

TEACHING WHEN NOTHING IS LYING AROUND

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talking with Michael Christie in Darwin, 25 Oct 2008

Translation by Michael Christie

Yow, mǎrrma' dhipaldja dhuwali, nhaltjan dhu ga marŋgikum yolŋuy, ga nhaltjan ŋuli Balanday marŋgikum.

Okay there's two things there, how will Yolŋu teach¹, and how do Balanda teach?



Dhuwal nhakun 'e, mali' ŋayi li yolŋu marŋgithirr nhakun nhāma ŋayi li, ga buthuru-bitjun bala ganydjarr-wirryuna räl-wandirr ŋayi ŋuli.

Here, you see, the picture the Yolŋu is learning, he is looking, and listening, then gets energised for hunting.

Ga dharrwa mala nhakun ga ŋorra nhanŋu nhawi malany, girri' - marrtjinyaraw², ŋayi dhu räl-wandirr.

There are many things lying there, resources, he will go hunting.

1 marŋgikum: teach literally to make knowledgeable

2 girri'-marrtjinyaraw – things for going – resources



Ga dhuwandja nhakun djinawany, ŋunhi dhu ga yän dhäwu ŋäma, beŋur bili djinawa'ŋur, yaka nhanŋu gi ŋorri nhakun, dhalakarr lapthunaraw³ ya' balanya djinawa' yän bunbuŋur.

Ga manymak. Ŋayi ŋuli djamarrkuli Yolŋuny dja ŋunhaldja wäŋaŋur ga marŋgithirr, ŋayi dhu djinawan' ŋunhal nhanŋu mulka'yirr ga marrparaŋdhirr ŋayi dhu marrtji.

Ŋayi dhu ŋäma ga, ŋäma ŋayi dhu, bala ŋayi dhu marrtjin.

Nhakun djamarrkuli walal dhu gara gulkthun, murma'murmaram, dämba'tambakum, ga lirra galkan, ya' bitjan bala huntinglili djamarrkuli dirramuwurr dhuwandja.

Ga miyalkkurruwurr balanya bili, walal marŋgi nhaltjan walal dhu marrtji maypalwu, ŋula nhaku malaŋuw.

And here, inside, you can only hear the story, from inside, there is nothing lying around there to open a way forward, you see inside the building.

Okay. So when the Yolŋu children learn on country, they are safe inside themselves, and confident to go forward.

S/he will hear, hear, and then go.

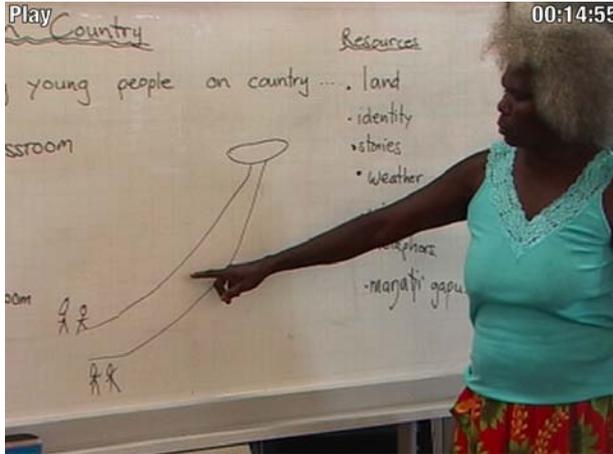
Like those boys will cut a spear shaft⁴, heat it, make it light, put the prongs in, then go hunting, that's for the boys.

And girls are the same, they know how they will collect shellfish, whatever.

³ dhalakarr lapthun – open a space

⁴ Typical boy's outside activity on country

Njunhi nhakun walal marŋgi, wäŋaw, wäŋaw walal marŋgi, ga wataw, ga gapuw, nhätha dhu nurruthirri, ga nhätha dhu raŋithirr, bili wäŋaŋur walal ga marŋgithirr ŋunhili banydji, ga ŋayiny marrtji walalaŋ ŋuthan ŋuruŋiyi marŋgithinyaray.



Ga balanya nhakun ŋayi ŋunhi rom, dhuwal nhakun gapu'wu, classroomdja bala ŋayi li ga wandirr gapu waŋgany yan, yän liŋgu—u, damurruŋ'lila gutjparr' dhipal, ga ŋayiny ga djamarrkuli nhina dhiyala, marŋgithirr walal ga.

