

Yingiya Guyula: Teaching from Country

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Interviewed by John Greatorex

Ma. ... Yolngu education on land has never always been where people can actually choose what they want to learn about and what we the teachers, of the land, we want to tell children about what they want to be and what they want to know. We always wait for seasons to come. When the time is right for young children to be told about certain stories, to be taught about how to learn about the land, learn about the history, the time comes when the elder of a clan of the land decides and says it is right for me to go and tell these certain stories about this land to these people. And they start teaching when they feel it's right to start teaching. It is not done by force of time when it must be done. It is done when the time is right, the Yolngu teaching on country. The resources that are on the land are the seasons of the time when the children are right to be taught about the culture, the land. It is not unlike the children, when their ages have come, say, when the children are four and then they start to learn about what they need to learn, as it is in the classrooms of balanda schools. It is never like that on the land. It is when children are right to start learning, the land, the resources are the land, the trees, the wind, the actual seasons that change, tells the story that it is right to tell a story to some children about the teaching. Because it is not only done through ...0:04:10 the teachings where I want to start learning, ... The children don't really choose what they want to be when they grow up or what they want to learn as in balanda education there is a range of subjects, a range of positions for when they grow up, and they want to be a certain person. ... want to be in the task force of police force or in the army or as a teacher or as just a local to run a business or that sort of thing. Children just grow up because the land, the old people, and they are grown up, they are born gifted, with a gift of talent which only the wise people, which only the land can provide. And when they are born on the land they are chosen to be certain leaders in the tribes. So the education on the land is the behaviour of children when they grow up and want to be as the signs tell us; we tell the story to our children when certain seasons come up. Looking at, during the, straight after the Wet Season when we sit down by the beach and look at the sea on, around the small islands of the hunting

0:06:48 grounds of the reefs where we hunt around turtles and the certain signs in the skies tell the stories, of clouds sitting in the air after people have eaten; tells a metaphor of the shapes of clouds just sitting around the horizon which tells who we are, of the Dhuwa people that actually, it tells the story that we are the right people of that country. And then comes a story where our young people can be taught by the old ones as they are cutting up the turtle meat or fishing, and the story comes along, and the children are taught. We have never learned in classrooms, we have never asked questions about what we want to learn. We just, our children have just participated in normal lifestyles for how to survive, learning how to survive in hunting and living in the bush, to be able to grow up and get the knowledge, and then as they grow up, a certain time tells when they are ready and circumcised to go up for another level of education 0:08:42 in the bush, according to the old men, the wise men, and the land and the trees, and the

birds that talk with the land. (853) It's all connected with the learning, association with the land. The trees are all related, the trees all tell a story. Certain bark, certain plants can be used for certain things, medicine, food, ceremonial rituals, ceremonies and so on. So it is different to the education you get in the classrooms because the classrooms don't talk to you. We're learning out there under a tree. We're learning out there in the bush walking around. The trees are always communicating with you. The hills, the land, the air are always communicating, teaching you, and understands every need that Yolngu children have to go through. When I'm teaching in classrooms and when I'm studying in classrooms reading at books, it's just not in the part of my culture, it just wasn't the way that my ancestors, the ancestral predecessors, when they created the land they never wrote on the land, they never wrote on books. They told stories through the landscapes, sculptures. They told stories through paintings. They told stories through looking at the first thunderstorm of the year, standing tall and straight when it calls out, and I feel strong, stand up strong and the tears run out from my eyes remembering the land, where I am, and it gives me a new knowledge. (Pause). 0:11:28 Thinking about teaching balanda students in the classrooms, balanya nhakun dhuwl nhawik bitjan dhu lakaram? – (should I be saying something about this?) Teaching balanda students in the classrooms is not the same as teaching the children out there in the bush. Because in the classrooms it is not the same and when teaching on someone else's land, the resources, the connection with land, you don't feel the rich stories that actually come from the land where the land of your fathers; it really is never the same as teaching out there through ceremonies, through the landscapes, the hunting, and survival of learning the strict discipline on the grounds of the old wise men. The Yolngu people have always discipline through ceremonies, through paintings, ... When I'm teaching balanda students in a classroom it is not the same as teaching the Yolngu students at home because the classroom's in another man's land, the classrooms don't have spirits, they are not alive. When I'm actually teaching on the ceremonial grounds, when I'm actually teaching in the bush, it is not only I that are teaching or talking, but the land is actually talking with me. I can turn around, the buluna wind blows gently and gives me the feeling of what the stories are and the stories are automatically being told by the land itself, through me. When I am standing on my own land I feel confident that the stories I'm telling are right. If I'm telling stories that are not right, I feel the land, the atmosphere, the spirits of my people, the spirits of the land where I come from are correcting me, that I'm not doing the right thing, I'm not going the right way. But when I'm teaching in a classroom or teaching in another man's land, I feel that unwanted feeling that I'm talking in the land of another man's spirit, I'm talking in a land, for instance, in the classroom, that is not a living thing, there is no breath in it and the classrooms doesn't really help me, it is just there to maybe to form a block, form a wall around me, surrounding me. And at times, the stories I'm talking, the stories I'm telling, is not really alive and it doesn't really touch the hearts, touch the feelings, touch the ears of the students. When I actually show photos, the images, the videos of the lands people can understand what we're talking about but when we're actually on the land, everything speaks, the wind, the rain, and it sings, and it sings a song and it sings a story. Every song talks about the land. Every bird singing away, every wind

