

EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION IN A REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

**ABORIGINALISATION IN OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART
SCHOOL, WADEYE**

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an explanation and documentation of the changes occurring in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, within the remote Aboriginal community of Wadeye in the Northern Territory. In 1994, for the first time, the majority of classroom teachers are Aborigines. Firstly, a profile of the community is given and field research procedures are explained. The broader contexts of cultural geography, Aboriginal education in general and Aboriginal education in remote areas specifically, are then examined. The main discussion outlines the present schooling process in OLSH School, looking at such features as the curriculum, the bilingual program, and various aspects of school policy as expressed through the 'Vision Statement'. Formal education is now a necessary part of the social organisation of Wadeye, however it is still ultimately under the control of non-Aboriginal people. The Aboriginalisation process aims to redress this by increasing local community power. How and why this process is happening, the possible implications of the changes and the rate of the process, are all examined. The Aboriginalisation process is essential if the school is to reflect more closely, the unique cultural values and beliefs of the students of this remote community, rather than those imposed by mainstream society and institutions. Aboriginalisation will enable the school to play a positive role in the cultural reproduction process of those in Wadeye. Furthermore, Aboriginalisation of OLSH School may initiate further positive changes in the community and it certainly represents a strong step toward self-determination for the people of Wadeye.

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Special thanks go to the Kardu Numida Council (Wadeye Council) for allowing me to visit their community and conduct my research. I am very grateful to all staff at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, particularly the principal Sister Elizabeth, who permitted me to examine the changes taking place in the school. I realise that February was a very busy time for all at the school, and thus I am especially appreciative of the time that the teachers were able to give to assist my work.

The technical staff in the Department of Geography and Environmental Science at Monash University cannot go without mention either. Their willingness to help with mapping techniques was much appreciated! Thanks also to my supervisor, Dr. Gale Dixon and to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra for their assistance with relevant literature. All contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

HLC	Homeland centre
HRSCAA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs
NARU	North Australia Research Unit
NAEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
OLSH	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
RATE	Remote Area Teacher Education
RCIADIC	Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody

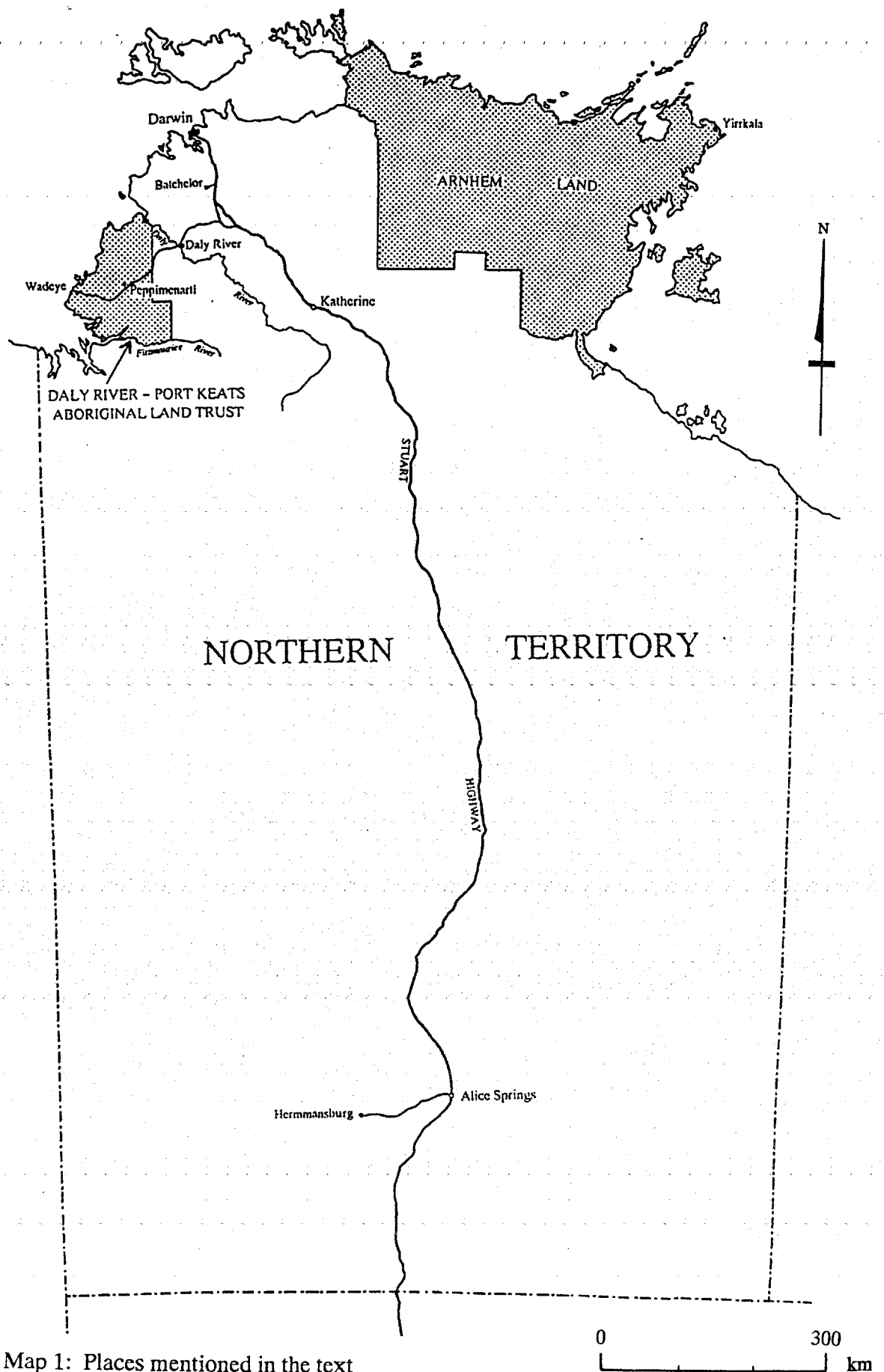
INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explain and document the way change is occurring in the education system of the remote Aboriginal community of Wadeye in the Northern Territory. At present, the formal education system incorporates many features that do not distinctly reflect the culture of the Wadeye people. They have therefore made a conscious decision to modify the schooling system through the process of Aboriginalisation, so that it reflects more closely their own cultural beliefs. This process of change involves establishing local Aboriginal control within the school and of the formal education process in general. The initial introduction to the study area presents a profile of the Wadeye community and the people who live there. In Chapter Two research procedures in the field are described and in the following chapter, the broader contexts of the study are examined, placing the study within the framework of relevant literature. Chapter Four presents the main discussion referring to the aim of the study. This chapter describes schooling in Wadeye at present, and then explains and documents the current process of Aboriginalisation in the school, the possible implications of this process and how the rate of this change may affect the outcome. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study by concentrating briefly on the major ideas raised within this examination of the changes occurring in the formal education system of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School (OLSH) in Wadeye.

The remote Aboriginal community of Wadeye

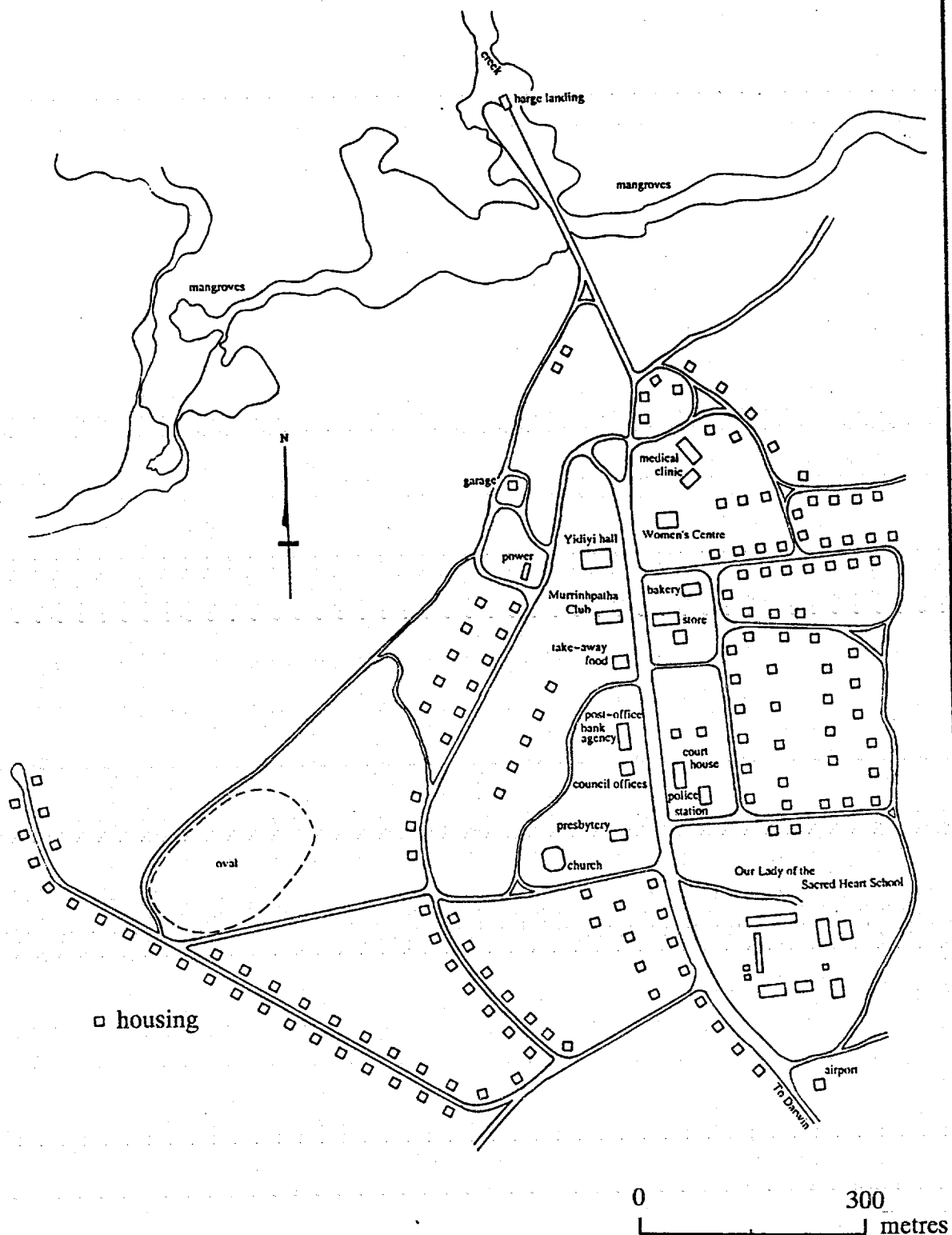
The study area is located on the Northern Territory coast, approximately 250 kilometres south-west of Darwin (Map 1). Travelling by road, the final section of which is impassable during the wet season, the distance to Darwin is around 400 kilometres. Non-Aborigines commonly refer to the community as Port Keats; however Wadeye (pronounced *Wad - air*) is the Aboriginal name given to the land upon which the community has been established. The community and surrounding land form the Daly River-Port Keats Aboriginal Land Trust, thus a permit is required for outsiders to visit or live in the community, or on the adjoining land.

The influences of modern living are quite apparent in Wadeye (Map 2). Basic housing has been provided (Plate 1), although much time is spent out of these houses, and there is electricity and a sewage system. Television was first transmitted in 1983 and telephones were connected in 1986. Video movies are now a popular past-time. The community has a general store that sells food and various other items, there are several 'take-



Map 1: Places mentioned in the text

Source: Adapted from, Australian Geographic: Australia for Adventurers and Dreamers, (map) supplement to *Australian Geographic*, Issue 18, April-June 1990.



away' food outlets and a bakery that supplies the store with fresh bread. The community council, Kardu Numida, has its own offices that are next to the post-office and bank agency (Plate 2). There is a police station and court house, a garage, a sewing centre, the Women's Centre, the Yidiyi Sports Centre (a recreation hall), a medical clinic, the church (Plate 3) and presbytery and of course, the Catholic school (Plate 4). The Murrinhpatha Club is permitted to sell restricted amounts of alcohol in the evening and has recently built a stage for community bands and musicians to play and practise on. Supplies for all of these services are delivered regularly by barge, essential in the wet season, and by road at other times of the year. During the week, there are daily flights to and from Darwin. Thus even though a remote community, Wadeye has access to many of the amenities and services of contemporary society. These changes have however, only come about quite recently.

As an established community, Wadeye has a relatively brief history. In the 1930s, under the request of the Commonwealth Government, the Catholic Church agreed to establish a mission in the Wadeye region. The responsibility was granted to Father Docherty who arrived there in early June 1935. There is little written reference to these activities, however according to Brother John Pye, who arrived in the mission in 1941, the request was in response to a number of killings and tribal conflicts in the area (Pye 1973). These events included the murder of a Japanese fishing crew by local people in 1933. As Pye explains, two local 'Warriors', Nemarluk and Tiger, had an agreement 'to kill intruders to save their country' (1973: 10). Brother Brian Graham, a staff member of the school in early 1994, suggests that the anxiety felt by the local groups due to their loss of land – their 'country' – to cattle stations, may have contributed to, and intensified the conflict between the people around this time (pers. comm., 1994).

