



Teaching from Country Yolŋu Panel, CDU, 27 & 29 July 2009

At the Teaching from Country International Symposium, at the beginning and at the end of the three days, Yolŋu elders and teachers gave us their reflections on the TfC program, and further ideas about Yolŋu knowledge, place, and university teaching. What follows is a series of excerpts from the talks they gave.

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27 July

Yiŋiya:

My name is Yiŋiya Guyula and the clan, I am Liya-dhālinymirr tribe, a Djambarrpuyŋu man from Gupawupa which is in Arnhem Bay. Every one of us has totems, and one of my totems is the dolphin that lives and created my land at Gupawupa, and that's who I am.

When the land was being first created, ever since time began, our ancestors walked this land, creating land, waterholes, mountains, trees, land, birds, animals, making, giving languages to different clans, different relationships between people, ceremonies, songs and dances, and most of all created us to live on the land. We lived by that law always. We always have and always will. And that story was always passed on to our forefathers, our mothers.

Here you see a picture of the photo here, of my grandfather and my brother. That story, those songs and dances are still being carried out right to the day right now, songs and ceremonies being carried out. We don't make up any stories, we don't make up any songs and dances, we just carry on what was given to us a long long time ago. That's the stories that we live by, through what we call the *ringitj*: linkages in people, different tribes, where a certain creator had walked through it, giving the right to different, three different, four different, or various different clan groups to participate in one ceremony, and other ceremonies sacred ceremonies, and some other funeral ceremonies. But we're all linked in the land, all related to each other, the people are related to each other, the water, the creation are all related to one another.

We tell the story, taking the people out, our children out, and actually standing on the ground, and from the bush. Our forefathers, the spirits of our ancestors are there with us. We meet and talk about stories that are real, that are actually real and we can actually feel that stories through the watchful eyes of elders, and through the watchful eyes of our spiritual fathers that are there on the ground watching over us, and we're telling the right story and we carry on the stories. Everyone, all the trees are related. And in those images, and on the ground that we stand, is my totem and I call the land

part of me, the land is part of me, I am the land, I am part of it. Try and destroy any trees, you're hurting me and the spirits of my fathers.

And we teach through the totems of our images on rocks, the totems on the images of trees, and the totems of images on the ground. Here you can see where green turtles once used to roam when the waters were covering the land. Here is an image of a green turtle Dhalwatpu. And here are the images of the Mukarr people, the great turtle hunters. They once came from a place called Badaypaday, we were looking at earlier on today. All part of my country. And here my brother, this is my brother, in these two images, he's standing on what is the turtle rock with a rawu and the track you can see belongs on either side, wasn't placed there by human hands. They were created there a long long time ago. And there are the images and in the spirits in animals of all our relatives; there are people gathered here, holding onto the python, which they call their own, one of theirs.

My spirits are in rocks, people's spirits are in snakes like the python, and it's all related with these people. The lady here calls it a mother, and some of these guys call it the grandfather, grandmother. People talk about How do you find spirits in goannas or snakes? We believe there's spirits in there and they are one of us. Our family members, like the Gälpu people, have their dreamings on pythons here, we can see another clan for the Birritjama and they have linkages and ceremonies and songs.

Dhänjal:

Can I just cut in? That's her, one of the ladies sitting there in the middle (pointing another Yolŋu woman in the audience the audience) is myself. We are that. The image is of a python. They are the images of python, and the images of python are those two ladies there. My mukul (father's sister), her name's Gamiritj, one of the students here. Those stories are being carried on through paintings, this is where the young boys start to get disciplined, right from a child, there's always discipline during this time. The paintings are there to discipline the children, they're no longer a little child. They're growing up to be a young man, a young boy, looking forward to one day where he can stand and take leadership and take part in the culture. The spirits of our fathers are in those paintings, we paint the stories, it was painted a long long time ago, and sculpted on the grounds of our land by our predecessors a long long time ago.