blowing tells a story of the creation and of the future of our leader who is about to take our place and tell the story when old people are passed away.

John: If you were teaching on country through the internet, through digital technologies, would that make it different to when you're teaching here to the university? How would you feel about that, if you're teaching from :Dalarra or Badaypaday or Landinjur? 0:17:45

Y: It would make a very, very big difference, when I'm actually standing on the ground and teaching, using the later technology through videos, and the technology of what is the world, the technology can offer today. When I'm actually walking around, standing beside a tree, standing beside a rock, I can actually feel that it is part of me; and yeah, you feel very, very much different to when you're actually teaching on the land, when you're actually standing. I can remember once when I was talking on the, standing at Bamungiya (?) talking about, telling a story about when the rain comes, when the rain comes of my fathers, the Dhuwa, bulunu (1914) rain, and it rains on the land, and it shoots out the new suckers of the Dhuwa trees associated with my tribe, the n̄ambarra (paperbark sp.), the gunga (pandanus). And the river running down from the rain, starting off as little brooks, little streams, and then all of a sudden it flows right down to the sea and meets the Dhuwa, the Dhuwa ceremony which is the rulyapa waters of my clan. And in that you can feel a lot different. 2010 Why I'm doing this story, I'm talking here in Darwin, in Darwin University outside here, and all of that story is not here with me at the moment, but if I was actually sitting out there on the land there would be more powerful strong stories coming out. It would be a lot different because this is not my land, I am not teaching in the grounds. If I had to be teaching here then somebody who belongs to this land would have to be sitting right here next to me and to be talking to his ancestors around the ground here, that I'm only a friendly person, I don't mean to harm anything around here, and that's the spirits that we always come across at different lands, that you're unwanted on certain areas, certain lands. And I don't have any stories to tell about this land. So when I'm talking about the land of my father's lands, my tribe, my clan, here in another man's land, it just doesn't make any sense; as if I was actually standing on the ground walking and touching and holding onto the images of my predecessors, on the land. ... Nh̄a wiripu ŋarra dhu waŋan – (what else should I talk about?)

John: So maybe it might be, you're almost talking then as if you would like to visit different places on your country for your teaching, you're almost saying it might be good to go to Badaypaday, if there was mobile satellites.

Y: I would like to be standing there actually singing away songs, telling stories through songs, ceremonies and the images; and there's a story that I always want to reflect, that it's a dry land, it is now a dry land, and the story is it was a reef, and we would like to tell the outside world, tell the balanda that there was a reef where our Mukarr, ancestors hunted turtles and speared. And at the same time, if I'm sitting around just talking to balanda, talking to somebody in the classroom in another man's land, just doesn't make any sense. But if I was actually out there with the digital technology that can actually turn, change the, 0:23:32 can actually express the feelings that I, the stories that I actually want to tell to the balanda community; and the question is, when are we going to get that sort of technology? Maybe it's out there already, it's just a matter of getting used to it and trying to get the

technology, understand the feelings of my thinking, of our thinking of what we want to tell. The spirits that people always say how do you find a spirit? or how do you see a spirit in a goanna? or how do you see a spirit in that rock? It's just a rock. That is the gap that we want to close up, that we're Yolngu people sitting on the land, saying that that rock is actually alive.

John: It's no different to how do you find a spirit in a cross.

Y: Yo. As Christian believers find a spirit in the cross, and it can actually heal, can touch the feelings of the people, the changes in the bondage. That is the feeling that we are talking about when we talk about the image, the image of a rock, the image of trees. There is power, there is healing, there is a strength and there is history and there is story on the images of rocks, especially the one that used to swim around in the form of a turtle; because of the age it turned around to be a rock. Yeah, the spirit's the land out there. It's just never the same as it is here. It is full of stories, it is full of history. When I'm sitting out here, or sitting in a classroom, the viewers will probably just fall asleep because I'm talking here and the stories are just not there, as it would be if I

0:26:28 was sitting back home, or walking back home. Turn around and just naturally there's just the right story for the right person, for the right student to learn. And that's my part of the story where things that will come.Ma' waji (Okay, you say something)

John: I thought that sounded pretty good.