The Sisters of the Order of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart arrived in the community in 1941, and formally established the dormitory system of schooling in 1945. The delay was due to their evacuation in 1942 because of the threat of invasion during the Second World War (Pye 1973: 31). Adult members of the surrounding language groups would bring their young people to the mission and leave them to be educated and trained by the missionaries. The adults of each group would visit the mission at different times, with one group staying for a few weeks, then returning to the bush as another group arrived. The children remained in the care of the missionaries, with the girls looked after by the Sisters and the boys under the guidance of the Priests and Brothers. Gradually, these different language groups began to settle in the Wadeye area and in 1966, the government recognised the town as the Community of Port Keats. As the people moved to the community, and the children began to live with their parents, the dormitory system was phased out around 1970 (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993, Br. Brian, pers. comm., 1994). Based upon conversations with the

local people, Brother Brian suggests that some of the possible reasons for the attraction to the community related to disease and tribal bloodshed among and within groups, a desire for certain consumer goods such as tobacco and a curiosity about the spirituality of the missionaries (pers. comm., 1994).

Hence today, Wadeye is a multi-tribal community with eight main language groups represented. Murrinhpatha is the lingua franca of the community and also the language used for instruction with English in the bilingual school. The land owned by each language group is shown in Map Three. Within these language groups are twenty-one land, or dreaming-based clans (Table 1). These are groups that have a common ownership of land. The people of Wadeye have retained much of their 'traditional' culture. Briefly for instance, a number of different ceremonies are still practiced, such as male circumcision and the opening of a house

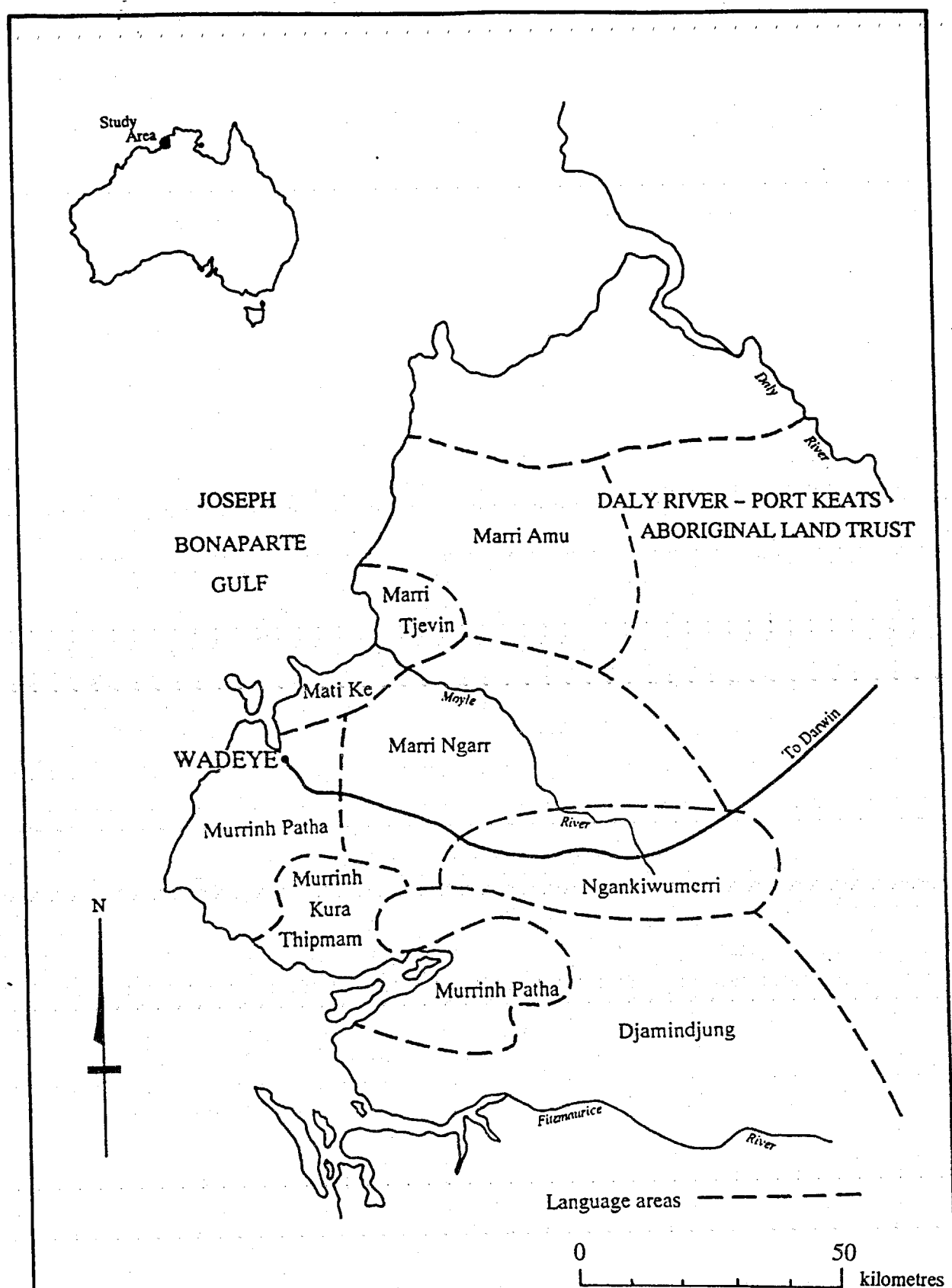
Table 1: The language groups and clans of Wadeye (Br. Brian Graham, pers. comm., 1994).

TRIBAL/LANGUAGE GROUP	CLAN
Murrinhpatha	Kardu Diminin Kardu Yek Maninh Kardu Yek Namgu Kardu Werntek Kardu Math Alinti Kardu Wunh
Murrinh Kura Thipmam	Kardu Kura Thipmam
Ngankiwumerri	Kardu Papa Ngala Kardu Pulampa Kardu Kura Ngaliwe
Djamindjung	Kardu Kimul Kardu Piru Pangkuy
Mati Ke	Kardu Yek Naninh Kardu Yek Yederr
Marri Tjevin	Kardu Thangkural
Marri Amu	Kardu Yek Thinti
Marri Ngarr	Kardu Thay Kardu Darrinpirr Kardu Bengkunh Kardu Kulinmirr Kardu Manthayangarl

after the death of a relative. Furthermore, the associated rules and obligations within the extended family are expected to be followed, certain sites within the landscape are respected for their sacredness, and although one is free to be in almost any part of their own land or that of their mother, an invitation must be received or permission obtained to enter the land of another group (Ward 1985). In total, there are 1,233 Aborigines living in Wadeye and 130 non-Aborigines. Of these, 65.8 per cent of the Aboriginal population are under the age of twenty-five, indicating a very young community (1991 Census figures, Wadeye town clerk, pers. comm., 1994).

The largest employer in Wadeye is OLSH School. Positions here include teachers and assistant teachers, literacy workers, office workers and cleaners. Other employment opportunities include the medical centre, building and maintenance with the council, work at the store and Government administration positions (Br. Brian, pers. comm., 1994). "Wadeye Art and Craft", which operates through the Adult Education unit based at the school, is also a source of income for members of the community. This is through the sale of such items as didgeridoos, dilly bags, baskets and paintings. However employment in the community is limited and most rely on unemployment benefits for money. Only around twenty per cent of the potential work force is currently employed on either a full-time or part-time basis (Br. Brian, pers. comm., 1994).

Over only sixty years, the people of the Wadeye region have experienced rapid and extensive change. Adjusting to such change has had an immense impact on their way of life and such adjustment still continues. There are problems in the community with health, unemployment, alcohol, gambling, and petrol sniffing among the younger ones. These affect everyone in the community and not just those involved directly. However efforts are being made to address these issues and also the underlying causes. The school holds an important position as a role-model for the whole community, not just the students. The progressive move toward the Aboriginalisation of the school, will hopefully prove to be a significant example of just what can be achieved.



Map 3: Land areas owned by the language groups of Wadeye.

Source: Adapted from, Ward, Sr. T. 1985, *The Peoples and their land around Wadeye*, Wadeye Press.



Plate 1: An example of housing in the Wadeye township.



Plate 2: The Wadeye post-office and bank agency, and the Kardu Numida Council (Wadeye Council) offices – looking south down the main street.



Plate 3: The church in Wadeye.



Plate 4: The grounds of OLSH School, looking south.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES IN THE FIELD

The initial motive for this study arose from a continuing interest in issues concerning Aboriginal Australians. Former study prompted a particular interest in the varying Aboriginal responses to unavoidable change within their culture, as a consequence of the presence of the dominating western society. These responses reflect the diversity of contemporary Aboriginal culture. Whether urban, rural or remote, the lifestyles and needs and general circumstances of each Aboriginal group will, to different degrees, be distinct from other groups and especially to the non-Aboriginal community. Greater recognition and support of these differences has enabled the development of unique, community-based responses to cultural change, rather than the acceptance of a universal approach or solution. By bearing in mind these issues, this study is aiming to highlight one such community-based response to relatively recent changes in an essential element of any culture, the education system.

Through prior visits to the remote Aboriginal community of Wadeye, I was familiar with the community and aware that changes were occurring in the Catholic school there. A community desire for greater control over their school has resulted in a process of substantial change. I feel that this is significant not only for the school, but also for the whole community as a step toward self-management and eventually self-determination. Thus it is an important issue, with considerable potential for the whole community.

Before travelling to Wadeye in February 1994, I stayed four weeks in Darwin largely making use of the resources offered by the North Australia Research Unit (NARU). The Unit, established in 1973, is part of the Research School of Pacific Studies within the Australian National University (Plate 5). Research at NARU focuses mainly, though not exclusively, around 'the study of socio-economic problems associated with the consequences of development now taking place in northern Australia' (Ward et al 1980). Current issues connected with northern Australia in the social science, policy and more recently, physical science fields, constitute most of the research undertaken at the Unit. Although education as such, is not generally a distinct area examined by the Unit, the broader context of my study does relate to various aspects of their work, including indigenous self-determination. Thus for general discussion and assistance, the NARU staff were a valuable resource.

The principal task undertaken before leaving for Wadeye, was the location of literature related to all aspects of the research issue, especially that which would be difficult

to obtain in Melbourne. Two main resources assisted with this task, the NARU library and the Batchelor College library, located in Batchelor about one hundred kilometres south of Darwin (Map 1). A Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program is also based at Batchelor College. The examination of both directly and indirectly related literature, was important for many reasons. The references consulted provided a broader context for the study and revealed further issues, possible consequences and comparable case studies, all associated with Aboriginal education and increasing community power. Such references included those relating to the Aboriginal world view, whereby they explained the different perceptions of the world as seen by Aborigines and non-Aborigines. Other sources examined self-determination, the importance of language, the place of Aborigines in contemporary society, and more specifically of course, Aboriginal education throughout Australia. Although there is very little written about Wadeye in particular, the information gathered concerning other Aboriginal communities and all the issues in general, was enough to assist in the formulation of more definite aims for the study. Examination of the literature also enabled the preparation of more pertinent and structured questions before arriving in the community.

Accommodation arrangements and council permission to visit Wadeye were confirmed from Darwin. Permission was obtained after providing the Wadeye Council, Kardu Numida, with an outline of the intended research activities and approximate length of stay. Once in Wadeye, the community library (Plate 6) located on the grounds of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) School, proved to be a suitable place to work from. Initial tasks undertaken in the school were the continuation of the literature search, this time focusing particularly on Wadeye and OLSH school, and becoming familiar with the different roles of those employed at the school (Appendix 1). When compared with other communities, for instance Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land (Map 1), it is quite apparent that there is relatively little written about the community of Wadeye. Hence regarding written sources, there were only a few reports and historical accounts to rely on. It was clear that discussions with staff members, observation, and participation where possible would be essential methods of inquiry.

Relatively informal interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method to obtain an understanding about the changes happening in the school. As Dixon (1982: 7) explains, an 'informal' interview is comparable to a conversation between the researcher and the respondent, although the topic of discussion is selected by the researcher. In this type of interview, the subject is encouraged to respond freely, in his/her own words, whilst the researcher listens, generally not taking notes (unlike in the instance of a 'formal' interview). This was the case in the interviews carried out at the school. Each interview was taped, to be

later transcribed, and the format was such that the staff member was able to talk casually about their role in the school and their general feelings toward the Aboriginalisation of OLSH School. They varied in length, from around ten minutes to over an hour. A certain element of the 'formal' interview (Dixon 1982: 7) was incorporated within this process. Before commencing the interviews, set questions were composed for staff of the various components of the school program, for example the English coordinator, the preschool teachers, the principal and the teacher-linguist, among others. These related to giving personal views regarding the potential effects and consequences of the continuing Aboriginalisation of the school, generally and more specifically in their field. However the respondents were encouraged to answer openly and the questions, often asking for personal opinions, were composed in such a way as to allow this to happen. The use of structured questionnaires as an alternative to this method was considered, however it was anticipated that a more extensive and personal response would be obtained through an informal interview. Furthermore, it would have been necessary to structure an individual questionnaire for many of the staff members, as each different position would require distinct questions. As the sample population, the staff at the school, was quite small, it was considered that a high degree of personal interaction through interviews would be possible and also more valuable than written responses to questionnaires.