Yinjiya:

The relationship between land are all related, different moieties, we have two moieties that is Dhuwa and Yirritja, and different nations that joined in to make a country all family. I have wondered what's going to happen next, is the story going to be carried on and told? Too many changes coming up. I wonder if it's going to be ever passed on. It's the worried look on old people nowadays, with a lot of changes coming around. And further on, beyond, I wonder what tomorrow's going to bring. Hopefully there'll be changes. And we'd like to keep on telling the stories, keep on letting people know that we own the land, we live on the land, the land is us. The land is ours, this is our motherland, the land is part of me and it's my grandmother land. It's my father's land. I wonder what's going to take place next, what's going to happen. After trying to tell everybody what spirits in the land, there is story on the land that we want to tell, but how do we get through to people who don't really understand what we're talking

about, how spirits speak. If you find any blood on the rocks, the spirits are rocks. You move a rock, you're hurting me.

Maybe the digital media technology has answers that can help us to show and explain what we really feel about when we stand on the ground and actually sing about this land and the tears come down. People wonder why we cry. We know why we're crying, but people sometimes laugh. Maybe in the technology there is a solution where we could really take people out to land, where we can actually tell you and show you what we really mean when we talk about land and the spirits of our forefathers.

Dhāngal:

We're at home and the resources are there, and that gives us the power so we can speak out what we want to tell people. And by doing that because in the past, as he was talking, he just gave me some ideas when he was talking about it, we have been receiving most of the time. So with the new technology that is here now will enable us to be able to give you that and make you come over to our side and together we can share what people can have. So that's the idea that came to me just while my brother was talking. Somehow in the end, Yolŋu has given back what we have been receiving most of the time, and we'll come in reconciliation with each other finally. So keep our fingers crossed.

Gotha (using John Greateorex as an interpreter)

I'm talking about from Gawa where I live. How I got to that country, went back there. And how I'm the youngest in the family but how I was given responsibility by my father.

I'm not speaking just on behalf of only myself or through just myself. I'm speaking through the old people, the old people have said what they give me stories, they also check up with other old, knowledgeable peoples. Maybe, I'm not sure whether you're talking about, with that knowledge, or with these systems, you will be able to teach. From that place, from my country, from my estates, to the students here. The technology has been very good. In the early mission days we used to live within strong family units where knowledge and disciplines and ways of living were passed on to the young children clearly and with authority. We're on that country and we look after the country, the country looks after us, and we're able to pass on to the children their one country. One time my husband said I'm going off going hunting for stingrays, and I said "look, the wind isn't right for hunting in that direction". And he didn't listen to me, just went off. And there he was stung in the foot by a poisonous stonefish. And we were driving back to Gawa and he became very ill. When the west wind is blowing then that's when there's going to be greater turbulence and you won't be able to see so much in the water. The last thing I want to say. I had a dream. A big boat is coming. The big boat is here. Why did that English word 'oars' come into my mind? Why did I hear that word 'oars'? So I rang my husband. This thing happened to me yesterday. Tell me what's the meaning of it. Nowadays boats are travelling very quickly. But we need to go by paddle, go slowly, not so quickly. And with the wind. And if they're going by boat then we mustn't just jump on board that big boat and be taken away and swept away with that, carried away so quickly. We need to stay where we are and move at the pace that we're comfortable with. And that's how we need to stay back on our country, and paddle and rely on the wind and the paddle to travel.

Yinija:

I've noticed two different things, two different ways. When I stand here firstly I feel, I'm just talking to an empty room. I'm talking in an empty room. In an empty space. There is nothing to support me when I talk teaching students. And by that time some of my students start to go to sleep, get bored, there's nothing, people don't get the sense that. It's just words and no actual spiritual meanings. But if I actually go out and stand on the land with the students and teach, I can feel that surroundings, the spiritual surroundings, the trees, they all speak, the land that I'm standing on. The voices of my fathers, the voices of my spiritual ancestors are there supporting me, telling that story about the land, and even before you speak some of the students understand already what I am going to say, you talk like that. I have come across three different people. Some told me during after ceremonies, passed away, they said I've never witnessed so powerful, so rich, strong ceremony and they went to sleep. A few days it kept on coming back to them, because we're actually participating in real ceremonies out there. We teach you out there.