Dhuwandja nhakun Balandaw marŋgikunhawuy ga dharrwa ga dhiyaldja djamarrkuli' nhina, ya' dhiyaldja.

Marŋgithirr walal ga, yurr nhawi nhakun dhäwuny yän walal ga ŋäma, ga marŋgithirr ga yakan walal marŋginy rumbalwuny, nhä maku nhuma li lakaram? Theory yän?

Ga ŋunhany, actionmirr ŋayi ga marŋgithirr ŋunhi ŋoyŋurdja.

So you see, they know the land, they know the land and the breezes, and the water, what time the tide will be in, when it will be out, because they are learning on country, and he grows with them, by means of that learning.

(pointing to her diagram on the whiteboard) The classroom is like the law of the water, it flows as a single stream until it spills down to the sea. And the children are sitting there learning.

This here is Balanda (European) learning, and there are many children sitting here, right here.

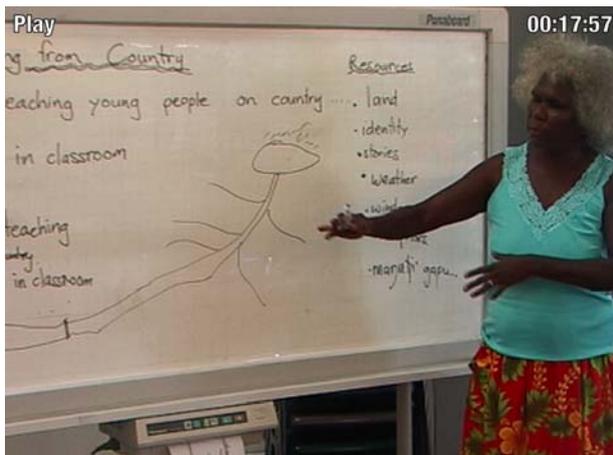
They are learning, but they are just hearing the story, and they don't know its body⁵, what do you call it? Just theory?

And there, (out on country), he is learning through action, deep learning.

5 rumbal: means both body, and true.

Ga dhuwandja nhakun Balanda teaching, ga dhiyala yanara'nur gapunur walal ga nhina, ga dhipunur walal ga educationdja marram, wangany yan, dhipunur bili, dhuwal gapu, nhakun dhuwandja Balandaw gapu manutji, dhuwal ga marrtjiny ga walalndyja ga dhiyala djurryurr gapu yaka full gapu, nyumukuniny walal ga marram, marngikunhawuy.

Nunhi one nhawi picture, ga dhuwal rrakal dhawu gurrupan wanganydhu old man Mapuru'nur nayi ga dhawu lakaram, dhuwandja nhakun buku'u wana, ga wakulungul nayi dhiyal nhina malany, gadany, ga gapu nayi marrtji dhipal, bala dhawatthurr nayi ga gapu dhipunurdja.



Raypiny gapu bala wanawanany nayi li djama dhuwal nunhi dhipal bapurruw marrtji gapu, ga dhuwal dhipal, dhuwal dhipal, bala nayi ga continue marrtjin badaknha yan, ga dhiyaldja, bala manda ga gumurr-bunanhamirr raypiny gapu, ga damurruj' gapu. Dhuwandja.

And in Balanda teaching, they are sitting in the water tributary, and getting education from there, just from the one source, like it's the Balanda spring flowing here, so they just get a little trickle, not a full stream, they get a little knowledge.

That's one picture, and here is a story given to me by one old man from Mapuru, from around there are hills there, with the mists and spiders webs, and the water goes to there, and then the water comes out from here.⁶

Making fresh water in all the little branches belonging to the various clan groups, to there, and continuing on, to there, and they meet, the fresh and the salt water. That's it.

6 Making reference here to another Yirritja water story, this one to do with hills, mists (connected to spiders webs) in a cycle becoming the various streams of water.

Bala gumurr-bunanhamirr, ga
marŋgikunhawuydja ga dhiyaŋ bāpurruy
mārram, ga dhiyaŋ, ga dhiyaŋ, dhiyaŋ
gāna'kana, warrpam' muka gapu dhuwal
Yirritja walalaŋ wāŋa, balanya nhakun
Madarrpa, Warramiri, nhawi Gandaŋu
malany, Meliway, dharrwa dharrwa bāpurru'
malany, walal ga gapu dhipuŋur mārram,
yaka yān waŋgany gapu.

