

## The dancing trope of cross-cultural language education policy

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**Keywords:** Decolonising research, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous research methods, culturally responsive research

### Abstract

The language education policy research based on the views of remote Indigenous communities that is the subject of this paper involved a complex metaphoric dance but one centred on the lead of Aboriginal collaborative research participants. The researchers in this dance, fortunately, had enough experience in traditional Aboriginal decision-making processes and so knew the tilts and sways that ensured the emergence of a reliable picture of remote Indigenous knowledge authority. However, as with most Indigenous research, the de-colonisation process and the use of Indigenous research methods hit a misstep when it came to the academy's ethical procedures and institutional gatekeeping. This almost led to a position from which the research would not recover and from which a contentious but important Indigenous topic on Indigenous language education remained unvoiced.

### Introduction

The introduction of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in 2007 resulted in a set of sweeping changes to remote communities such as the suspension of their human rights; forced acquisition and management of their assets, land and housing; and income management (Altman & Russell, 2012). This ensured a dramatic reduction in self-determination, school attendance, employment and employment prospects but an increase in violence, suicides and social dysfunction (Altman, 2009; Oldfield, 2016). Soon after, in 2008, the Northern Territory Government introduced a draconian language education policy, Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day policy (FFHP). This effectively extinguished Indigenous bilingual education in the Northern Territory for a considerable number of years and undermined community–school interactions in remote communities, including the employment of hundreds of Indigenous teachers and assistant teachers (Oldfield, 2016).

It was as a consequence of these developments that we decided to embark on a study that would be qualitative and ethnographic and uncover the views and perspectives of those affected by the FFHP. We also wanted to examine the policy using critical discourse analysis and thereby divulge the operation of power and ideology (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). What we found was policy text and policy discourse<sup>1</sup> that comprised of metaphors of war, signifying

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1 Discourse surrounding the policy: in this case, this comprised 1. a newspaper opinion piece by Marion Scrymgour – the NT Education Minister who introduced the FFHP; 2. a letter from the Office of Julia Gillard, then Federal Minister for Education, in response to a petition to overturn the FFHP; and 3. transcript of the ABC Television *Four Corners* program interview with Gary Barnes, the Minister who succeeded Marion Scrymgour.

a ‘governing through crime’ approach; language and cultural hierarchy which reflected the cultural capital of the state’s official language, Standard Australian English (Bourdieu, 1991); Indigenous deficit discourse; ‘normalisation’ of the Indigenous population so that they conform to national standards; as well as a neoliberal construal of Indigenous ‘poor choice’ to account for remote Indigenous destitution and academic failure – as opposed to structural inequalities that exist (Oldfield, 2016). Upon analysing 29 community interviews on two communities, we uncovered responses framed in terms of White hegemony, injustice, victimisation, inequality and danger to the well-being, social function of youth and their academic and language outcomes as a consequence of such a policy – all supported by national and international academic evidence (Oldfield, 2016).

Profound as the implication of these results are for Indigenous policy formation and implementation in the Australian landscape, we had considerable obstacles to overcome in order to commence their research at all – ethics approval from western academic institutions. This paper outlines the ‘decolonising’ methodologies instituted in the research process between researchers and research participants and the challenges to protocols, values and ethics that were posed when this was applied to a western academic framework.

### **The Decolonising Waltz**

Historically, Indigenous people in Australia, as elsewhere, have been the subject of disempowering, dehumanising and highly negative research discourse (Shay, 2016). Indeed, Tuck (2009, p. 409) argues that these flawed research approaches have inflicted considerable damage by ensuring Indigenous subjects and communities undergo a subjectivity that “reinforces and re-inscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless.” In contrast, and in line with an emerging field of Indigenous methodology, this research project attempted to positively and ethically present the views of community members, their perspectives and priorities. This meant that we had to engage with participants on their own terms and recognise the impact of imperialism. In agreement with Martin and Mirrapoopa (2003), however, both researchers believed that particular western modes of research have their place in Indigenous research, particularly given the context where Indigenous research often occurs – within an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary or ‘both ways’ space. Both Ways research comprises the intersection of western and Indigenous knowledge systems whose practices, although they may echo the academy or Indigenous knowledge systems, in fact go beyond them and are “validated with participants outside the university” (Christie, 2006, p. 81). As such, the research complied with elements of both western and Indigenous research.