But like now. When I'm talking here, you don't really understand what I'm talking about, but if I actually took you out there, there'd be a lot of difference.

Getting right close to our my clan, doing the dance, singing, ceremony. Totems, what was taking place and everything really changes. Rather than when we sit down here. And it makes a lot of difference teaching on the land because I've got support from all the background, the spirits of the trees, my father's, the ground himself speaks, the land itself speaks as well. And here, I feel I'm standing in another man's land. This land doesn't belong to me. That land doesn't recognize me. I'm powerless here in the classroom.

Maratja:

I've come here, I honour you, I respect you. I'm standing here, I want to respect you for the time, that you make to come here to listen to us, listen to the stories. I respect you because on a human level you've come to listen. This is the desire, the heart feeling, the gut feeling, the consciousness of Yolŋu people right across in this nation of Australia. Today we were welcomed by the Larrakia man (Aboriginal traditional owner of the land where the university stands). This is part of the protocol. This is the Yolŋu way of respecting and honouring people. We've come to see you as you are, human beings, and we appreciate people who come and listen, and listen to Yolŋu. Sometimes hearing, you don't really listen, but listening to the people and the land you have to go to places where we come from, our Yirralka, our estates. To really listen. To carry the message. Because some of the message we speak but it's also the non-verbal. This is the message. We are all Australians both black and white, we're all Australians. But a Yolŋu consciousness must be addressed and heard. What is the Yolŋu speaking? You have to listen. Likewise we've been listening, and it's falling on deaf ears.

Government can't talk, government can't listen. We are looking for people who can listen to our stories. And we can come to some kind of a mutual understanding, reconciliation and respect. This is the Yolŋu desire, deep down, the gut feeling of Yolŋu, not only us but the Yolŋu people in the past. This is a day and age where we are beginning to open up, share our stories. Take this as an opportunity, a moment, seize the moment for Yolŋu as the Yolŋu are speaking, because sometimes Yolŋu don't

speak too much. In the past we've been subjugated, we haven't been given our rights, our privileges by the system, but this time we're speaking, we're telling our stories, what this really means, our land.

In essence, why we are telling this, so that we can really respect one another on a human level. Eyeball to eyeball we are humans, we are all humans and we really respect you. That's why I stand up, to respect you, to tell you that this is a moment you have to really listen to our people because it mightn't come again, the time mightn't come. There are so many questions as the picture of my brother, and my maralkur, was standing there, there is a confusion.

I don't know what this story about the Yolŋu, will it be ever come to reach its fullest potential, its destiny? Because we are all people with a destiny, with a hope. And we want to carry that flag, carry that flag and share that knowledge and understanding to wider Australian society but also overseas. And this is we want to share with you now. Thank you.

Gotha

Three elderly women were going off to look for a large yam called gangari but they didn't come and ask permission from the land owners living nearby or ask where to go to find the right path, to find those yams. When they went inside that jungle they weren't welcome. There were things inside that didn't make it easy for them, and were chasing them out, were trying to prevent them from going further. Orange footed scrub fowls were in there telling them to move back, move out. When they heard the sounds of those birds calling out they left all the things they were carrying and ran out of the jungle. When we listen to each other and work together then that will be productive. Just like my husband.

Garngulkpuy.

So you've heard a lot about our traditional ways, the stories, and how does Yolŋu link in with the land, with the songs, with the bloodline and everything. Now, there are structures but wherever it takes, where there's a land, where there's a law, where there's a songline or where there's a kinship term, there is a line of structures and models that we need to be implementing as Yolŋu people in everywhere. There are things and meaningful issues in the way where there is going out into the bush for a yam as a collective research procedure, that is some kind of process that we need to act upon as Yolŋu people to be able to implement in today's organisation.