The activities observed at OLSH School included staff meetings, a school assembly, collecting the children for school in the truck (Plate 7), library lessons (as these were conducted from the community library), a school mass, morning recess breaks and a brief look into some of the classrooms while lessons were in progress (Plate 8). As the time spent in the community was really quite short and being untrained in these areas, participation in many of the school activities was limited, if not impossible. Nevertheless, observing these activities provided a general insight into the routine and conduct of the school, and was also the source of further questions to ask the staff. Important archival sources disclosed various other aspects about school operations, contained within documents such as the school attendance records. Along with providing the monthly raw figures, these records also gave reasons for fluctuations in attendance levels, including for example, traditional men's and women's ceremonies, movement to and from outstations¹ and numerous funerals, which all resulted in a lower attendance rate. Documents containing the proposals for funding from the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program also outlined school requests for assistance with excursions, equipment, nutrition programs, bush camps and

¹Outstations are now commonly known as 'homeland centres'. They provide an alternative to living in a large community, which often consists of tribal groups living together that were traditionally non-homogeneous (as in Wadeye). Thus they are established away from the major communities, on the traditional land owned by the particular group of Aborigines who want to avoid the conflicts that arise in a multi-tribal situation, and who also aim to rediscover, to reinforce or to restore their links with the land and their Aboriginal identity (Livett 1988: 15).

substance abuse programs. Additionally, minutes from the ASSPA School Committee meetings provided a brief summary of the discussions surrounding these proposals. All of these documents, which cover the past four years, are an important indication of community and school activities, events and attitudes.

The duration of stay in Wadeye was three weeks. In early March I returned to Darwin and to NARU briefly. At the research unit I presented an informal seminar to the NARU staff, which covered the activities and findings of my field work in Wadeye. With the discussion that followed, the seminar lasted around an hour and helped with the initial organisation and examination of the information I had collected. Comments from the staff prompted further thought, ideas and issues to pursue on return to Melbourne. In all, the seminar was a very worthwhile activity.

There were of course, limitations within the fieldwork procedure. February was a busy time for all at OLSH School in Wadeye. Along with the usual difficulties of a new school year, many staff members were preparing for, and adjusting to, their new roles within the school. On occasions, this made it difficult to approach the teachers and request an interview. Hence I was very grateful to all who offered their time, especially the principal, Sister Elizabeth, who gave up almost an hour of her time to speak with me. This situation also delayed my arrival in the community for one week, limiting my stay to three weeks instead of a possible four. Additional time in the community would have been beneficial to become more familiar with the staff at the school, especially the Aboriginal teachers, many of whom I had not met previously.

Time constraints, teacher activities and lack of familiarity with some teachers prevented all staff being interviewed (Appendix 1). The Aboriginal teachers were very busy settling in to their new jobs. Planning, translation and work with the non-Aboriginal mentors, occupy much time outside class hours, especially in the early stages of the year. I was hesitant to disrupt this process too much. Undoubtedly, a degree of sampling error was involved, as only those staff members who had time and with whom I was acquainted were interviewed. In total, nine interviews were conducted and there were numerous casual conversations with most staff members, which was helpful for relations in the field. Overall, the interviews were successful, providing a variety of opinions about the changes within the school. However a different approach when interviewing the Aboriginal staff may have produced more extensive responses. These two interviews were relatively brief, possibly because the teachers were not familiar with me and the structure of the questions may have been inappropriate. In retrospect, the presence of another non-Aboriginal staff member at the interviews, may have encouraged a greater response. Personal inexperience in the field and in

a cross-cultural situation, certainly influenced the outcome of these two interviews in particular.

In theory, this is a source of 'instrument error' – the instrument being the interviewer. One form of instrument error as referred to by Dixon (1982: 9) is the 'interviewer effect', whereby certain characteristics of the interviewer influence the responses given in an interview, particularly an informal interview. In this case, my age, gender, cultural background, language and general behaviour, may have modified or restricted the answers to the questions. Another form of instrument error as defined by Dixon, is that caused by a 'change in the research instrument' (1982: 9). Again the instrument is the interviewer, and the change involved an increase in competence when interviewing. As more interviews were conducted and as time in the community increased, my knowledge and experience also increased, which in turn generated more questions and discussion for the following interviews. Thus the nature of the initial interviews, may have been different to that of the later interviews. This limitation could have been redressed if more time was spent in Wadeye.

Little direct contact with a supervisor made dealing with these limitations more difficult. Nevertheless, despite the limitations mentioned concerning the length of time spent in the community, three weeks was sufficient to enable documentation and explanation of the changes occurring in OLSH School at that particular time. Importantly, it must be acknowledged that the study examines the issues from the viewpoint of a non-Aboriginal person who is a relative outsider to the community. The issues discussed were perceived during the time spent in the community at the beginning of 1994 – the first year that the majority of classroom teachers are Aborigines. Furthermore, many of the implications examined in the study are potential rather than definite situations, for it is still too soon to determine the full consequences of Aboriginalisation. Already, at the end of 1994, the situation is likely to be very different from at the beginning of the school year.



Plate 5: Entrance to the North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.



Plate 6: The Wadeye Community Library.



Plate 7: OLSH School grounds and the school truck after collecting the students for morning classes.



Plate 8: Year 6/7 boys in their classroom.

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This examination of the changes now taking place in the formal education process in Wadeye is situated within the context of three principal ideas. Firstly, the sub-field of cultural geography is the broadest setting for the study. Within this context, the study examines patterns of social organisation created by people through their continuing process of cultural reproduction. The second area relates more specifically to Aboriginal education in Australia, and the issues and reasons why changes are deemed necessary within this field. The final context refers again to Aboriginal education, though this time in particular relation to the unique issues surrounding education in remote communities. There is virtually no literature in direct relation to education in Wadeye, thus another remote community of the Northern Territory, Yirrkala, has been chosen to illustrate briefly how others have worked toward change in their education system. By recognising the place of the study within the related literature, it should be clear that the study has some knowledge to contribute to, and some implications for, the broader contexts highlighted.

Cultural geography

'Cultures are not simply systems of meaning and value carried around in the head. They are made concrete through patterns of social organisation' (Jackson 1989: 2). In a broad sense, it is these 'patterns of social organisation' which cultural geographers aim to examine. A continuing tradition within the field of cultural geography, is the examination of these patterns as they are represented in the landscape. A vast number of studies exist which examine the idea of landscape and the various cultural traits observed within the landscape (for example, Conzen 1990; Kobayashi & Mackenzie 1989; Meinig 1979; Penning-Rowsell & Lowenthal 1986; Sauer 1925, to name only a few). However in Peter Jackson's work, *Maps of Meaning*, he explores the less tangible aspects of culture such as those within everyday social activities (1989: 9). In his opinion:

An exclusive interest in the physical expression of culture in the landscape now . . . seems unnecessarily restrictive . . . [C]ultural geographers are beginning to recognise a plurality of cultures and to shift attention away from the analysis of a few privileged texts towards an analysis of the social relations through which cultures are produced and reproduced . . . in historically contingent and geographically specific contexts (Jackson 1989: 23).

In this study, the changing education system is part of the social relations and social organisation of contemporary Aboriginal culture in Wadeye, a particular historical and spatial location. The changes represent patterns of evidence of people engaged in a process of working continuously to reinforce, to reproduce and in this instance, to modify, aspects of their culture. Culture is not a static, individual entity working through passive human carriers, rather it is a dynamic combination of the 'symbols, beliefs, languages and practices' which people must continue to reproduce in their actions, so as they remain a part of their culture (Anderson & Gale 1992: 3). Often, when people do not consciously think about or question what is happening, the process of culture can reproduce continually without any significant modifications. However once one becomes aware of how actions, values and beliefs shape the social organisations of society, then a deliberate attempt to change these cultural elements may be made. In a similar manner, the people of Wadeye are attempting such a change at present. Over time, the community has become increasingly aware of how the system of formal education, reflecting the values of another culture, impacts upon their culture. Therefore they have made a deliberate and conscious decision to change this system, now a necessary part of their contemporary social organisation. The community is looking for a conscious reproduction of their culture through an education process appropriate for this task. Culture is an expression of identity and Wadeye is looking to their own chosen process of formal education to express their contemporary identity.

By consciously examining patterns of social organisation, it becomes clear that some are controlled and even determined by dominant organisations and institutions. These groups, such as universities, banks, the military, different levels of state, the church, corporations, schools and the media, all 'have the power to *make-over* the world in the image of select interests by defining for all groups what is considered *natural*' (Anderson & Gale 1992: 8). For example, those responsible for the provision of education persist with advocating the basic western model of formal education, with some accommodations, as the most appropriate method for supplying all students with the knowledge they will need in this society. As Coombs (1993: 38) points out in relation to the recent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP):

This document invariably identifies 'education' with what is offered by the 'mainstream' educational institutions, schools controlled by government, churches, and private privileged groups. The content, style and motivation of what they offer is with marginal modifications, based on the needs, the standards and the values of contemporary, acquisitive, materialistic corporate white society (also see later discussion of the National Aboriginal Education Policy).

Thus the cultural beliefs of government and churches, are imposed on a society assumed to be homogeneous. One of the serious consequences of any institution acting in this way, is that the 'discourses that [these] organisations articulate to interpret themselves to each other and the world at large, clearly uphold unequal relations between people and places' (Anderson & Gale 1992: 7). The government departments and religious groups responsible for education, commonly reinforce inequalities by reproducing a customary, basic educational model because they are bound by a cultural interpretation or assumption regarding the correct way to educate people. Even if the model is appropriate for the majority, over a substantial length of time it has been proven inadequate for a minority group, Aboriginal people (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 348), and thus another should be offered. Alternatively, this group should be provided with resources to formulate their own model. Aborigines living in remote areas, such as Wadeye, are particularly disadvantaged in this situation and are dissatisfied with the model offered to students in such a unique cultural and spatial context (also see, for example, later discussion regarding Yirrkala).

The obvious response of many minority groups to cultural domination from large institutions is to formulate resistance strategies. These strategies will vary in different locations in response to the circumstances surrounding the cultural domination being experienced. In the context of education, Sykes (1990: 3) believes that Aborigines are resisting culturally inappropriate methods of education, by 'voting with their feet'; that is, by not attending school. As emphasised in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), this non-attendance 'may be a positive reaction to a hostile social environment and a purposeful assertion of Aboriginal identity in the face of an institution which often denies this identity' (1991, vol. 2: 365). The present desire for change in the formal education system at Wadeye, is also a show of resistance to the ever increasing intrusion and dominance of western society. An understanding of this resistance however, must consider the experiences of the remote community of Wadeye, that is, the history, the location and the general circumstances surrounding this community. The experience of this Aboriginal community will be unique within the wider context of resistance to cultural domination and social change generally.

Thus, in various ways, this examination of the changes occurring within the school at Wadeye is situated within one perspective of cultural geography. The study examines a pattern of social organisation, the education process, within the culture of those in Wadeye. Within this pattern it is possible to observe the conscious changes that are taking place, the influence and dominance of the imposing institutions, the consequences of this imposition and control, and the resistance strategies of those members of the community who deal with these issues. It is important to recognise that an examination of these aspects of patterns of

social organisation, must be within the context in which they were created. Broadly, this context involves time and space – the history and the location of the community. This involves therefore, the theme of 'cultural integration', whereby it is recognised that 'cultures are complex wholes rather than series of unrelated traits, [and] that the immediate causes of some cultural phenomena are other cultural phenomena' (Jordan & Rowntree 1982: 21). The culture of Wadeye is unique to this community and future consequences of present day actions will also be thus. Furthermore, as Anderson and Gale point out, 'The contingencies introduced by geographic variation deny researchers anything as easy or satisfying, or for that matter possible, as generalisable models of human behaviour . . . the aim of cultural geography is to produce contextualized interpretation, not universalistic explanation' (1992: 8).