The main western strategy of inquiry followed in the field was that of qualitative methodology. The principal methodology employed in this was that of critical ethnography – an interpretivist inquiry that aims to understand human cognition and behaviour from the participants’ perspectives using a social, cultural and historical contextual lens (May, 1997). Underpinning this inquiry is the view that reality is a social and cultural construction (May, 1997). This also includes the researcher(s) as participant(s) (May, 1997). Indeed, the Indigenous researcher consistently wove between the two roles of researcher and participant to produce some of the most insightful data and analysis. In addition, this type of ethnography, being critical, entails the premise that dominant ideology has a major role in “sustaining and perpetuating inequality” as well as hegemonic practices in particular contexts. However, this approach needs to be tempered by an understanding of how the dialectic relationship between human agency and institutional structure determines the degree of individual (or rather, in Indigenous contexts, collective) autonomy or “choice and constraint” (May, 1997, pp. 197, 199).

This understanding occurred with the application of critique that emanated from the use of decolonising methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) – an Indigenous theory of research that, as with all Indigenous research, has emerged from feminist and critical theory and participatory methodology (Tur, Blanch, & Wilson, 2010). In league with critical theory, decolonising methodology seeks to deconstruct power structures, hegemony and relations in society as well as to seek liberation from these formations (Merriam, 2014). It also seeks to unfold the symbolic violence (the naturalness of existing social order that is reproduced in the “everyday interactions, social practices, institutional processes and dispositions”) that impact on Indigenous communities (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016, p. 144). What sets it apart from other critical methodologies is the pre-eminence of the relational and collective Indigenous-centric position, Indigenous voices and epistemologies. This contrasts with research conducted using nation-state ‘norms’ and ‘values’ that invariably lead to a ‘forgetfulness’ and ‘invisibility’ of Indigenous cultures, languages and people as well as a contemporaneous neoliberal rendering of a dysfunctional Indigenous experience devoid of racial inequalities, colonisation and hegemony (Bhabha, 1990; Davis, 2007; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In settler-colonial contexts such as Australia, decolonising methodologies necessarily entails a process of inquiry that uses critical race theory to uncover white hegemony and non-dominant exclusion in knowledge production (Dunbar, 2008). Decolonisation methodologies also incorporates postcolonialism, the perpetuation of colonial structures, ideologies and practices (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Decolonising and Indigenous methodologies, however, also seek emancipation from such practices of domination through a process that includes self-determination. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) noted, decolonising methodology is concerned with usurping dominant western notions of deficient Indigenous ‘others’ and replacing this with self-determination agendas and Indigenous perspectives. She writes:

*Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples. The processes, approaches and methodologies – while dynamic and open to different influences and possibilities – are critical elements of a strategic research agenda (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 116).*

This self-determination aspect of decolonisation in research has formed an important foundation in a decolonisation research progeny – culturally responsive research (CRR) – whose primary principle is the inclusion of community participants “at all stages of research” (Trainer & Ball, 2014, p. 205). This entails the inclusion of culture and community views as well as their needs and interests in principle research standards. Such standards include formulating a research problem, relevancy of research, literature review, theoretical framework, data collection strategies, presentation of findings, analysis and interpretation of findings in addition to the dissemination of findings (Trainer & Ball, 2014).