Then there's another way like *Garmak gularriwuy* story, it talks about where does the source start. Where there's a source, and how the source has to be implemented. How information has to be implemented by doing a lot of talking, negotiating, agreeing, and consulting or any stating, according to whatever or wherever that job starts off with. And there's a whole lot of richness in those methodologies. There's teaching and learning methodologies that should be implemented within the Yolŋu system. And also there are our own structures and laws that need to be implemented, which maybe balanda and Yolŋu can work together to implement it.

As long as they are lot of richnesses, there's values and beliefs in all of what you might have heard today; and we need to look upon it together to be able to see where to go, what to do, because there's children, Yolŋu children, who are suffering and there's a whole lot of new things that are coming in. So how can we implement this Yolŋu

theology to be able to get to the standard where we need to become a professional first people, of Yolŋu people. Because there's a library out there, a good library, a rich library, so this is where I think from my opinion that would be helpful to Yolŋu. So understanding and teaching water about Dhälinybuy on my ancestral land, which flows out to the sea, the source talks the Wangurri clan group learning and teaching methodology. It talks about confidence, it talks about research. When the water wells up in the wet season it starts to flow and it talks, agreeing, negotiating, consulting, stating and empowering. So all those processes give the richness, the empowerment, of all, whether it's Wangurri or whether it's all these other people that link in with Wangurri. It gives power. It empowers us to be able to tell ourselves that we belong to something or someone or wherever, the land, the sea speaks, the river speaks. And then after all, when people come to agreement, everybody, every clan needs to know what we're going for, where we're going to. Every clan needs to know and make agreement whether it's true, yes or no. And this is where all these methodologies, or theologies, come from, here.

Maratja:

I think also about the property rights and things like that, we have to be careful. We as this panel, we know our rights, whom to consult with, our elders, like the yothu yindi relationship that we have, our mother child relationship or even gutharra relationship, that even that we cannot take things on our own neck and run with it. (referring here to the different clan groups – mothers and grandmothers for example - who have the authority to allow or disallow any person to speak of their own histories and connections) We have to also go back to our ancestors and tell them this is what has happened, like we saw on that video, the consultation between my maralkurs here, it's always that communication and coming to ... what is the protocol. We follow that really strictly. And we don't row our own boat, we always go back to our own family and we want to consult with them; some information, you get the restricted, semi restricted, and the public, some information we have to suss out, tease out, unpack it even within our own structures and try to, where that is suitable for educational purposes and things like that. That sort of information has to be sussed out back there, with our people, and we know our protocols. We've been through the law, we've been initiated into the law and it's not an overnight thing, you know, we've been there since we were toddlers with the paintings we saw in the kids, the madayin (sacred) system is really been put in his stomach and telling them that you're going to grow up to become a law abiding citizen within your mind's system of law. So you grow up knowing the protocols, whom to consult, and come to some kind of a consensus and things like that. It's just there it's a system there, it's the structures that we have, and can't be bypassed by anybody basically. That goes for us too. We cannot speak even for another people's clan, groups, or maybe the line system, the ringitj (totem) system. We have got some connections to it, it goes into different levels, shades of meaning and understanding that comes to, that we have to comply with the structures that are in place within the Yolŋu framework. Everything has to be understood by all of us. That is a requirement.

Maratja (in response to a question from Geoff): I think all of us are on a journey, like there's two extremes. We have to come to some kind of an understanding where we