Aboriginal education in Australia

The 'contextualized interpretation' provided in this study, concerns changes to the education system in a remote Aboriginal community. Firstly however, the broader context of Aboriginal education in Australia will be examined. Additionally, it should be mentioned that education is only one of the issues facing many Aborigines in Australia at present. Others include health, housing, employment, land rights, racism, incarceration, marginalisation from the wider community and self-determination (all examined in the RCIADIC 1991, vols. 2 & 4). The background to each of these interrelated issues, including education, involves historical circumstances relating to dispossession and massacres, and policies of protectionism, assimilation and integration, all of which are covered adequately in sources such as Broome (1982), Coombs (1976), Lippman (1981), Loos (1982), McConnochie et al (1993), Prentis (1988), and Reynolds (1981 & 1989). The nature of these issues will undoubtedly vary between contemporary Aboriginal groups, depending on their historical experiences and also their present socio-economic background, cultural beliefs and values, and location (for example, major urban centres, country towns, town camps, cattle stations, Aboriginal townships, such as Wadeye, and homeland centres). Self-determination appears to be nevertheless, a high priority for most Aborigines today.

A step toward self-determination / self-management for many Aborigines has been taking greater control of the process of formal education within their communities. Continuing dissatisfaction with the formal education process has resulted in a number of significant changes within Aboriginal education in Australia. As a group, they have been identified as the most poorly educated in Australia and this is despite significant improvements over the past two decades (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 348). More specifically, fewer than fifty per cent of Aboriginal children have had some pre-schooling experience, compared with a national rate of more than ninety per cent; around eighty-five per cent of

Aboriginal children of compulsory schooling age are participating in primary or secondary schooling education, compared with a national participation rate of close to one hundred per cent, and; only around thirty per cent of those aged sixteen to seventeen years are participating in education or formal training, compared to a national rate of seventy-five per cent (NAEP Joint Policy Statement 1993: 7).

On a national level, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP) has been established to address these educational disadvantages. Its fundamental purpose is to 'develop appropriate ways of responding effectively and sensitively to the educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (NAEP Joint Policy Statement 1993: 6). Its long-term goals include: the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision making; to ensure equality of access to educational services; to achieve equity of educational participation, and; to achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for the indigenous people of Australia (NAEP Joint Policy Statement 1993: 12-14). On the surface, this policy appears to be a positive step toward improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people. From the viewpoint of Smallwood (1993: 11), as an Aboriginal person she feels that the NAEP: '... shows a greater respect and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views and needs ... Finally governments are beginning to listen to what ATSI parents really want for their children.' However there are some well-founded criticisms of the policy too. For instance, the RCIADIC states that:

What has been set in place ... is a structure which ties education provision much more closely to the plans of States and Territories. It is the relationships of power which are entailed in this process which have caused concern to ... independent providers ... at a time when many Aboriginal people are seeking to assert self-determination, maintenance of culture and maintenance of their historical identity as a people (1991, vol. 4: 348).

Furthermore, along with the concerns expressed earlier by Coombs regarding how the NAEP perceives 'education', he continues by saying that:

The system proposed separates children from their elders and families, prevents their full participation in the round of family and clan activities, their participation in the normal exploration of their traditional territory, its indigenous species and the uses to which they were put ... [T]he proposed plan cuts off the process of Aboriginal education, makes irrelevant the role models that historically the young would have imitated and from whom they would have acquired skills and values appropriate to their lifestyles. Instead they are plunged into an alien society whose behavioural patterns, whose purposes and values largely

contradict those of their own (Coombs 1993: 38–39, also reflected in the RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 346).

These are just a few of the various opinions about the NAEP. As with other issues, there will always be varying degrees of support and rejection for policies and programs such as these. Though as the Royal Commission argues, the NAEP can strengthen rather than erode Aboriginal culture if the first long-term goal is 'rigorously adhered to', namely the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in (all levels) of education decision-making (1991, vol. 4: 350–51).

Aborigines were excluded from schools, either by law or because non-Aboriginal parents opposed their presence, until well into this century, leaving most to be educated by missionaries (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 340). In the Northern Territory for instance, government attempts to educate Aboriginal children, especially those outside urban areas such as Wadeye, were not taken seriously until after the Second World War. It was not until 1948, that the establishment of schools for Aboriginal people was considered important, however the motive behind this idea was to fulfil the general assimilation policies being developed by the government at that time (Harker & McConnochie 1985: 113). Thus before government involvement in Aboriginal education, the only education provided was through missions, the earliest in the Northern Territory being in 1877 at Hermannsburg (Map 1), west of Alice Springs (Harker & McConnochie 1985: 109).

A frequent educational practice in the missions was to remove children from their families and accommodate them within dormitories (Harker & McConnochie 1985: 111). This practice has been widely criticised because it not only severed the bond between the children and their traditional educators, but also interfered with, and even destroyed the development of the emotional and obligatory relationship between the children and their extended families. Thus children were in a culturally foreign environment and the normal processes of cultural transmission were destroyed (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 340; Valadian 1991: 5–6, Webb 1944: 68). The mission schools did nevertheless, introduce the use of the vernacular language for instruction in schools and they used linguists and anthropologists to develop teaching materials. These initiatives were then widely adopted in government schools (Harker & McConnochie 1985: 111).

One of the major problems with conventional schooling, both historically and at present, is stated quite clearly by Harris:

Orthodox schools have been and still are, one of the most powerful forces toward assimilation in Aboriginal communities because they try (both accidentally and deliberately) to teach un-Aboriginal ways of thinking, believing and valuing (1989: 31).

And more succinctly from an Aboriginal viewpoint:

... schools have been used quite openly to capture the minds of Aboriginal children and to turn them towards the dominating western culture (Lanhupuy 1987: 31).

The most overt attempts at using education to assimilate Aborigines into the wider community are reflected within the general assimilation policies devised around the 1950s. Yet even today with these policies abolished, elements of the concept of assimilation are still incorporated, to some degree, in the schooling process. They are expressed more subtly however, and at many levels are probably unconsciously carried out through daily, routine procedures. The RCIADIC recognises this and states that schooling is almost inevitably assimilationist because it provides Aborigines 'with ideas, attitudes and values which are not derived from their own culture' (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 300). When non-Aboriginal parents choose a school for their children, it is these very aspects of their own culture which they will try to ensure are reflected in the teachings of their final choice (broadly for example, a private or public school). On the other hand, most Aborigines do not have access to schools that reflect their cultural needs and beliefs, which are quite distinct from those of non-Aborigines. These cultural differences and the failure of the education system to accommodate them, form the issues underlying the disadvantages faced by Aborigines today. A brief examination of these issues is given here, with acknowledgment that variations will exist between different Aboriginal groups.

Broadly, a 'world view' relates to 'the ideas and beliefs which a group of people holds about its world and the people and things in it' (Christie 1984: 3). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world views are often compared and contrasted, revealing many differences. For instance, a belief in the relatedness of all things versus a compartmentalisation of phenomena in western society (Harris 1990, ch. 2; see also Christie 1984; Christie 1985, ch. 2; Hughes 1987; Parish 1991). Associated with this world view are distinct attributes of Aboriginal culture that differ to non-Aboriginal culture. These include for instance, an emphasis on cooperation and sharing rather than competition for resources, and promoting conformity rather than individualism within their society (Baarda 1990: 167). Furthermore, Aborigines have developed particular learning styles, for example: learning by doing rather than by learning to do; reinforcing correct behaviour and ignoring mistakes where possible and; using observation and imitation techniques to transmit knowledge, thus emphasising non-verbal

communication, rather than direct verbal instruction (Baarda 1990; Brandl 1981; for further discussion on learning styles see Christie 1985: ch. 4 & 5; Evans 1991; Hughes 1987).

The importance of language must also be recognised, for example: 'A lack of Aboriginal language and culture in the school curriculum was . . . the main reason for an identity crisis suffered by many young [Aboriginal] people' (Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group 1987: 16). According to Bourke (1991: 2), the incorporation of appropriate language programs in schools will result in greater cultural relevance for students and consequently improve participation and educational outcomes for students. External factors such as the health, mobility, poverty and living conditions of many Aboriginal people, also impact upon their ability to participate effectively in the education process (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: ch. 16). Broadly, the effects that all these issues mentioned above have on the lives of Aboriginal students, are reflected in their behaviour at school, or as often happens, in that they do not regularly attend school or drop out at an early age. By recognising that school is not an Aboriginal construction, and that most schools do not reflect the beliefs, values and teaching methods which are incorporated within Aboriginal culture, then it is understandable that Aboriginal students will react to this both overtly and covertly. As Baarda (1990: 171) points out, we should 'adjust the schools to fit the children rather than persist in trying to adjust the children to fit the schools.'

These are some of the main factors which, when not recognised, impede the attempts made by Aboriginal students to participate effectively within the process of formal education. Efforts have been made, however, to create a more relevant and culturally appropriate system to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. Such attempts include bilingual and bicultural education and two-way education. Briefly, a bilingual program employs two languages, English and the vernacular language, and uses them both for instruction within all subject areas (Gale 1990: 41). The bilingual program recognises the value of vernacular language and consequently the culture united with it. In this extended sense, the program has become known as bilingual and bicultural (Morgan 1988: 7). The formal Bilingual Education Program was established in the Northern Territory in 1973. The program has been significant for Aborigines in a number of ways, providing them with more control in the classrooms and greater influence over curriculum content, and encouraging increased participation in teacher training (Harris 1993: 14). However as Walton and Eggington (1990: x) point out, although 'bilingual education created a place for Aboriginal control within classrooms, other changes were necessary to facilitate Aboriginal control of the school.' It is this situation that is addressed by 'two-way' (or 'both-ways') education. This model places emphasis on Aboriginal control and ownership of the *total* schooling process, both the Aboriginal and the

western content. For example, as Yunupingu (1990: 5) states, 'if you have control of both languages then you have *double power*.'

Both the bilingual/bicultural model and the two-way model of education, are clearly more appropriate for some rural and especially remote areas, where Aborigines may form the vast majority of students in the schools, where many still possess their language and where the intrusion of western culture is far less. Each model illustrates a move toward self-determination for the communities. In urban regions and towns however, where the influence of western society is more intense, independent Aboriginal schools have emerged as a clear expression of a desire for self-determination, at least in the area of education (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 329). These schools have been established by Aboriginal people who want a greater say in the education of their children. As an independent alternative to the mainstream schooling process, these schools emphasise teaching which is in accord with Aboriginal values and lifestyles (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 329). Aboriginal management enables the schools to address the specific needs of Aboriginal students far more effectively than in conventional, mainstream schools where Aboriginal students are likely to be a minority.

Education in remote communities

The final context in which this study is situated involves an examination of the issues surrounding formal education in remote Aboriginal communities specifically. The term 'remote' is used here from the perspective of the author, and probably most of the wider community. From the viewpoint of those Aborigines who live in these areas however, it is likely that the living spaces of the wider community would also be perceived as 'remote', in reference to the distance from their own communities and the culturally different environment. In the context of education, remoteness has an impact on such things as accessibility of the service, the provision of teachers and community consultation. Along with looking at these points, a brief description will be given of how one remote community, Yirrkala, has itself responded to such issues.

Improving access to education is of fundamental importance to most Aborigines in remote areas. For those who have to provide this service however, the mobility and increasingly decentralised distribution of the remote Aboriginal population, pose significant challenges (Crough & Pritchard 1991: 101). Periodic movement from larger communities to and from homeland centres (see page 12 for explanation of HLCs), and permanent migration to these centres, interrupts mainstream schooling and if permanent, may require that the service be provided at the homeland centre. The dilemma of Aboriginal rights to retain their cultural lifestyle and the government's obligation to provide schooling for all children, is

raised in this situation (HRSCAA Report 1989: 38). Though the population of the homeland centre may be small, 'given the clear constitutional responsibility of State and Territory governments for education, it is up to them to provide a reasonable access to schooling for all children regardless of where they live. . .' (HRSCAA Report 1989: 39). Post-primary students also pose a challenge for educational decision makers. There could be as many as 10,000 to 12,000 Aboriginal children between the ages of twelve and fifteen years in remote areas who do not attend school (HRSCAA Report 1989: 39). Reasons behind this include the lack of post-primary facilities even in some larger communities and a reluctance of students to leave their community to attend secondary schooling in larger centres (HRSCAA Report 1989: 39; RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 363-3). Access to education may constrain the movement of Aboriginal people, whereby they will remain in larger settlements so that their children can attend school. Alternatively, the movement of Aborigines, particularly to homeland centres, has forced a degree of decentralisation of education services, as Aborigines exercise their constitutional right to this service, regardless of where they live (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 2: 355).

Remote communities also face problems with the provision of teachers. Non-Aboriginal teachers still play a significant role in remote area schools, however they face not only geographic isolation in these schools, but also cultural and professional isolation as well (Brandl 1981; RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 320). This often results in a high teacher turn-over rate in the school. Consequently, the stability of teaching in the school is threatened by a series of culturally inexperienced teachers, often staying only a couple of years (RCIADIC 1991, vol. 4: 320-21). To overcome this problem, the Northern Territory's Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program stands as a strong incentive for the Aboriginal members of the communities to become teachers themselves. Based at Batchelor College, around one hundred kilometres south of Darwin, the program enables its students to carry out most of their training in their community (a high priority for most), over the three year Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) course. A fourth year can be undertaken to gain a Diploma of Teaching, which allows the graduate to teach in any Northern Territory school. In 1986 Batchelor College also developed a RATE program especially orientated toward training members of homeland centres for teacher positions – the Homeland Centre Remote Area Teacher Education program (Livett 1988: 14).