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Foley (2006, p. 25) suggest that this responsiveness must have an emancipation agenda where “research [is] undertaken for the researched” and “Knowledge is retained by and of value to the community being researched.” This necessarily entails Indigenous knowledge acquisition processes and interpretation. Foley (2006) maintains these processes and interpretation are facilitated by the use of Indigenous standpoint theory. Indigenous standpoint theory, he claims, is:

*... in the philosophy of the writer's ancestors, which informs the methodology in a science that is possibly tens of thousands of years old. This then provides a context in a logic process that is the multi-dimensional.* (Foley, 2006, p. 29)

In the case of this research, the research from the outset was guided by community members themselves. It was ground-up, arising from “collective public problem” (Hall, 2016, p. 106), and, as a consequence, responsive to Indigenous concerns. It was also responsive to Indigenous protocols and collectivism. Given the fact that one researcher was born and bred in the centre with family and ceremonial ties to the two communities, this researcher was steeped in traditional knowledge, philosophy, ethics, values and Indigenous methodologies that mirrored those of participants. The other researcher had been married to the first for nearly 20 years and had lived in central Australia most of that time so had a relatively strong understanding of Indigenous contexts, belief systems and social collective justice. As such, the researchers could be regarded as ‘insider’ ‘outsider’ researchers, where their western and Indigenous perspectives complemented each other and the western researcher was happy for the Indigenous one to take the lead. In terms of the research process itself, however, while the Indigenous researcher at times became the subject of research, for the non-Indigenous researcher the research position taken reflected that of Glynn (2013, p. 38) – of seeking “a position that is unknowing rather than expert, a position that is responsive to cultural differences, rather than one that marginalises these differences” and recognising white hegemony and the domination of white culture as the primary problem being examined.

The direct link to the research participants also meant that both researchers were known in terms of ancestors, land and relationships to the researched (important factors outlined by Glynn, 2013) either directly or through marriage. This ‘opened doors’ and ensured a rapid data collection phase since little time had to be devoted to developing relationships as they had already been developed or were known (see for instance, Jackson-Barrett, Price, Stomski & Walker, 2015). This relationship to participants not only guaranteed the researchers had an innate understanding of the “lived experiences and world views” of those involved in the research project (Glynn, 2013, p. 37), it resulted in, as a consequence of cultural obligations, a clear case of what Glynn (2013, p. 36) has described as the decolonising researcher position – a position which aims to engender “collaborative, caring, trusting and close relationships with Indigenous people” to effect the best research outcomes.

In response to cultural and social protocols and obligations, there was also a heavy dependence on the expertise of participants in data gathering and analysis. For instance, only those with the collective authority to speak, and with experience, on issues of education were sought. This meant the identification of important elders (which was done courtesy of the Shire office and key staff working at the school) in one community who were informed of the project, its parameters and goals and asked to participate. The initial participants were then asked for the names of others in the community (snowball interviews). In the other community, the status of the Indigenous researcher meant that they could identify and select known key prominent spokespeople (known intimately by the Indigenous researcher). These participants were also asked to refer the researchers onto others (to reinforce the collective authority of participants).

The qualitative semi-structured interviews also followed Indigenous ‘ways of doing things’ since they were conducted orally (with no pen and paper – items that constitute an anathema to Indigenous ways of information exchange), were ‘on country’, did not conform to rigid western timeframes (no appointments and conducted over a period of many months) and entailed deep ‘listening’ – a “deeply respectful protocol to sit and listen” where, rather than question asking, you watch and wait and “begin to get a sense of awareness of connecting

to the ‘country’ on which you stand and also to the people you have come to ‘yarn’ with” (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015, p. 41). The interviews also entailed cultural relevance in terms of themes and topics. These factors enhanced reliability and validity since they opened the way for Indigenous participants to take the lead and determine the data collected (Trainer & Ball, 2014). It also led to the inclusion of a number of key Indigenous methodological elements identified by Kovach (2005) such as:

- Experience as a legitimate knowledge base
- Indigenous methodologies of knowledge transmission, such as storytelling, as legitimate research methods
- Relationships as a normal part of the research ‘methodology’
- Collectivity and reciprocity in knowledge sharing and ownership (that is, the research project was equally shared by the researchers and participants).