can really find common ground where ... the classroom setting and as was expressed by many of the panel here, out there where the resources are, we feel that, as though the land is speaking through us and telling the story. It's not just coming from a head knowledge. It is the non verbal too, it's the land speaking through us. That is the understanding that the Yolŋu have, whether it's giving us confidence, whereas in the classroom setting it is somewhere cut off from it, we're alienated, we alienate ourselves from our land and connections to the land. And we need those elements out there to give us some kind of a substance so that we can be able to teach. But sure there has to be some kind of a middle ground, common ground for that to happen but those two extremes, they complement each other, the two extremes, there needs to be for the Yolŋu, it's not out here all the time. Maybe up there, to maybe make some kind of a compromise or something like that. We can work for Yolŋu. So I think sometimes, Balanda people come with the analytical mind whereas the Yolŋu are coming from the, we're more global, there are the two extremes but the two are good. Sometimes balanda tend to compartmentalise things whereas the Yolŋu don't do that. But they're two separate streams that we can somehow some kind of reconciliation maybe further down the track, and having those minds, having the Yolŋu and have some kind of appreciation for both cultures, and acceptance, respect. That's what the Yolŋu is basically asking for, we're sharing this information so that we can have some kind of a glimpse, tip of the iceberg, some kind of an understanding for Yolŋu what we are on about, and our Cosmos, cosmology is all about world view, that's what we're trying to convey to you, to the world.

Waymamba:

My name's Waymamba, I'm a ex lecturer. I used to stand here for the last 12 years knowing that every student worked to understand me, what I was talking about. Mälu (Yinjiya) and all the other families gave me a story that took me back to my teaching days. When I used to teach them about land, they used to listen but they didn't get what I was saying all about what my land is about, because there's a different views of understanding. Views are different from mine. My Yolŋu head is different from yours. So the understanding is very difficult to match how we can understand the system of Yolŋu, how we teach it from our side. And every time I used to stand here knowing that my students will learn from me. Because they were very new to my culture, to my language. And they wanted to learn what the Yolŋu is all about. They wanted to learn about how the system of gurrutu (kinship) works.

And how the knowledge is being passed on to every individual clan group that we have. And I used to find it very difficult to make them understand where I was coming from. So it was very very difficult at first for them to learn the ways how Yolŋu are related, how Yolŋu have links and connections with all the ceremonies and land and everything that we have. It was a very difficult thing and very unique. The more anyone wants to learn, the more they can get the knowledge from us by sharing. Because we have been sharing for a long, long time sharing, since from our fathers, our grandparents, and with this new technology maybe it can bring new people to our land and you can learn from our land, so you can get familiar with the surroundings that we have. But if it's, just to bring my memory back, to this very room, it was an emptiness, nothing there, what can we teach from them, what can the student learn

from it. So all the time I was here it just made me realise back to my teaching times when I was teaching here. But with this technology you can go to our places and learn from there.

Dhänjal is my name and my brother is Djalu and he has just got back from overseas and we've got a business rirrpaṅu yidaki (didgeridoo) And we received that many visitors from Australia and all over. We receive visitors that hasn't even met a Yolṅu. And by the time they come a few days, at least a week, they observe everything what we do, sit down with the families, at the same time questioning us, learning things, by the time they return home they have a different way of seeing things in their lives. It's just being with people in the certain area of the country like, most of the people I've come across and start asking questions, I'd say most people when they're going on their journeys doing what they do every day, focused on one particular thing with their hands like that, straight. By the time these people come to us they take their hands and they can see.

Maratja.

I would like also to add that, I'm Maratja Dhamarrandji, and a translator interpreter, but also recently I've just been graduated as a mediator through the Mäwul Rom. Mäwul Rom is an annual event that happens at Dhudupu, it's a cross-cultural leadership and training for Indigenous leadership, for mediation, it's traditional mediation and contemporary mediation, and I've done my fourth year, there's four years in that process. And that has helped me to see the mediation process in the contemporary, but also in the traditional, ... really find and cemented, reinforce some of the traditional methods of using mediation and for reconciliation to happen in our communities. It's happening in the communities and it's really something that to see some of the resources and the processes there that is in place, and to observe the processes. And to compare and contrast and for the two systems of law to integrate and to understand each other, and that has been. We get people from the federal police come out there, not too much the NT Police but the federal police come there and they learn lots about the cultural protocols and to compare, contrast about the contemporary mediation. It's a really good experience. And I've just come back from that and it's really helped me to see what are the important ways, how to approach people; and you know, there's a story even in my culture about the preparation of a stingray, how to prepare the stingray, how to take the poison out from the stingray liver, and how to prepare that through the Yolṅu way. That is like a mediation process, you know, when we take the poison from people, to make them a better person, to accept one another, get that conflict resolution coming together, and that's been in my culture for donkey's years. And to apply that to the mediation protocols has been very much something for; I see myself now, we are like, in the government circles, sometimes we're seen, as Aboriginal people, as a liability but we are an asset, we're contributing to society to make our society a better place. How to respect one another, when healing and reconciliation happen for both Yolṅu way and balanda.