Ga ŋuruŋi walal ŋuli ga marŋgikunhawuy
mārram, dhuwal nhakun ŋarra gan dhāwu
lakaraŋal, ŋunhi gana ŋalapal nhinan
nhawiŋur, nhawiŋur, Warrawurr'ŋur.

Ga wandirri ŋayi li ŋunhi gapuny,
damurruŋ'ŋurdja bala ŋayi li ŋunhi luku-
nhirrana ŋunhiliyi.

Djalkimirra dhārran ga nhakun.

Ŋunhi ŋurruŋun bittja ŋarra milkuŋal, ŋunhi
djalkimiriw.

Dhiyal gan ŋāthinyamirr yolŋu'yulŋu.
Balanya nhakun ŋunhi scriptureŋur ga
lakaram, 'By the rivers of Babylon',
ŋunhiyi ga teaching mārram, ŋunhi walal ga
ŋāthinyamirri walal ŋayi dhu gapman'thu
bitjan waŋa – 'Ma' dhāwu napurruŋ
gurrupul!'

Ga walaldja ŋuli waŋan djamarrikuliny,
'Nhaltjan napurr dhu dar'taryun
wāŋaŋurnydja, nhawi manikaynydja,
dhuwandja napurr ga mulkurruŋur wāŋaŋur
dar'taryundja, nhawi nhinan, bāyŋu napurr
dhu dar'taryun wo dhāwu lakaram, wo
marŋgikum, bili ŋuruŋiyi ŋayi romdhu
djaw'yurr gapuy.'

They meet⁷, and those different tribes
receive learning, this one and this one
and this one, Yes, all the different Yirritja
waters, like for the Madarrpa people, the
Warramiri, the Gandaŋu, Meliway, many
many clan groups, they get water from
here, not just one water.

And from all those different tributaries
they get knowledge, that's my story,
from the old man who was sitting at
Warrawurr⁸.

So the water runs, and at the sea, it places
its feet down.

Standing with its foundation.

But that picture I showed you before, the
students are without foundations.

Crying there to each other, just like the
scriptures say; 'By the rivers of Babylon',
getting the teaching, when they were
crying together, and the government says:
'Okay, give us a story'.

And the children say: 'How can we sing a
song in this place, here singing in a strange
land, we can't sing or tell a story or teach,
because that law of the (Balanda) water
has taken it.'

7 Reference here to the Yirritja flotsam on the floodwater surface referred to by Garŋgulkpuy in her paper 'Garmak gularri'.

8 referring back to the old man from Mapuru whose water comes out at Warrawurr.

Yow, yän nhakun different narra ga lakaram nhawi, marŋgikunhawuy, Balandaw ga yolŋuw.

Ga dhiyal ŋayi li djamarrkuliny feel mulkany, bala ŋayi dhu balayiny gärrri, ŋayi dhu marrparaŋ djinawan' nhanŋu.

Djalkiri nhanŋu ga dhärra ŋayi dhu marrtji, ga nhawi nhanŋu dhu, nhän ŋunhi'i, gulmaram ŋanyan ga ŋunhi barrier ŋayi dhu bäyŋun ŋanya gulmaram ŋuruŋiyi djinawan ŋayi dhu marrtji yan, bawalamirra.

Bili ŋayi dhiyal märraŋal marŋgikunhawuy ŋunhi ŋayi 'mainstream' yän marŋgithin, ŋunhi ŋanyany dhu gulmaram.

Nhawiyu waŋanhaŋur, waŋany ŋayi dhu ga waŋa, yurru djinawa nhanŋu dhal'yunawuynha ŋayaŋu¹⁰ yuwalktja.

Yow bäyŋu ŋayi ga yuwalknha ŋunhi marŋgithirr dhuwanan nhanŋu barrkuny, ga dhuwandja nhanŋu bäyŋun djinawany.

Ga dhuwali mandany märrma': djamarrkuli' dhu marŋgithirr wäŋaw, ga yol ŋayi, ga dhäwuw, ga wata wanhaŋur ga galkirri, ga wanhamal ga marrtji, bili ŋayiny ŋunhi yothu galŋa-watamirr, marŋgi ŋayi.