'The key aspect for success in the provision of educational resources in remote communities appears to be the capturing of community support and the establishment of community control' (Crough & Pritchard 1991: 100). This kind of community support encouraged the demand to develop a specific program for training teachers for homeland centres, and thereby resulting in greater local control within the homeland centre. Through

consultation, another important factor for success in the provision of education, Batchelor College was able to meet this demand and formulate an appropriate program for members of homeland centres. The HRSCAA Report (1989: 39) also recognises that close consultation is essential, mainly because 'to impose programs that are not in accordance with the aspirations of the community could destroy the educational value that should be derived from the programs.' Consultation will ensure that the content, and the method of delivery, of the programs provided to the community, will be relevant to its particular needs.

Yunupingu (1990) outlines the development of local community control of the school at Yirrkala, in north east Arnhem Land (Map 1). As he describes, when the missionaries arrived, power in education was taken from the traditional teachers, the elders, and the English language was introduced into the school. By stopping the use of their language in the school, 'they were stopping our way of thinking' (Yunupingu 1990: 3). Yolngu¹ (Aboriginal) culture was irrelevant to the school until the introduction of bilingual education in 1974. With this program, some yolngu content was introduced into the curriculum and consequently, the yolngu had some power within the classroom. However outside the classroom, balanda² (non-Aborigines) still controlled the curriculum, staff meetings and school decisions in general. Furthermore, English was used in these operations, 'so it was still really a balanda school' (Yunupingu 1990: 4). To obtain greater power within the school, a school council was established in 1984 by yolngu members of local clans. The Yolngu Action Group was established later that year, consisting of yolngu school staff members. Only if invited do balanda staff members attend their meetings, which are conducted in yolngu language. The success of these groups in achieving greater yolngu power within the school is reflected in the appointment of the first yolngu principal in 1990. At Yirrkala, the yolngu are aiming to control both sides of the curriculum – the balanda content and the yolngu content. Yunupingu acknowledges there is still a long way to go because despite the shift in the balance of power, the school still reflects the balanda way of thinking, for example 'boys and girls together, very young children at school, teachers who are strangers brought in from other places' (1990: 3). However he believes that the school is a part of the community's future and given time and the opportunity, which they have created themselves, they can make the school a true reflection of their cultural values and aspirations.

Thus the events in Yirrkala demonstrate how one remote community chose to regain control over the education of their children. In the particular cultural and spatial location of Yirrkala, the people have developed this community-based response to change one aspect of their contemporary social organisation, the formal education system. In another location, this

¹Yolngu is the term used by the Aborigines of north-eastern Arnhem Land for their own people (Harris 1976).

²Balanda is the term used in most of Arnhem Land in reference to those of European origin, or the 'whites' (Harris 1976). 'Balanda' is Indonesian for 'Hollander' and thus, by extension, European or 'white'.

process of change is likely to be different as the distinct cultural needs, beliefs and social relations of each community will be unique. Wherever the change is occurring, Aboriginal people must be able to determine the role of the formal education system within their lives, so that it reflects their own values and not those imposed by the wider dominant society. As the RCIADIC acknowledges: 'If there is one lesson we can learn from history, it is that solutions imposed from the outside will only create their own problems (1991, vol. 4: 2).

Educational transition in Wadeye

The schooling system in Wadeye has been and still is, essentially controlled by non-Aboriginal people. The non-Aboriginal presence within Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, particularly in all of the senior positions, inevitably results in the educational process continuing, to some degree, from a 'white' perspective. Ultimately, this removes a great deal of responsibility and independent decision making power from the local people of Wadeye. In a school that consists entirely of Aboriginal students, this situation is considered inappropriate. The Wadeye people have recognised this and are now working toward change in their school through the process of Aboriginalisation. This process will bring about local control and responsibility within in the school, allowing the people to determine independently their own goals for the school and thus making the school reflect more closely the culture of those in Wadeye. Hence this chapter concentrates on the main aim of this study, by explaining and documenting the way change is occurring in the education system of the remote Aboriginal community of Wadeye. The current schooling process, itself a product of changes over time, is examined first and then the continuing process of Aboriginalisation, including the implications and rate of this process, are discussed.

Schooling in Wadeye at present

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) School in Wadeye is an Aboriginal Catholic school, with an enrolment in 1994 of 439 students (Br. Brian, pers. comm., 1994). The school and students are presently divided into the three main areas shown in Table 2 below. Students may remain in the post primary class for about three years and then have the option of going into Darwin or interstate for further education.

Table 2: General divisions in OLSH School (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 25).

SECTION	CLASSES	APPROX. AGE RANGE
Early childhood	Preschool – two classes	4 – 8 years
	Transition A and B	
	Year one	
Middle primary	Year two – year five (mixed gender classes)	8 – 11 years
Upper school	Year 6/7 boys and 6/7 girls	12 – 17 years
	Post primary boys	
	Post primary girls	

The current curriculum covers numerous subjects and activities. These include the Murrinhpatha and English languages, maths, science, health and physical education, art and manual arts, singing and music, home economics and computer lessons (Plate 9). A correspondence course is also offered to post primary students if their standard of English and maths is greater than that of other students. As OLSH is a Catholic Aboriginal school, there are also religion lessons and culture lessons included in the timetable. The Wadeye Community Library, a joint-use facility for both the school and the community, is located at the school and the students participate in weekly lessons there (Plate 10). Excursions are of course a popular activity for the students and may be part of a programmed lesson, such as culture, or just used as a break from routine. Local excursions include trips to nearby beaches and to water-holes or into the bush. School excursions also extend to other Aboriginal communities, such as Daly River and Peppimenarti, especially for sporting activities. The older students, from around year five upwards, may also visit one of the larger towns or cities such as Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs (Map 1). The school and the community recognise and promote the value of these broader experiences for the students (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993; and reflected in the minutes of various School Committee meetings, for example, 27 August 1991, 23 April 1993, 9 August 1993).

A bilingual program incorporating the Murrinhpatha language was first introduced to OLSH School in 1976. In 1987, an appraisal of the program was undertaken and in 1988, formal accreditation of the bilingual program was granted by the Northern Territory Education Department (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993). Recent reappraisal of the bilingual program in 1993 produced a positive result, thus enabling OLSH School to retain their official status as a Bilingual School. Essential to the bilingual program at OLSH, and in any bilingual school, are the teacher-linguist, the Aboriginal language and literacy workers and the literacy production centre. Generally, the teacher-linguist coordinates the production of the materials needed to teach literacy in the Murrinhpatha language. For instance, at each class level 'Big Books' are used as text books to teach the students to read in Murrinhpatha (Plate 11), and accompanying each book is a series of student worksheets, bound into booklet form. The text books, often based on traditional stories collected from community elders, are written and illustrated by the Aboriginal language workers. The student worksheets are written by the teacher-linguist, Brother Brian Graham, as the skills of a qualified teacher are necessary to produce the appropriate exercises for literacy instruction. Nevertheless much advice is given by the Aboriginal language workers in the composition of these worksheets. Both the text books and the worksheets are proof-read numerous times by the Aboriginal language and literacy workers, who are fluent in the written and spoken language of Murrinhpatha. Through the resources of the literacy production centre, for example the



Plate 9: Year 2 computer class.



Plate 10: Year 6/7 girls borrowing books from the library.

computers and printing, binding and laminating machines, the workers then produce the final copies of these books and worksheets for classroom use (Br. Brian, pers. comm., 1994).

The 'Vision Statement' of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, was devised by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in 1989, and represents the current policy of the school. The statement (below), 'reflects the aims and aspirations that the staff and community have for themselves and each other in providing *an all round education*, which respects the dignity of each person, child and adult' (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 11).

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Wadeye, is an Aboriginal Catholic school which always works towards educating the whole person, both children and adults.

1. Health, happiness and pride in ourselves is most important.
2. We recognise that we are all different yet all a special part of God's creation.
3. All teachers should work toward Aboriginal teachers running the school.
4. Children learn in two languages and through two cultures.
5. Education should help children learn to cope with their lives both here in Wadeye and elsewhere.
6. We recognise the importance of traditional Aboriginal learning.
7. By learning in their own language children become proud of themselves.
8. Teachers should have the chance to continue learning.
9. A happy and helpful staff makes a happy school.
10. The school, community and parish must work together.
11. We should always look at these things to help us teach the children in Wadeye.

I noticed many of these principles reflected in school activities. For instance, the school's awareness of the importance and value of language is demonstrated through its involvement in the bilingual program since 1976. Not only does teaching in the vernacular help the students with formal learning, the process also strengthens their Aboriginal identity and self-esteem. The principal, Sister Elizabeth, considers this personal development a high priority for the students, as reflected in her thoughts on the purpose of education for the students. She believes that the process should provide the students with the skills:

to lead the community and to be able to stand up and negotiate with various government bodies that come in with a sense dignity and self-worth and pride in their own community (pers. comm., 1994).

A number of staff members commented on the strong spiritual nature of the Aboriginal people (Sr. Elizabeth, Mark Linkson, Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994). The objectives behind the religious education program within the school reflect the second point of the Vision Statement, namely that 'we are all different yet all a special part of God's creation'. As outlined in the introductory booklet to OLSH School (c. 1990: 27), religious instruction in the school must focus on the people and circumstances of Wadeye, and must involve close consultation with these people. Through religious education, the Faith must penetrate to the roots of the culture, though the roots must not be pulled out. I observed in a staff meeting, the religious education coordinator Sister Rosemary Walsh, supporting this recognition of difference. Sister Rosemary asked the teachers to use religious examples from the community, thus making the religious concepts relevant to the life experiences of the students in the classrooms of OLSH School in Wadeye.

Further principles of the Vision Statement noticed included teachers working toward Aboriginal people running the school. The RATE program has been operating within the school since 1984. Although the program had a relatively slow start, the greatest demonstration of more recent effort is that in 1994, the majority of classroom teachers are Aborigines. All staff members appeared very enthusiastic about the transition to Aboriginal control within the school. The school helps the students to cope with life outside the community mainly through excursions and through videos and some of the general literature used within the curriculum also work toward this goal. For the stage two RATE students, meeting with Koori people while on a field trip in Melbourne developed an awareness of the extent of cultural loss experienced by other Aboriginal groups (OLSH School Magazine 1992).

The accommodation of traditional Aboriginal learning in the school is currently most prominent in the culture lessons, timetabled in the curriculum as other subjects are. These aim at reinforcing and/or introducing the students to a range of traditional activities and skills. As such, organisation by either the Aboriginal teacher or the Aboriginal teacher assistant, in the case of a non-Aboriginal classroom teacher, is necessary (OLSH Introductory booklet, c.1990: 35). At first I questioned the rationale behind the idea of specified 'culture lessons' in a community such as Wadeye, however their role within the school did become clear. These culture sessions are important because members of the wider community and their knowledge are brought into the school environment. By encouraging community participation, the

school is not alienating itself from the wider community and is supporting the cultural reproduction process. Cultural activities include story telling, dancing and singing, weaving, and making artefacts such as clapsticks, didgeridoos and spears (OLSH Introductory booklet, c. 1990: 35). The sessions may also be conducted outside the school, with students visiting members of the community, or going on bush outings to collect 'bush tucker' and go fishing.

The incorporation of Aboriginal culture into the school's activities, is not only through the set cultural sessions. The Murrinhpatha language, for example, plays an essential role in any subject. Furthermore, kinship rules are still adhered to in the school, for instance avoidance rules, and the school mass which I participated in was celebrated in both Murrinhpatha and English, with murals on the church walls depicting various totems which are perceived as gifts from God (Ward 1985: 80).

The school and community are working together in many other areas. For instance, parents and grandparents often come to the school and sit with their children in the preschool classes, community members attend mass and they are invited to participate in school sport days and to attend special student presentations. In 1994, the community council, Kardu Numida, is providing the funds for a manual arts teacher in the school (Sister Elizabeth pers. comm., 1994). The post primary work experience program also requires community involvement and willingness to accommodate the students in different jobs around town, for example at the clinic or council offices. Furthermore, 'Wadeye Art and Craft' operates through the adult education program based at the school, and provides the community artists with an extended outlet for their work by dealing with a business in Darwin (Plate 12). As Mark Linkson the adult educator admitted, although this is not 'education' as such, it is beneficial because as a member of staff, he is getting people involved and working within the school environment and for themselves (pers. comm., 1994). Finally, the school-based Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Committee, consisted of seventeen community and (Aboriginal) school staff members in 1993. ASSPA is part of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy and aims to encourage greater involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools and to provide funds to address needs at the local community level (Guide for ASSPA Committees 1994: 4).