Maratja: I'm sure that what we're saying that sometimes Yolṅu; even, Yolṅu has copped heaps when it comes to waiting for some kind of thing to happen. We've been sitting here 200 years to, and I know that Rome wasn't built in a day, and things can happen for other people whereas for Yolṅu things go slowly, and technology

sometimes is just on the beginning stages. And sometimes even the Yolŋu have no understanding of the Meinmuk picture, good picture of oneself, without all the distortion and things like that, that can be really irritating in Yolŋu, but that's something that's, even that there's the idea that you're taking the spirits away from your country like that, that's the thinking once in the past. But this time we are more open but we'd like to see more clarity in the, good images, not that distortion. We've been waiting for things like this kind of program, Yolŋu, sometimes we don't have, in general I think Yolŋu is the most humblest people, the most patient people that you can ever come across because they are from the land. We know our Territory. We know our land, we sit on the land. And that's our security. And we can wait for another maybe 20 or 30 years but what I'm saying is, there needs to be some improvement with the technology. Something to make it better, doing justice, doing heaps for Yolŋu people as a whole.

Geoff: We've spoken a lot today about vision, and seeing the land, but I'm wondering if other kinds of technology might be interesting as well, like you can hear the land, being able to smell the land, would that make it; I presume that would make it a much richer experience.

ŋ:

Yinija: For the time being you can come and sit on the land and smell the land, and hear the land, visit it.

Dhänjal: There was one thing that I can remember that came out from the mulka' media, at Buku-Larrŋgay Yirrkala art and craft centre, and they came up with these paintings about the land and the story, and then actually the whole documentary was about the journey of where the painting took place. Through the actual land, the sea, and the people. Now, that would help, you know get more specific ideas of a person relating to the land, and how the song lines go. That was just something I've had in mind for a while. I've seen it, it does talk about the land, the song, where it journeyed through, which particular area.

Waymamba:

because the songs, they can take you where you're going and where we're stopped, and where it starts. Not only with singing, the men's singing but the woman crying. When woman used to cry, they can follow exactly the same footsteps and exactly the same lyrics as the man. And go singing all the way and know where to stop. So it's got to do with everything, the songline, the land, the designs ... and all that, everything goes together.

Yinija:

You don't get so much of the empowered feeling when you stand here. When you're at the same class. But when you're actually standing out there teaching from your country, actually touching the objects, the trees, plants and images, and actually standing on the land, it makes you even full of power when you talk, you can feel the hair standing on your back, the presence of your ancestors talking, it makes it more powerful. And I believe the students here through the screen can feel that and understand what you're really talking about from. Just teaching here, one other thing would be that I'm standing in another man's land, and the stories I'm telling about my country over there, this land doesn't understand. Unless if there was somebody that

belongs to this land that could take you through a certain way to be able to make this place understand my feelings, who I am, and what background I come from. But yeah, it feels more powerful when you're actually standing on the ground and that's the sort of technology we need to get to try, even to try to interstate, and even to classes in America, Japan, or other places.