It was, as noted above, recognised from the outset that participants were participant researchers and had a collective ownership of the material, so the researchers were obligated to the researched to use the project for the collective good as well as ensure participants could check data accuracy and interpretation. The researchers achieved this through a number of site visits to ensure the accuracy of data collection and interpretation which led to a number of important corrections (related to the ‘normativity’ of remote Indigenous life). The researchers also, in consultation with the community, sent and discussed the completed thesis with key Indigenous, legal and government community organisations and people to effect change. Given the fact that the researchers had familial or ceremonial ties to the participants, there was also an obligation to achieve much higher social justice research outcomes since this was linked to the cultural relationship of Ngapartji ngapartji (reciprocal obligations or ‘you give, I give’).

As a consequence of the background of the researchers and their relationship to participants, the processes at this stage of research went relatively smoothly.

### **A Changed Stage**

However, given the “highly problematic” relationships between western colonial powers and Indigenous people as a consequence of the ideologies of social Darwinism and racial and cultural hierarchies, our decolonising waltz hit a misstep when we changed to a western institutional context (Hawkes, Pollock, Judd, Phipps, & Assoulin, 2017, p. 17). As noted above, historically Indigenous people have been heavily researched using western ideologies and frames that reinforce colonial hierarchies and underpinned the moral justification for Indigenous disempowerment and persecution. Although there has been an attempt to address this through ethical guidelines such as the Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003), the rigid implementation of these guidelines using western frames and the “tightly regulated bureaucracies to enforce” these guidelines has resulted in unethical outcomes for Indigenous research (Hawkes et al., 2017, p. 22). Hawkes et al. (2017), have noted the endemic neo-paternalism in the NHMRC and similar frameworks, particularly as it is applied to Indigenous people who are characterised as “vulnerable”. They (2017) also note the conventions of informed consent and reference groups are highly problematic. Hawkes et al. (2017) also argue that institutional management of such ethical frameworks can in fact marginalise Indigenous voices in research.

The NHMRC guidelines (2003) outline six areas of concern for the Indigenous researcher – equality, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, survival and protection. It is mandatory for

research in central Australia to go through the central Australian office for the NHMRC Human Research Ethics Committee and use these guidelines. The following outlines the problems associated with aspects of the western ethical approval process that negatively impacted on this research. These include the NHMRC research approval process (discussed first) and community/institutional organisational approval for research.

### **Implications of a changed stage**

As noted above, it is a requirement for Indigenous research in central Australia to get ethics approval from the NHMRC ethics committee in that region. At the time research was being undertaken for the PhD, this involved the submission of an application form, the National Ethics Application Form, that outlined such things as research aims and objectives, research design (including data analysis and data gathering techniques and instruments, as well as explicit consent and information forms), background and significance of the research and how it conforms to the NHMRC guidelines. The first ethics application we made was rejected by an NHMRC ethics committee due to data gathering instruments – the semi-structured questions asked of participants which the committee regarded as ‘leading’ for Indigenous participants. Given the fact that these questions comprised part of a semi-structured interview and so would not reflect word by word the actual questions asked, both researchers and supervisors were perplexed. The researchers were also perplexed by the failure of the ethics committee to acknowledge Indigenous agency and intellectualism. The rejection of the ethics application as a consequence of ‘leading’ questions appeared to indicate an appraisal of remote people as deficient, easily swayed and with ‘childlike’ comprehension of the importance of Indigenous language and culture. This is to a degree in line with Hawkes et al. (2017), who noted that reference groups formed to monitor research actually undermine the autonomy of Indigenous people by “questioning their ability to make such a decision”. The questions were also written from an understanding of the English language barrier that remote people would experience and so attempted to reduce grammatical and syntactical complexity to enable participants to understand what was being asked (a discourse analysis of these changed and unchanged questions are beyond the scope of this paper). To ensure the research received ethics approval, we restructured the questions so that they conformed to the grammatical and syntactical complexity required by the ethics committee but this in turn made them unusable. That is, we followed what the vast majority of what social researchers do when faced with the NHMRC limitations and effectively “just lie[d]” (Hawkes et al., 2017, p. 28).