In a number of ways, I noticed that the teachers were continuing to learn at OLSH School. The Aboriginal teachers are still learning about formal teaching through their non-Aboriginal mentors and with time will gain experience. So too with the non-Aboriginal teachers, as they gain knowledge over time working in a cross-cultural environment. One teacher, originally from a small country town where a minority of the population was Aboriginal, has experienced a sudden reversal of roles. As she explains:

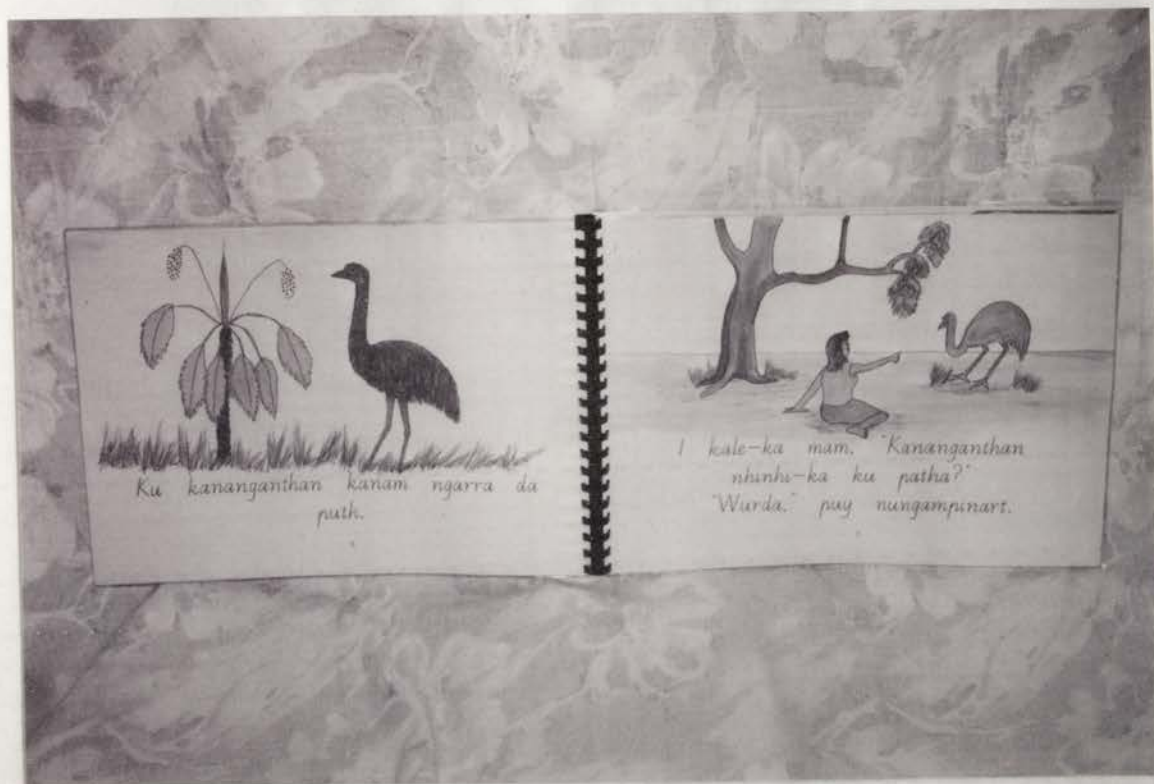


Plate 11: A 'Big Book', used as a text book for teaching Murrinhpatha literacy.



Plate 12: The adult education room, also the base for 'Wadeye Art and Craft' – work displayed is that of local artists.

I can sort of understand how they [the Aborigines] must have felt now. There was just them and a mass of white fellas . . . suddenly I'm the minority, it's an incredible feeling (Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994).

When I asked another non-Aboriginal teacher why she has remained in the community for four years, she replied:

. . . the culture is fantastic and you learn, every year you just learn and learn and learn something different, and that is why I stayed. You can never learn everything but I'm still enjoying learning about the place so I keep coming back for more! (Maree Molinaro, pers. comm., 1994).

Thus the current policy of OLSH School expressed through the Vision Statement, was seen to be put into practice in various areas of the school. This policy may of course change as the process of Aboriginalisation continues.

Aboriginalisation in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Wadeye

To explain and document the changes occurring in the education system of OLSH School, three broad areas will be examined. Firstly, the process of change looks at how and why this is happening. Secondly, the discussion will examine the possible implications of the change, for the structure of the education system, for the students and for the wider Wadeye community. Thirdly, the rate of this change will be considered and how this aspect may influence the outcome of the process. The remoteness of Wadeye will influence in some way, each of these interconnected areas.

The Process of Change

At OLSH School in Wadeye, Aboriginal members of the community are in the process of gaining effective control of their children's schooling system. The aim of the Aboriginal teachers and staff members is to possess the power to determine and administer all the decisions that affect the operations of the school. 'Aboriginalisation' is the term often used to describe this process, whereby Aboriginal people gain control of the organisations, formally under the authority of non-Aboriginal people, which influence their communities (for example, Gale 1990; McTaggart 1989). In Wadeye, this process is taking place in the school. At present, all of the senior positions in OLSH School are held by non-Aboriginal people (Appendix 1) and only in 1994 have a majority of classroom positions been held by Aborigines. Thus although the community does generally perceive the school to be 'their

school, the community school' (Sister Elizabeth, pers. comm., 1994), until more of the fundamental decisions are in the hands of local Aborigines, this perception may be inaccurate.

The process of Aboriginalisation continues as more community members gain qualifications and take up positions within the school. As expressed in the Vision Statement, it is part of school policy for all staff members to work toward Aboriginal people running the school. The support shown by the school for the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program and the encouragement given to the students, does demonstrate a strong commitment to this goal. Overall, eight out of the thirteen classroom teachers in 1994 are Aborigines and a larger number is currently involved in the RATE program. The teacher-librarian is also Aboriginal and others are training for positions such as the adult educator, the school secretary, preschool teachers and various literacy production roles. However at this stage, there is no community member preparing for the position of principal.

Consequently, in 1994 certain positions held by non-Aboriginal staff members were no longer available to them, although the mentor scheme did create some new roles for these teachers. The non-Aboriginal mentors provide support and assistance to the new Aboriginal teachers. In the opinion of Dianne Fitzpatrick, mentor to three early childhood teachers, she sees her role primarily as 'a manager', providing extra reference material and sometimes taking a 'demonstration' lesson for the teachers. She also perceives her job to be that of a 'teacher assistant', helping with English and maths lessons, just as the Aboriginal teacher assistants take Murrinhpatha lessons for the non-Aboriginal teachers (pers. comm., 1994).

As reflected in the Vision Statement, the school perceives the Aboriginalisation process as one of the necessary steps to educating the whole person. From a more personal level, one of the non-Aboriginal teachers sees the process occurring because:

... While white people are here and while white people are running it, then there's always going to be that white way of [doing things]. That's fine, but it's not a white school, it's a black school ... (Mark Linkson pers. comm., 1994).

Peter Bunduck, an Aboriginal teacher within the school, stated quite clearly why he wanted to become a teacher:

So I am able to teach my own children. When a non-Aboriginal teacher comes to Wadeye, they leave after a few years and that's it. But for us Aboriginal teachers, our place is here. The children are seeing us in the community (pers. comm., 1994).

Aboriginalisation is happening so as the school reflects and is relevant to, the culture and circumstances of the students within. Being a remote community, these circumstances are quite unique. Students have minimal direct contact with the wider, mainstream community. They have a very close relationship with the members of the Wadeye Community and their land, and the desire to leave these things is not normally very great. Thus their education will need to focus upon those aspects of their lives which are important to them, and not those which others think should be important to them. It must also be acknowledged that these values can, and probably will change in the future.

In the 1991 school magazine, the stage three RATE students expressed some of the reasons why the RATE program (a vital part of the Aboriginalisation process) was established at OLSH School:

This program was started because the school and the community wanted to have the Aboriginal teacher assistants become better teachers . . . We are all doing this because we want to become qualified teachers and have our own class. It's a very hard course with lots of time spent away from our families doing workshops. But we are looking to the future when classes will be run by Aboriginal teachers (OLSH School Magazine 1991).

The Aboriginalisation process has the support of the Wadeye community. Without this backing it is doubtful if the process would continue. Sister Elizabeth referred to a kind of 'cultural rule', whereby within the community, 'no tall poppy ever stands out, they are cut down'. Therefore it can be very difficult for a member of the community to try something different or to even look for employment. This is why she particularly admires the people working within the school because 'they *have* stuck at something' (pers. comm., 1994). Thus in one sense, by not 'cutting down' these achievers, the wider community has allowed these teachers to succeed in gaining positions of responsibility in the school and continues to support them. Furthermore, the Aboriginal teachers have accepted these roles and recognise the associated responsibility.

Implications of Change

The process of Aboriginalisation in OLSH School will impact upon the education system, student outcomes and the wider Wadeye community. It is difficult at this stage to determine exactly what these implications will be, but it is possible to define certain areas which are likely to be affected.

The role of the Murrinhpatha language within Wadeye has undoubtedly been strengthened by its use in the bilingual program at the school. As the lingua franca of the community, Murrinhpatha is widely spoken in general use among all language groups (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 17). According to the teacher-linguist, Murrinhpatha rather than English, is threatening the survival of the other Aboriginal languages represented in the community (Br. Brian Graham, pers. comm., 1994; see Table 1 for these languages). The need to use English, the language of mainstream society, appears limited as an Aboriginal language has been established as the lingua franca of the community. English is normally used by the people of Wadeye only in communications with non-Aboriginal people, for example between staff in the school or in other work locations where interaction with non-Aborigines is necessary (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 19). According to the teacher-linguist, many students perceive English as 'a school based thing', which is rarely necessary to use in their own community.

Hence a possible implication of concern regarding the Aboriginalisation process is a reduction in the level of English within the school (Br. Brian Graham, Dianne Fitzpatrick, Maree Molinaro, pers. comm., 1994). A formal request *from the community* in 1991, initiated a change in the model for bilingual instruction, resulting in an increased proportion of English used for instruction (Appendix 2.1 and 2.2). English is therefore, perceived to be of importance for the community. However it is the opinion of the teacher-linguist, that although the students speak Murrinhpatha well, the present standard of English is quite basic (pers. comm., 1994), and this is clearly noticeable in conversations with the students. Furthermore, it appears that less English is now used within the classrooms of Aboriginal teachers. For instance, part of daily routine with non-Aboriginal teachers includes prayers, greetings, taking the attendance role and asking brief questions about such things as the weather – all spoken in English. Maths lessons are also instructed in English. Yet now, Murrinhpatha is used for most of the daily, verbal routine, even though to fulfil the guidelines of the Bilingual Program, a certain amount of English must be spoken (Br. Brian Graham & Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994). Communication is of course, more effective and efficient when it is in Murrinhpatha, the lingua franca of the community and the first language of the majority of students. However the limited exposure to English which the students already experience in their remote community, is further reduced when the Aboriginal teachers use Murrinhpatha for basic instructions. It is important for members of the community to have a sound knowledge of English and western knowledge in general because, as the English coordinator explains:

... you do need to have representation within your own people. If it is not yourself, then someone else has to be able to communicate within an English system – [not only] the language, but the system of western culture too ... otherwise there will only be exploitation ... [For example] an elder speaking only in their own language, they need to have someone to translate it properly, not someone like an English linguist who comes here only for a while ... they have to understand the culture too (Maree Molinaro, pers. comm., 1994).

In the future, the school will have to retain the responsibility for English instruction because within the wider community, the language has only minimal, direct relevance and is used little. It was suggested that a long-term situation may involve a single lesson of English every day, just as foreign languages are taught in mainstream schools (Br. Brian Graham & Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994). If this situation does eventuate however, OLSH School could not remain a Bilingual School, as instruction would take place in a single language only. A bilingual program requires general instruction in two languages, which does not include one taught separately as a second or foreign language.

In these preliminary stages, it is too soon to predict how the Aboriginal staff will incorporate English into the school's operations and how this will influence English proficiency among the students. The role of language within the school will certainly be an area which experiences change as Aboriginalisation continues. This will involve not only English, but also other Aboriginal languages present in the community. Requests have been made to introduce other tribal languages into the school, however limited resources make any substantial progress in this area impossible at present (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 17). Possibly though, with full Aboriginalisation, focus within the curriculum may shift to give greater support to the maintenance of these languages.