There's a funny joke, maybe we need to get some sort of technology to get to Parliament House somehow, so they can understand what we're talking about. So I remember last month, I can't remember the minister's name, or the politician's name, driving around in a taxi, and he mentioned something about bringing everybody from homeland centres back into major mainstream centres, and he said but they can still go back to their fishing camps, still go back to their hunting camps. But everything, all the policing and everything else, school and major stuff would be in the major communities. That's not hunting camps. Homeland's not a fishing camp. That is home. That's where we belong. That's where all the resources are. We feel nowhere, we're nowhere, nobody in another man's land. That's when we're wrong. Some minister, some politicians talk on the radio, make me really angry.

Waymamba:

So somebody's got their understanding our values, or how we see it. And they think it's a fishing camp but they don't see the significance of that place and how we are relating to the certain areas of our places and how we can fit it into our system of ownership of that area.

Maratja:

I think the Indigenous people hold the key for blessing or curse on the lands. In the past, it can be bypassed and overlooked, no matter where you're going in the world. There's been this overpowering, overtaking, colonization. But the people of the land has got the key for these treasures and jewels that we're talking about from the land. They've got the knowledge and you have to respect that I think. It's the consciousness that I was talking about, about something there. We are, we share that now, it's an opportunity for Australia and for overseas people. It's just something there that we want to share, the uniqueness of our culture, our land. And it's also as I experienced in the Mäwul Rom with some of the balanda participants they're knowing more and more, they know about the Yolŋu culture, they're even more, they're eager to learn about their own traditions and where they come from, whether they're people from Scotland or maybe with the Celts and all that there. To know about their culture where they come from. The systems of law, their coat of arms, you know, the madayin' (sacred lore) system is like our coat of arms, our insignias and all of that. They have to compare something like that. How we've built up into clan groups. They were just a clan in the Great Britain area and in Scotland, and they're beginning to appreciate about their ancestry, their story's like that.

Part 2:

Helen introduced the final panel session.

Garnŋulkpuy:

So therefore we start with the source. (pointing to the diagram) This is the source. Here, at the source of the river, that is where all the database are, the knowledge, the system. The information. That is where the sacred knowledges are. That is where we start. That is where people start to give information about who we are, where we come from and where we're going to. So therefore, there's all these bits and pieces of leaves which I will call (balaga). They are coming down to meet the salt water. They're the policies, the kinship system, the information that I need to teach the children to be able to change, to be able to implement what lies here in the mixture of the water. So therefore I've heard information today and mainly with the water policy, it's already there, with the Indigenous knowledge. The only thing that I think would be best is to sit down with the Indigenous people to actually sing the song about water. And they have the right answers to your questions, to be able to implement, to develop policies, to be able to develop constitution, to meet the needs of a human life, where we're going to, people both Yolŋu and balanda. Where this is a mark where people stop, and talk about things. We need to stop and talk about things and find out what are the right answers, what are the solutions to the problem that we're facing today. And this is the gate keepers person, because the gate keepers person are the ones who can actually open the door, to let you in, to experience what things are here. So that's a new way of creating the traditional knowledge. But the most important one is to revisit where you come from. If you revisit where you come from you will have the answers to whatever you're looking for because we have all started in the same way. Now we're taking a different path. To meet that different path we need to agree upon what issues or concepts you're looking for. Any questions?

Helen:

I have already got three questions that were up on the board. I want to begin with the one that the student forum posed, the student forum is very thankful, the students are very thankful to have been, to have experienced Teaching From Country understood within that framework, and they're asking, okay we know that to be able to engage that we have to first understand ourselves, what we're bringing, what we are, and they said if I take their question correctly, that by telling us why they are teaching us, why they are happy to come here and engage in Teaching From Country to come and be part of our lives, we will understand ourselves better if you tell us something about why you're interested in teaching us, that will help us focus on what it is we need to understand about what we're bringing and how we fit in to doing things in that way.

