a site for young people to take leadership responsibility and develop as role models. During the 2005 *Wilurarra Festival*, Mick, Clarrie and Naomi are festival directors and they organise events and keep the younger ones inspired and motivated. At 25 years of age, Jim's son Clarrie (Family I) is taking on age-appropriate male responsibilities that fit the transforming cultural framework. He is a band leader, captain of the football team, a worker and he attends Ngaanyatjarra Council meetings. Naomi is emerging as a strong leader through her role as a media worker where gender distinctions are not a consideration as 'it's anybody's job'. She has been encouraged by her family to work hard and become a leader and has the cultural authority to direct film and fashion events. Naomi tells me:

Education is important because we want to learn more about English, you know, education, get educated properly...one day some of the young people they might be leader, if they keep on going, not going the wrong way...you have to work for your living.

Concomitantly, she has the confidence to work independently and edit her films in the radio room over many days. Naomi generates enthusiasm, interest and engagement and is consciously leading young people. In 2004 Naomi completed her *Certificate III in Broadcasting* and her ongoing role as a media trainer for the younger adolescents has been integral to ongoing film production. She has also inspired a new cohort to undertake media training. In 2005 ten of the twenty trainees who commenced formal VET training with Ngaanyatjarra Media (*Certificate III in Broadcasting*) were from Warburton and in 2006 a further three young people enrolled—a direct result of having participated in the non-formal youth arts activities.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the developmental trajectory of this generation of young adults is diverging from cultural norms. The traditional maturational cycle has altered, yet the assumed normativity of the Western adolescent developmental trajectory does not match the cultural reality of the remote Ngaanyatjarra world. Despite obvious changes, Ngaanyatjarra core values continue to underpin the practice of everyday life and the construction of social identity is tied to the reproduction of these values over the generations. The mainstream rhetoric proposes that schooling and vocational training offer the choices or opportunities required for Aboriginal futures. However I suggest that we need to explore a broader range of options to engage youth in purposeful activity that will build up the skills they need for their future. In this chapter I have used the exemplar of community- or arts-based learning to gain insights into the skills, knowledge, values and behaviours that come to the fore when young adults participate in meaningful activities that interest and inspire them. I show that when stimulated by an optimal learning environment young adults display agency, leadership, creative adaptability and engagement as artists, learners, workers and literate participants.

A theme that I have repeatedly returned to throughout the thesis is the loss of the regulatory sanctions of the past. I discuss how the traditional rule-bound structures were challenged by the arrival of the mission, schooling, and the introduction of other Western practices. Old boundaries of obligation, responsibility or compulsion have dissipated and individuals can to a greater extent than before 'choose' how to spend their time and whether or not to attend school, training or work. There is also less compulsion to conform to the strict confines of Western formal or institutional standards of written expression. In past generations literacy practices were ideologically driven and defined by the frame of literacy initiated by institutions. Writing conformed to the genres encountered in schooling or in adult Christian practice. Adult literates read and wrote in different ways according to their emerging roles and identities within the expanding domains of practice. Now young people are creatively exploring divergent writing forms. Through the youth arts space young people have access to literacy resources that match their autonomy and unfolding contemporary self-identity. This alerts us to the important realisation that the discourse of failure surrounding literacy and learning among Aboriginal youth can be turned into horizons of possibility, if the right approaches are found.