The hierarchical staffing structures of western style schooling, such as an individual principal, a vice-principal, senior staff and general staff, may not be appropriate when the school is under the direction of Aboriginal people. Wadeye is a multi-tribal community with related complexities that may pose problems if a single principal, representing only one group, is chosen to lead the school. This may cause 'family pressures', as described by one Aboriginal teacher (Tobias Nganbe, pers. comm., 1994). The establishment of an administrative team to carry out the duties of a principal, was one idea suggested by Sister Elizabeth (pers. comm., 1994). Other conventional arrangements within the schooling system may also change, including school hours and school terms. Sister Elizabeth has already considered changing the school hours, presently 8.45 a.m. to 2.45 p.m. and for example, operating at night or starting school later in the day, especially when it becomes 'colder and darker' in the morning (that is, in the dry season, pers. comm., 1994). As the preschool

teacher pointed out, even collecting the students in the school bus each morning and after lunch takes time and does not mean they reach school on time (Margaret Sinclair, pers. comm., 1994). The school would nevertheless, have to consider the activities of the township, for example the store, post-office, bank and council operating times. As Sister Elizabeth said, '... there are other people [including the non-Aboriginal teachers] and different employing agencies ... and the school can't just call the tune.' Yet these agencies within the town are essentially under Aboriginal control and if necessary, their operations could change. As the community takes greater control of the school, it may be possible to restructure school hours to suit their needs and routine, also allowing for the operations of the township and external interactions with, for instance, Darwin and Batchelor.

Aboriginalisation may also change the structure of school terms. There are a number of reasons why this might happen. For instance, those who attend school are generally there because they enjoy it. They have fun and they want to be there because it is a change from their home environment (Dianne Fitzgerald & Sister Elizabeth, pers. comm., 1994). However Sister Elizabeth has noticed that by the end of any four week block, attendance drops off for a while and then it rises again after a short break. In her opinion, the students want to be at school but they lack the perseverance to continue for long periods. Thus when control of the school becomes totally Aboriginal, school terms may become, for example, four week blocks with a short break in between, encouraging more consistent attendance. Planning new school terms could also take into consideration movement to and from homeland centres and cultural ceremonies. Every two years for instance, the 'Men's Ceremonies' (male initiation) take place and all members of their families, whether male or female, have a role to play. For the students, this can disrupt the schooling process for a number of weeks (Maree Molinaro, pers. comm., 1994). Thus school holidays could be planned to coincide with these ceremonies. These changes would of course, also require approval from the Education Department and Catholic Education Office. However being a remote community, with few direct ties or obligations to the many institutions and conventional routines of mainstream society and living, Wadeye should be able to accommodate changes such as these.

Greater Aboriginal control and participation within the school should also solve some of the problems associated with non-Aboriginal teachers in a cross-cultural environment. For instance, understanding the specific cultural characteristics that shape the particular learning styles of Aborigines is very difficult for a teacher of a different cultural background. The introductory booklet to OLSH School outlines some 'cultural hints' for new staff members, many of which correspond with those outlined in Chapter Three. For example: teachers should ignore mistakes where possible and praise good behaviour; students learn by doing rather than learning to do, and; non-verbal communication is used just as much as

verbal communication, thus the words of a teacher must match their body signals. The teachers are also reminded that the students will still be in Wadeye long after they have moved elsewhere (OLSH Introductory booklet, c. 1990: 25). Aboriginal teachers possess an inherent understanding of these, and all other cultural values and obligations of their remote, distinctly Aboriginal community. On the other hand, even a general understanding of these things takes time for non-Aboriginal teachers to acquire – time in which their teaching methods may be inappropriate and ineffective. A high staff turn-over rate aggravates the problem each time new, non-Aboriginal staff are employed.

One of the preschool teachers highlighted a problem that emerged this year in her class. The Aboriginal teacher of the other preschool class, is unable to teach one particular child because he is a 'taboo cousin', thus avoidance rules do not allow contact (Margaret Sinclair, pers. comm., 1994). In this case, the child was transferred into the preschool class of the non-Aboriginal teacher, however most year levels do not have two classes. If class structures remain the same, this situation will also have to be considered as Aboriginalisation continues. In general, if major changes are planned for the OLSH School when it is under full Aboriginal direction, then the staff members should be prepared for possible confrontation with Government and even Catholic institutions – a sure test for their language skills.

Overall, the implications of the Aboriginalisation process for the education system in Wadeye will be reflected in the students as they complete their schooling years. As Sister Elizabeth stated:

If you want Aboriginalisation, you're not going to have them [the students] coming out as they would from exposure to a school of non-Aboriginal emphasis . . . you can't have it both ways (pers. comm., 1994).

Possibly the standard of English will drop, and maybe there will be a greater emphasis on the issues and culture of Wadeye, but there will always be room for future change. It will take time for the community to choose the distinct values that it wants taught in the school, and also to decide upon the role of western knowledge and the western approach to teaching. These decisions can change, just as culture changes. It is important that the school is given the chance to develop the decisions they make and to learn from their mistakes, rather than being judged by them.

The implications of the Aboriginalisation process at the school will extend to the wider Wadeye community too. A direct result will of course be employment opportunities

for those willing to become qualified teachers. These people have the potential to then become the negotiators and communicators for Wadeye, prepared for any future issues involving interactions with the broader Australian society. The importance of these teachers as role models cannot be ignored either. Sister Elizabeth has asked the Aboriginal teachers why they have chosen to continue teaching, and they have replied that it is because 'we feel good' (pers. comm., 1994). Teaching has provided them with a source of self-esteem. Seeing others working and 'feeling good' about themselves, will hopefully encourage more people to obtain employment, or even create employment for themselves. From the viewpoint of Sister Elizabeth, lack of dignity and self-esteem is a serious problem in the community. Finding those who want to succeed in working effectively toward Aboriginalisation, such as the Aboriginal teachers at OLSH, and using these people as role-models, will be an essential part of restoring this lost sense of self-worth.

In the opinion of the Adult Educator:

In ten years time this school will not be as white people would like it to be . . . because hopefully Aborigines will be in all the positions in the school, and they won't run it like a white person would run it . . . and you feel that the education won't be as good, but what does that mean, 'won't be as good'? . . . It's certainly going to be different, and it will probably be better because all of the decisions will be taken from the black perspective, instead of what a white person thinks the black perspective should be (Mark Linkson, pers. comm., 1994).

This final point is probably the most important for the wider community and educational institutions and officials to understand, namely that Aboriginalisation will make the structure of the educational process for the students of Wadeye, a true reflection of the cultural values and ideas of the students it is there to teach.

The Rate of Change

It is necessary to examine the rate of Aboriginalisation because this will influence the outcome of the process. It is also important to consider the changing role of non-Aboriginal people in the school and to establish when and if, their positions will become obsolete. As McTaggart (1989: 41) has emphasised, non-Aboriginal teachers and administrators must face several 'moral, social and psychological dilemmas', namely 'what to do, how to help and when to leave'.

In 1991, the School Committee expressed their opinion regarding the Aboriginalisation process. They wanted the school to move slowly into this process and

requested that non-Aboriginal teachers remain at the school, to assist the Aboriginal graduates in their new role as classroom teachers (School Committee meeting, minutes: 27 August 1991). In a conversation with an Aboriginal teacher early this year, this opinion was reflected in his thoughts concerning the process. He agreed that Aboriginalisation was a positive step for the community, however for the classroom teachers:

... it will need some time, it's going to take time. It doesn't mean that we [the Aboriginal teachers] are going to have to take it all over this year ... give us maybe one more year to take over properly (Peter Bunduck, pers. comm., 1994).

Mentors have been provided to assist the new Aboriginal teachers until they are prepared to work by themselves. The new teachers were adamant about having some support when they obtained a classroom position. Teaching in two languages, Murrinhpatha and English (a foreign language for the teachers), is a considerable demand without such support. Sister Elizabeth believes that the rate of Aboriginalisation must reflect the wishes of the Aboriginal people themselves and hence:

... they don't want to be left on their own. I believe that we have to respect this and move very, very slowly because otherwise we will be setting them up for failure. If they feel they are not coping they will walk away ... From my understanding, they would rather walk away than try and continue with failure (pers. comm., 1994).

In this statement, Sister Elizabeth raises the idea of 'failure'. If Aboriginalisation is too rapid, will the process fail? Furthermore, what would constitute a failed outcome? The perception of failure may differ between Wadeye and educational authorities. Aboriginalisation is an attempt to redress the continuing western domination of Aboriginal culture. The Aboriginal teachers in OLSH School have created within themselves, a source of knowledge for others who want to participate in the process. Thus even if these teachers were all to abandon their positions at the end of the year (though unlikely), this knowledge is not lost. What they have learnt is still accessible and can be expanded upon and reapplied in the future if they, or others decide to continue the process of Aboriginalisation. In this sense, I do not believe that any attempt by those of Wadeye to regain control over their culture and lives can be considered a failure, only if an initial effort does not produce the expected outcome of total Aboriginal control.

However Sister Elizabeth is probably concerned about academic outcomes and the how the educational authorities may perceive failure. As mentioned previously, the Aboriginalisation of OLSH School is likely to create a different kind of education, based on

Aboriginal values rather than those of non-Aborigines. Thus students may complete their schooling with an 'unconventional' form of knowledge, possibly more attuned with their lives in Wadeye. The importance of possessing a solid understanding of western knowledge and skills is recognised in Wadeye and thus these are unlikely to be neglected in any changes to their process of schooling. The community must be given the time and the resources to develop and test their own educational approach. Inevitably, there will be modifications to this approach, especially in the initial stages. Culture is dynamic, particularly in Wadeye as the community attempts to adjust to the increasing imposition of western culture. Thus changes in the long-term will also be inevitable to accommodate cultural adaptations. As different approaches are tested, modified and possibly discarded, educational authorities must not consider the process to be 'failing'. Rather they should recognise all adjustments, initial or subsequent, as inevitable steps in any development process.

At present it appears that Aboriginalisation will be a steady, rather than sudden process within OLSH School. The alternative, a more rapid approach to Aboriginalisation, has been considered by a number of non-Aboriginal teachers. The English coordinator for instance, expressed her view:

Sometimes I think we should just let go, even if it falls down for a while, because as long as we are just 'carrying them', then nothing will ever really happen. I think that is really hard for everyone to do . . . If we did just leave it to them [the Aboriginal staff] . . . then they would get the pressure from the community . . . or from the parents, not from us (pers. comm., 1994).

Similar thoughts were expressed by another teacher:

. . . the thing is, we do everything for them [the Aboriginal teachers], so if we all went, they would do it . . . I think we just don't give them credit for what they can do and we don't acknowledge that they can do it. We spoon-feed them, we give them hand-outs too often. Of course you are going to have your failures but the ones who make it are going to be . . . the leaders (Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994).

The Adult Educator believes that with Aboriginalisation:

. . . when you're going to give control over, you just have to give it over, you can't keep holding on to bits of it because you are not happy with the way some bits might be. That's going to be the hardest part for the school . . . that actual letting go (Mark Linkson, pers. comm., 1994).

These ideas prompt questions regarding the rate of the Aboriginalisation process. The school is of course, following the community's request that the process will be gradual, that it will move slowly. Yet perhaps the presence of the non-Aboriginal teachers and mentors prevents the Aboriginal teachers working to their full potential. As the English coordinator pointed out, the non-Aboriginal staff are constantly giving advice, helping with planning and reviewing and monitoring the work of the teachers (pers. comm., 1994). Thus they are probably doing too much for the Aboriginal teachers – they are too willing to help. Under these circumstances, the Aboriginal teachers may begin to rely on the non-Aboriginal staff, or at least think they must rely on them. The non-Aboriginal staff may also gain a false sense of their own importance, believing their role to be essential, and thus prolonging their presence within the school.

Therefore, each non-Aboriginal staff member should evaluate the necessity of their role within the school because it may be time to 'let go' and allow the Aboriginalisation process to develop without them. Inevitably, these roles will be limited, they will each 'carry the seeds of their own obsolescence' (McTaggart 1989: 41). With time, the Aboriginal teachers are gaining more experience and learning through the non-Aboriginal staff and through their own training, and thus it is they who will soon adopt the role of 'mentor' for the new teachers. This will be a clear indication that control of OLSH School is in the hands of the local people.

Conclusion

By explaining and documenting the educational transition in Wadeye, the importance of these changes has become clear. As the process of Aboriginalisation continues, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School will increasingly come to reflect the culture of those for which it was established to educate. The people of Wadeye possess cultural beliefs and values unique to their own community. The remote location of Wadeye has minimised direct contact with the dominant mainstream society and consequently, the people of Wadeye have adopted only a few of the needs, values and beliefs of the wider Australian community. Therefore the formal education process should be relevant to, and support the reproduction of, their own cultural needs and beliefs rather than those imposed by the mainstream society.

Aboriginalisation will allow the people of Wadeye to adopt those features of mainstream society which they believe are important in the educational process, instead of having these decisions made for them. Essentially, the decisions regarding the content and method of instruction within the process of formal education will be in their hands, thus making the people of Wadeye much more responsible for the education of their children. Whatever the student outcome, the school will be accountable more to the community than the wider society.