Another issue associated with the NHMRC application was the requirement to gather informed consent through written documentation for a context where English literacy was low and agreement is reached verbally. That is, although the NHMRC guidelines stipulate that informed consent should be sensitive to context, culture, laws and codes where data is being gathered, this is not possible given the strictures applied to NHMRC ethics approval processes (Hawkes et al., 2017). Rather, a rigid adherence to neoliberal surveillance and regulation transpires so that the researcher and the participants drown in paper work and convoluted text that fail to ensure either the ethical conduct of research or the establishment of “a base measure of [a] ... consensual relationship” since meaningful agreement in such a context is usually dependent on relationships and “oral consent” (Hawkes et al., 2017; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015, p. 44). The vast majority of participants in this project could not read the plain language statement in its entirety (despite rigorous attempts to tone down and eradicate the academic discourse). This was due to the Standard Australian language and literacy barriers common in remote Indigenous communities where English is a fourth or fifth language and participants have been highly marginalised from the western education system (see Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015, for a similar vignette). Fortunately, given the status of the researchers in the two

communities, all participants unproblematically signed the consent forms and took the plain language statements after being debriefed by researchers. That is, there was an automatic trust because of the existing relationship of researchers to participants and an acknowledgement that there was a reciprocity of responsibility for the welfare of participants operating in the exchange. As such, the researchers did not experience any of the problems outlined by Judd of outright rejection of consent forms (Hawkes et al., 2017). However, this does not detract from the inappropriateness of this form of consent seeking in such contexts (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015).

The research ethics approval process also required permission from the NT Department of Education to work in schools in order to interview teachers, students and parents. This required a formal application process that outlined the category of research, conflict of interest, benefit of study, research problem, hypothesis, methodology and instruments and any alignment with NT Department of Education priorities and goals. This application could be submitted concurrently with an NHMRC ethics application or after NMHRC ethics approval. This request was not unexpectedly rejected given the status of the Department of Education as a colonial institution. Its rationale for rejection was on the basis of poor research value (stipulating that its qualitative rather than quantitative nature was the key discrepancy, despite qualitative research being touted as the best method to explore complex issues, which this research attempted to do). It also stated that the research project had no experienced researchers attached, even though the principal supervisor was a United Nations research fellow and research leader and consultant of international renown. It was also the requirement of the research submission process to contact the principals of schools involved. One principal was uninterested in the project which meant that it could not occur at her school while the other was enthusiastic. However, this latter principal was later reprimanded for discussing the project with the researchers despite this being normal protocol.

Given the rejection by the NT Department of Education, to ensure we had approval for the NHMRC ethics process we then had to seek community approval through the Shire Council offices. This presented a dilemma given the status of Shires as disempowering council bodies. In the Northern Territory, local communities had been managed by local councils, which were run and staffed by locals. Many of these councils, apart from fulfilling more than 100 council roles, also had government contracts serviced by independent and community-owned businesses that were staffed and co-owned by local Indigenous community members. In 2008, community councils were merged into much larger Shire Councils and their assets and governance seized by Shires. Shire offices in communities are largely run by non-locals and staffed mainly by non-Indigenous personnel. They also have a much reduced staffing level with no independent, collectively owned businesses. They thus do not represent the local community but rather a colonial power that has undermined both self-determination and the local community socio-economic base in remote areas. Even so, we were fortunate to find one relative working in one office while a sympathetic non-Indigenous manager (who had grown up in the community under the bilingual education system) approved our application in another. That is, we were incredibly lucky.