Ŋunhi dhu ŋanyany luŋgurrmay boy'yun, ŋayiny dhu bitjan 'Yakay, yal'yurra narra dhika', bitjan ŋayi li.

Luŋgurrma ga djalathaŋ manda wata ŋunhi gurrum' manda, balanyaray. We need that, nhakun, teaching limurr dhu märram.

Ga manda Dhuwa manda wata, bärri, ga dhimurru, ŋunhi rirri'rirri.

Okay, so I'm just telling about the difference between the teaching of Balanda and of Yolŋu.

Here if the children feel safe and cared for, they will have the confidence to go inside a classroom.

They have a strong foundation⁹, will stand and nothing there will stop them, no barrier inside will prevent them, they will go anywhere.

But the one who has done all his learning in the mainstream, something will stop him.

From talking, they will talk, but inside their inner being has been truly blocked.

Yes, they can't really learn anything, what belongs to him is far away, and there is nothing inside him.

So those are the two different methods: the children will learn the land, and who s/he is, and the stories, and where the breeze is blowing from, and where it is going, because that child has breeze on his skin, he knows.

When the north easterly blows, he will say 'Ahhh, I'm feeling cool and relaxed', he says.

The north easterly and the south westerly are gentle winds. You see, we need that, we get teaching from them.

And the two Dhuwa winds, the westerly and the easterly are rough.

9 djakiri – foot, foundation

10 ŋayaŋu – inner being – seat of the emotions.

Bapmaram walal dhu, dry-kum nula
nhaltjan, ga still nunhi li ga norra,
marngikunhawuy limurruṅ, ga bulu ṅayi li
dhiyaṅ lakaram dhäwu, mayali' mirr dhäwu,
ga ṅayi dhu djamarrkuli pick up nunhiyi,
beṅur nyumukuniny' ṅur.

Nhakun märrma' ga layer norra, waṅgany
inside, ga waṅganydja outside.

Marngithirr walal dhu warraṅulwuy dhäwu,
ga bulu djinawa' walal dhu marngithirr
dhiyaldja, metaphor-ṅur ga bulu gurrutu ga
dhäwu ṅunhiliyi.

Yaka yän mulkurrwu ṅanydja dhiyak
ṅayaṅuw, birrimbirruwu, märrwu, ṅayi
nunhi li dhuwandja märram, manda dhu
yuwalk nhänhamirri, ga gurrutuy maṅutjiy
guṅga'yunmirr. Ga balanya.

Michael asks: So will the computer and the software and those websites will they help the Balanda students whoever to take part in that Yolṅu knowledge work or will it be still too hard for them?

ṅarrany dhu gurrupan, ga walal dhu
märraman nhaltjan walal dhu nhäma,
dharayan walal dhu, wo ṅämum walal dhu,
wo walal dhu djälthirr ṅurukiyi, ya' balanya.

ṅarrany dhu yän gurrupan rrakuwuy ṅarra
dhäwu, ga walalna dhu nhaltjan ṅurukiyi.

Yaka dhu ṅarra lakaram walalaṅgal,
yän nhakun nunhi nhaltjan limurr ga
marngithirri. Ga nhuma ga marngithirr.
Nhä ṅayi dhuwali manymak, wo yätjkurr,
djuṅunymirr wo djuṅunymiriw. Balanya.

They buffet and dry things out, but still
there is knowledge there for us, and so
it tells its story, full of meaning, and the
story will be picked up by children, from
when they are very young.

You see there are two layers, one inside,
and one outside.

They will learn the outside story, and they
will learn the inside one too, through the
metaphor, its kinship and stories.

Not just for the head, but for the inner
being, the spirit and for good faith¹¹, if he
gets it, the inside and outside will truly
come together and help each other through
the perspective of kinship¹².

I will give, and they will take what they
see, they will recognise, or they will
misrecognise, or they will want that thing,
you see.

I will just give my own story, and they will
do whatever with it.

I'm not going to tell them, that's how
we learn. And you will learn. Whether
it's good or bad, good practice¹³ or bad
practice.

11 These words are difficult and complex to translate. Here we could use ṅayaṅu – inner being, birrimbirr – spirit, and märr – good faith.

12 gurrutuy maṅutjiy literally: by means of kinship, by means of the eye or seed.

13 djuṅuny – good practice.