In a community such as Wadeye, where direct contact with mainstream society is minimal for most, questions concerning the relevance and necessity of formal education for all may be raised. Do *all* children have to attend OLSH School for formal education? Do they all need to obtain a thorough understanding of mainstream society? Do all members of Wadeye have to learn English? At present, the relevance and importance of the education system is not necessarily recognised by everyone in Wadeye and some children are not pressured by their parents to attend school (Sr. Elizabeth & Dianne Fitzpatrick, pers. comm., 1994). This may change of course with local control of the school, however it occurred to me that in the future, the community may make a conscious decision to refrain from enforcing compulsory schooling of their children. It is unlikely the formal instruction of such things as English literacy and numeracy will be discarded completely, however the community may acknowledge that these skills are not necessary for all. As long as some have a thorough understanding of western knowledge to represent the community in interactions with mainstream society, then others can fulfil different roles, specifically related to life in the community. It is difficult to determine at this point if educational authorities would allow this situation to emerge, or if it does eventuate, if they will have power to change it.

The future rate and direction of change at OLSH School in Wadeye will undoubtedly be influenced, to some degree, by the support and resources offered by the government and the Catholic Education Office. The extent to which these institutions encourage and permit the people to develop and test their own educational models will affect the ultimate structure of the education system. It is unnecessary, of course, for this system to remain unchanged. It must be flexible to allow for continuing cultural change within the Wadeye community, especially as the people adjust to the increasing influence of western culture. Whatever the outcome, it is important to document the process of change at OLSH School because this may have wider use for other communities who are undergoing a similar process of transition. Although the circumstances of change in different communities are likely to be unique, it is certainly beneficial to consider and compare how others are working toward change. Further geographical study in this area may concentrate on comparing processes of change in particular areas of social organisation and relations in different remote communities or between, for instance, a remote community and an Aboriginal group in a country town or urban city. In the future, even pursuing an examination of the changes in the education system at Wadeye will undoubtedly produce different results to those obtained at the beginning of the school year in 1994.

For the people of Wadeye, the process of Aboriginalisation is a step toward self-determination of their community. The formal education process has become an essential component of their contemporary social organisation and relations, particularly as consultation and interaction with the mainstream community will always be necessary. Further development of local community control may also be initiated by the process of Aboriginalisation occurring in the school at present. Hopefully, those Aborigines working within the school will be recognised as important role models for the community, providing an incentive for others to find employment and gain positions of responsibility within the community. Increased self-esteem and motivation should consequently produce change in other areas, such as health and housing and the perception of employment in general. Thus, in my opinion, the school is clearly emerging as an important source for positive change within the community of Wadeye.

From the viewpoint of this visitor to the community, it appears that the people of Wadeye are looking for an affirmation of their own culture to strengthen and in some instances rediscover their Aboriginal identity. Aboriginalisation will enable the school to play a positive and effective role in the process of cultural reproduction, within the geographically specific context of the Wadeye Community. Local power within the school will control the effect of those beliefs and values imposed by outside institutions, which

generally reflect the culture of the mainstream society rather than the remote community of Wadeye.

APPENDIXES

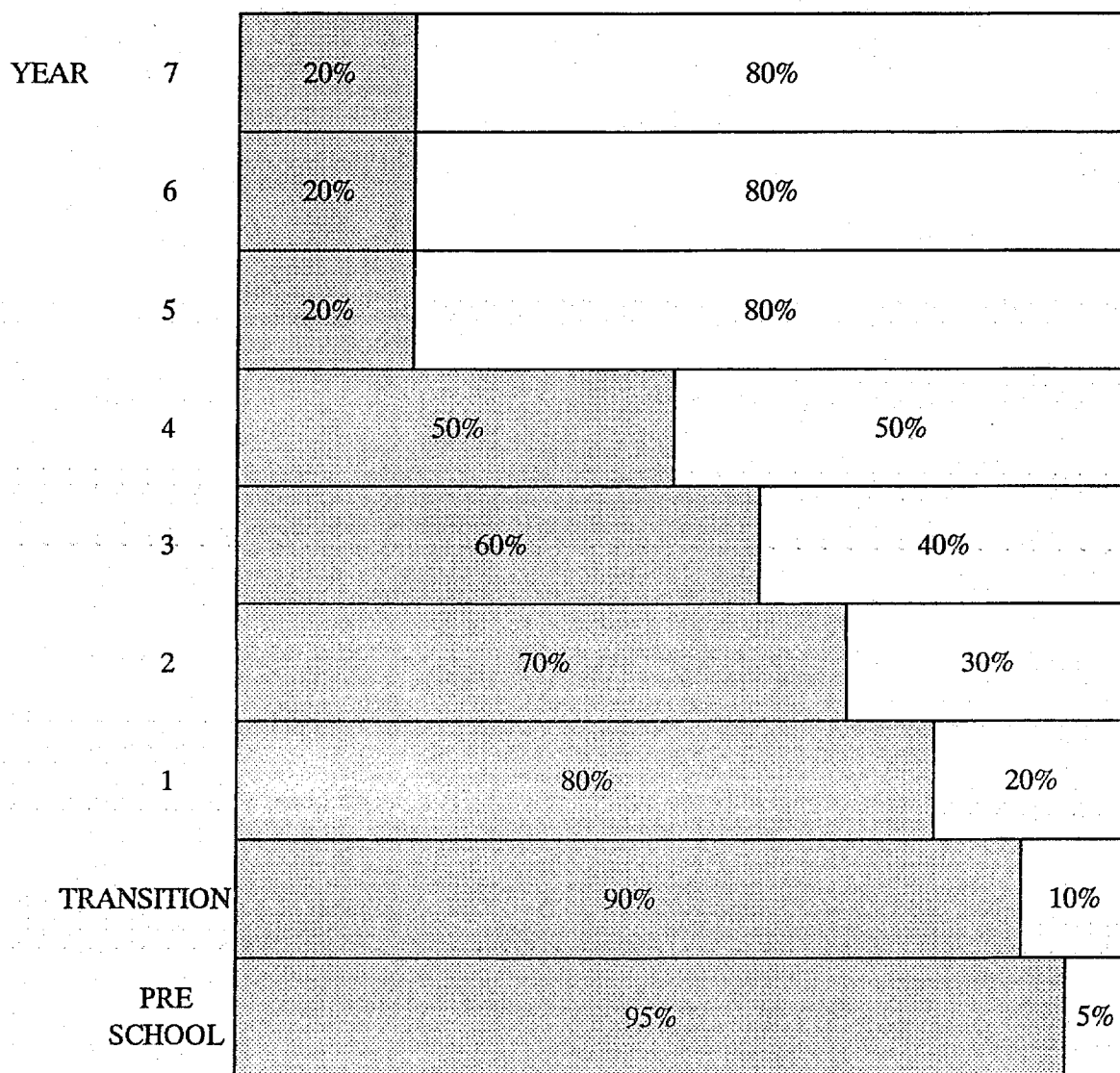
APPENDIX 1

General OLSH School staff list 1994*

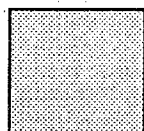
Principal	Sister Elizabeth Little		
Vice-principals	Gerrard Doyle (Computers coordinator, physical education coordinator, post primary boys coordinator) Margaret Rowe (Maths and science coordinator)		
Senior staff	Dianne Fitzpatrick (Early childhood coordinator, mentor) Maree Moilinaro (English coordinator, mentor) Sister Rosemary Walsh (Religion coordinator, art coordinator, mentor, RATE supervisor)		
Classroom teachers			
– preschool	Margaret Sinclair (mentor) Gemma Nganbe	– year 5	Tobias Nganbe
– transition	Xaverine Bunduck Francella Nudjula	– yr. 6/7 girls	Christine Reed
– year 1	Rosaria Kungul	– yr. 6/7 boys	Roger Sparvell
– year 2	Louise Djarkal	– p.p. girls	Ursula Kinthari
– year 3	Peter Bunduck	– p.p. boys	Gerrard Doyle
– year 4	Sister Emmanuel Chapman		
Teacher librarian	Scholastica Kinthari		
Teacher linguist	Brother Brian Graham	Manual arts	Ron Bassett
Adult educator – trainee	Mark Linkson Cletus Dumoo	Secretary – trainee	Cathy Linkson Louise Tchinburur
Literacy production supervisor			
	John Billing	Language & literacy workers	
			Aloysius Kungal Damien Tunmuck Moira Munar Marie Thardim Helena Warnir

*Personal communications within the text refer to interviews with these people in February 1994.

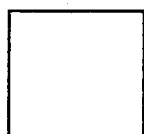
'Model 1' for a Bilingual School, as defined by the Northern Territory Education Department (McGill 1980: 17). This was the model adopted initially by OLSH School, before a formal request from the community in 1991 for an increase in the amount of English instruction used in the school.



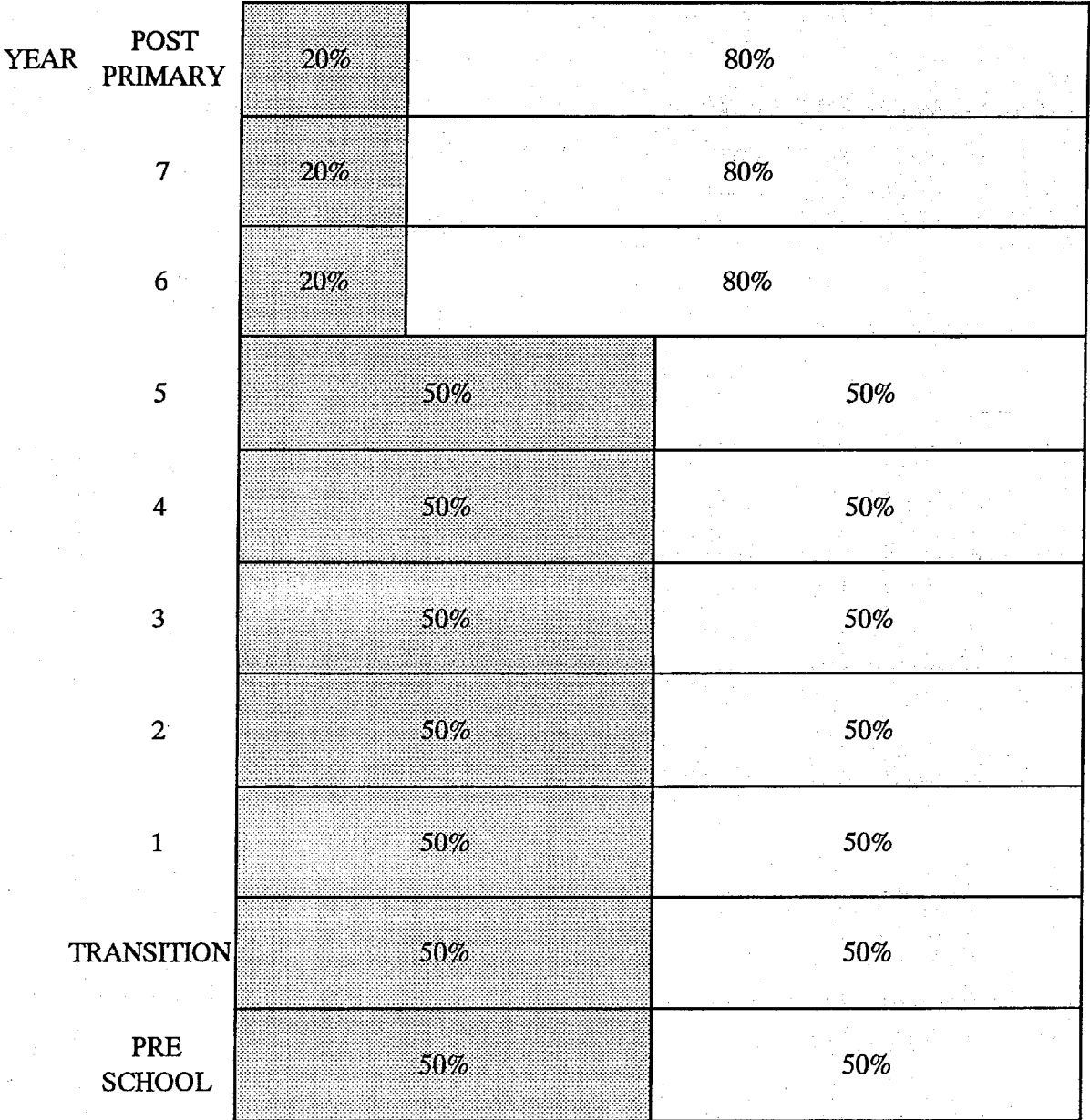
PROPORTION OF THE SCHOOL DAY/WEEK



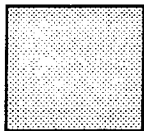
INSTRUCTION THROUGH THE VERNACULAR

INSTRUCTION THROUGH ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Current bilingual model used in OLSH School (OLSH Bilingual Report 1993: 15). This model shows the increased use of English instruction within the school since 1991.



PROPORTION OF THE SCHOOL DAY/WEEK (%)



INSTRUCTION IN MURRINHPATHA



INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH

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