### **Reflections on the missteps**

Reflecting on the research process led us to examine the major western elements that can hinder Indigenous research – the NHMRC, its guidelines and ethics committees and approval from outside institutions to satisfy the NMHRC approval process. While the NHMRC guidelines attempt to subvert the worst excesses of colonisation, in many respects they appear to reinforce them. Shay (2016) notes that the guidelines themselves are written from a non-

Indigenous perspective. The ‘othering’ that is apparent in the text and the vague allusions to Indigenous research methodologies as a consequence of the guidelines being framed in a non-Indigenous framework means these guidelines are problematically applied to contexts where Indigenous researchers are conducting research or those who have positionalities within a transdisciplinary or cross-cultural space (Shay, 2016). Although this aspect of the ethics process was not explored in this paper, it was noted during the ethics application process. Issues associated with gatekeeping in terms of racial hierarchy, paternalism and lack of cultural intelligence,<sup>2</sup> however, represented the most impactful in terms of our research ethics approval. The gatekeeping function of the NHMRC can be highly paternalistic, geared to the protection of ‘vulnerable’ and, by inference, the hierarchical construction of the colonial ‘child-like’ and primitive Indigenous subject (Bhabha, 2004). In this research, this construction became evident with critiques of data gathering instruments (semi-structured questions) and the implication of potential Indigenous participants as deficient. It was also apparent with the use of informed consent and research explanation guides for research participants that were not appropriate for the literacy and cultural context of the research and could have jeopardised the research process altogether. The rejection of the research by organisations outside of the NHMRC, such as the NT Department of Education refusing our research on the basis of poor research quality, was perhaps more disturbing since it indicated colonial and paternalistic subterfuge of research issues considered important by remote communities.

These rejections, in fact, seem related to the phenomenon noted by Aboriginal researcher Marnee Shay (2016) of the consistent construction of Indigenous subjects as deficient and inferior that transfer to potential research participants, the Indigenous researcher, and, in this case, the Indigenous research project itself, particularly given its overt relationship to Indigenous interests and the threat it posed to colonial ones. The rejection could also have been a manifestation of formal high-level gatekeepers steering research away from sensitive topics (Wanat, 2008). Shay (2016, p. 290), however, describes this rejection of research that “serve(s)... the interests of Indigenous people” as a consequence of the inappropriate and even unsound judgments of gatekeepers who, in a display of a lack of cultural intelligence, have “limited knowledge themselves about Indigenous peoples, cultures, communities and issues” but who are making decision on research conducted by those researchers with specific skills and training in the area of Indigenous research. Shay (2016, p. 289) maintains, in fact, these developments represent a demonstration of “how Whiteness discursively operates to keep Indigenous peoples subordinate thus maintaining the power and privileges that continue to benefit white people and systems”.

Further reflection on the research and the gatekeeping functions of white institutions also led us to consider that the research only achieved ethics clearance because of existing ceremonial and familial relationships as well as the work experience of one researcher on remote communities who had previously dealt extensively with remote community institutions. Our existing relationships with people in these communities meant an automatic entrée but the luck of having an established relationship with one person in the Shire office in one community and the bilingual and remote community experience of the Shire officer in the other community was a major coup and a condition that does not currently exist. Both Shires could easily have rejected our approach, as did the Department of Education, without giving substantiated reasons. This led us to surmise that Indigenous research must be replete with project approval failures as a consequence of the vagarious regulation of institutional gatekeepers and the colonial context in which they operate.

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2 Cultural intelligence refers to the metacognitive (reflective) and cognitive (knowledge of norms, protocols, cultural differences) motivational (desire to understand and work in another culture) and behavioural (exhibiting appropriate verbal and non-verbal cues and actions)(Ang, Van Dyne & Tan, 2011).

In relation to this state of play, Shay (2016, p. 280) asks, “how are Aboriginal researchers able to conduct research that is motivated by our agendas, ideas and aspirations in a discipline and context that perpetuates imperialism, racism and exclusion?” Given the role of educational institutions in the creation of a unified national polity with policies and practices that echo current Indigenous policy agendas of ‘normalising’ and mainstreaming Indigenous groups (Howard-Wagner, 2007), Shay (2016) argues their hegemony in terms of gatekeeping makes Indigenous self-determination and the application of Indigenous methodologies near impossible. It would seem that while ethical frameworks and processes associated with organisations such as the NHMRC and government departments were designed to ensure research is ethical and proceeds ethically, the failure to achieve this would suggest that far more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement is required in the creation of ethical frameworks and their implementation through ethics committees, particularly from those communities in which the research is situated.