Y: But not as powerful. ... (Laughing).

John: When you're using the technology, when we think when people will be using and teaching from out on their estates, where you're comfortable, what things would you like the technology to do? Things like because there will be some limitations in the bandwidth and the power of the computers and the internet, to pass things. So seeing people, seeing videos; what things would you want the technology to be able to do?

Y: Bulnha bulnha, nhe gan wajan narra ga thinking nula nha wiripu. (Hang on, wait, while you were talking I thought of something else.) Lately, we've been showing people the setups on Powerpoints, videos that we've been taking of the lands, the stories, and they're almost a few years, a few days, a few weeks older, but if there is a technology out there that we can use to be able to actually, I stand on the ground on my land out there, on Badaypaday or Marrnatja or Wulkundiya, or Gupawupa, and have the cameras looking at me. At the same time I'm looking at the students, looking at the people, sitting back here in classrooms whether that be here in Darwin or whether that be down south, and we are both seeing each other as we teach and you're asking questions, and I'm actually standing on the ground at Badaypaday telling you this is the image of the canoe that was used for hunting here by my Mukarr ancestors. So I am hoping that in the near future, that we can be able to use this sort of technology where we can actually see each other and talking, standing on the ground and you watching live coverage of the stories that I'm telling. And at the same time I'm looking at the faces of the students that are actually learning. Ga wanganydja narra dhu nhawi, gandarrnur nula dhu dhawu manapan dhuwal. (So I'll just um, in the middle add one story here...) We have never, growing up; growing up we have never asked questions to our teachers, to our elders. We have never asked them about what the images are, what the stories of this land are. And in fact it is bad manners when I stop an older person, an elder, a senior

elder in the clan, and start asking them questions about what the story of this land is and what does he think of my leadership when I grow up. We have always learned through participating in ceremonies, we are always listen when their time is right when they want to tell the story, because the land is talking to them, because their feelings and their knowledge is ready to be told to the younger generation. And when we're asking questions, when we're asking questions to the elders, senior leaders, to tell us stories and tell us what they think about, the answers are just not there and the example is I might come back and say this is what I should have spoken when I'm being interviewed, when I'm sitting around here talking to a television. It is by, and I'm being asked to tell the story of a land and that is just not in our 0:32:52 blood, it is just not in our, not the way it was. And when I actually talk in the interview, the stories are just not there because I'm not ready to tell that story and the land is not ready to sort of talk to me about certain stories, about certain lands, and then the story might not be fully told what we want to be able to tell. And the stories that people have always, we've always gone back and asked questions to older people; what's that in the ceremonies, how are we going to do; what song is this, or how can I lead these people; and the answer we get back from the elders are I've shown you this so many times, haven't you yet picked it up, haven't you yet learnt. And I walk away and talk to myself, but I can't remember him stopping and telling me, and showing me what steps are to be done in certain songs and words. They never tell you. It's just a matter of participating and concentrating. When they are doing their song, when they are participating in ceremonies, that's when they are telling you and there's no second chances; you just learn it. But if you're actually born gifted, and you already start to pick up automatically that you are the right person for that song, and if you still don't know what you're doing then you're not the right person; and the right person just triggers up and picks up everything first go. Then the elders in the clan say that is the right person to be the next leader in the clan.

John: Can I ask something?

Y: Ma.

John: It seems to me that what you're saying, sometimes, I'm getting back to the first issues when talked about 'is teaching different?' It seems to me something you're saying there, that djakululu like that. And as it grows it's coming up on country.

Y: Yo.

John: And it grows up and it grows up and grows up until it can speak out.. Is that like a child?

Y: Yes. It is like a djakululu being grown up and starting to form by the ants, and it comes out of the soil and starts to grow up, until it reaches the height, the size, and then it starts to speak and it starts to tell the story of who he is. And yo.

John: Is that maybe how some things are different, so you can talk about djakululu but when you're in a classroom these people aren't djakululu or I'm not djakululu. So land is important to that.

Y: Yo.

John: But if ... something else that can't be a ...

Y: Yo. The right stories for the right people on the land of my father's, I call myself djakululu, the giant, the termite mound, the real huge tall one which

is the djakululu. And if I'm the djakululu, maybe I'm of a Yirritja descent or maybe a Warraga or the cycad which is the Yirritja story, and the stories there are for the djakululu. They don't have the connection, they don't have the feeling with that. So somebody else comes in and I tell the story in a classroom, which is talking about the land of my fathers, to a different bunch of people, say the balanda students who don't really belong to that clan, don't belong to their father's, the spirits don't really come from the land where I'm talking about. It has got to be a right story on the right land. Ma. ... Too much ...