The gatekeeping function of western institutions was not the only problem of colonial dominance in an Indigenous research space that we faced in the project. The research we embarked upon, to investigate the experiences of remote Indigenous community members in relation to language education policy, while well-executed and conforming to local traditions, had a number of key elements that made it problematically placed in terms of cross-cultural ethics and values. Although the research used a non-positivist research paradigm (and so did not conflict with Indigenous philosophies) and the field work went smoothly and adhered closely to local Indigenous methodological protocols,<sup>3</sup> the Indigenous methodology and the detail of this process was not as fully explored in the eventual thesis as perhaps was warranted. This was due to the constraints of western academic institutions and the need to account for research in terms of western methods. In addition, while the themes generated from content analysis largely arose from grounded theory<sup>4</sup> and so reflected the philosophy of Indigenous participants in addition to the impact of western institutions, the atomistic western mode of analysis (in terms of content analysis and the generation of themes in discourse) necessitated that conversations and stories had to be broken down into separate units. As such, the research was conflicted with contradictory values and analysis, since the atomistic separation of discourse elements created conditions where “the relationship among the pieces of the story are lost” as opposed to learning from the whole story as is the convention in Indigenous contexts (Simonds & Christopher, 2013, p. 2188). This also results in a process of “destroying all the relationships around” the story and extinguishing the identity of those who told their story in the first place (Wilson in Simonds & Christopher, 2013, p. 2189). As more Indigenous research evolves and occurs, and western academic boundaries become more diffuse, this emphasis on western academic research instruments and analysis should evolve to create new instruments and analysis that best serve Indigenous community knowledge and experiences. The fact that this appears to be occurring more rapidly in less dominant tertiary institutions such as Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University seems to indicate that the high tier universities require stronger Indigenous research bodies.

### The finale

This paper outlined the application of Indigenous methodologies in remote Indigenous community field work by one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous researcher – both of whom had extensive cultural and familial ties to participants in two remote Indigenous communities

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3 Similar to those outlined by Simonds and Christopher (2013) in their health research in North American Indigenous communities

4 Grounded theory is generated from data that has a theoretical base of the concept of self being created through symbolic social interaction (Annelis, 1996).

involved in the project. The knowledge and experience of both researchers in central Australia meant that Indigenous methodologies were well-known and applied. However, the application of these methodologies in this research project on a language education policy was fraught with a number of difficulties that appeared to relate directly to the dominance of western research practice. Despite the promise of culturally responsive research embedded in notions of decolonising methodologies that was used in this research – that of ground-up research; community participatory research; adhering to the social norms, protocols, values and ethics of the Indigenous communities – there is continued western institutional dominance in research and ethics processes. Even with guidelines such as those of the NHMRC, that specifically address issues of importance to Indigenous research participants, the administration of these guidelines can result in unethical outcomes for research and the marginalisation of Indigenous voices. In terms of this particular project, this manifested most heavily in the institutional gatekeeping by both the ethics body (whose responses to the research suggested colonial neo-paternalist forces at work) and educational institutions (whose rejection of the research indicated colonial oppressive factors at play). As such, the administration of ethical guidelines almost resulted in the project – despite the high interest in it in from Indigenous circles – not occurring at all. In addition, western research methodology and data analysis also appeared to dominate in the reportage of the research. This led the researchers to question whether the elements of narratives and descriptions had been too atomised to sufficiently garner valuable learnings from the “whole story”. These findings would suggest that Australian Indigenous research does have some development milestones to hurdle and that formalised and institutional processes require an overhaul to ensure missteps of colonial domination do not comprise the norm for Australian Indigenous research dance.

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