Garnŋulkpuy:

Many years Yolŋu have been struggling with the way balanda has led us, the government has led us, there are so many things that is instructed to Yolŋu, is for instruction. There is funding that is coming in to Yolŋu people from government and Yolŋu don't know how to control it. That's what people are saying. So therefore it is held in the middle and we are the field workers there doing the big work and the processes are doing, they're the ones who are in the middle who are actually mixing it up. Or telling stories to the government. We should be the one who is actually doing the work. Should be going to and giving it to the government. And we need to understand both because we need to, we are telling these stories so you can understand where our laws, our songs and things are, where we come from. And how

we can integrate that into the whole, so we can be able to understand each other, and meet our needs together, that's why.

Maratja:

We had the maths workshop here, and I was flying over from Canberra to Sydney and I looked out the window and I saw this picture like this (draws square fence lines and winding river as seen from a plane). I saw a river, and next to it lots of pasture land all over it on both sides of the river, and straightaway my thought came to my mind: it's something like Yolŋu knowledge, Yolŋu understanding, our Yolŋu world view, Yolŋu maths. I thought about it, I thought Yolŋu maths, it's like free flowing, not in squares or compartmentalising things It's really free, what's that word?... What's the opposite to uniformity?

Diversity?

Yeah. It's free, it's like the Yolŋu knowledge. It made me think about that. And just like doing this workshop here for studying Teaching from Country. I've done the classroom teaching here maybe twice or three times here, and it's been really really rewarding, a really satisfying thing, deep down in my soul, in my spirit, in my the soulish area, where the soul and spirit meet to really engage to interact, to talk with balanda students. It is really satisfying, rewarding.

Because I said yesterday I told a story about the Djan'kawu sisters and I'm a Dhuwa man, I can't really speak for Yirritja because Yirritja they have their own jurisdictions of their knowledge and understanding.

Sometimes I can tell a Yirritja story, like the river story, she (Garnŋulkpuy) is a Wangurri woman, that's my mother's clan, and I can tell the story, we're connected, but there's a level of participation, involvement that we can play, our role, but not everything.

So I told the story about the two sisters, the Djan'kawu sisters, bringing the law and giving the sacred business to the Dhuwa people, and the Wagilak sisters coming, and bringing the skin groups and the order, how to marry and all that, and it's like law and order is in place with Yolŋu, the Arnhem Land people. It's like a big jigsaw puzzle and this has made me become analytical, to really see things and to analyse things, and look for those gaps and for the questions, even in the songlines when you sing songs. You know, there are even questions like where we are, all Dhuwa people, when we got our law and a system from the ancestral beings, the womanfolk, was going in Arnhemland.

How come there's questions in some of the Yolŋu minds too, how come we're all, how come we're divided into these two halves, Dhuwa and Yirritja. It's supposed to be. Where's the menfolks? But without going into deeper things I think the Yirritja were the menfolk, sort of hypothetically speaking, you know, we're supposed to be all Yirritja now but how come there's Dhuwa and Yirritja in Arnhem Land, that's the question that I sometimes ask. And many Yolŋu ask. They think about, but the stories happen, and there seems to hold a boundary. There's stories, there's significant stories, they've got their own style, their own law, it's a system that we have to just accept and go through the protocols.

At the Mawul workshop, they were studying for the mediation, cross cultural awareness, and it's an opportunity where the participants are accepted and adopted

into their own like they're given the skin names and all that so that they can become one with the people.

Yolŋu has got a special ability to see in people's character their behavioural patterns and all that, they can see you, sometimes more so in Central Arnhem, there's some people who can see even human beings walking across, and they can see ah, he belongs to that subsection, that mälk, they can suss you out and pick you out straightaway like that. They've got that ability. Cross boundaries this is, Yolŋu and balanda. I was walking around in Katherine one time and I didn't know, this man just came out from nowhere and he came and walked over to me and he started singing my song, and he said 'I know you, you are this, your skin is this, you're Burralanj and you come from this tribe'. 'How did you know?', and 'I know because I see what we call the buyu'. Buyu is the, I don't know, the structures that the DNA or something like that, you know, that we can see. Yolŋu has got that ability. I think that's the gift, for this nation, that the Yolŋu can contribute and try to embrace and to accept people from this land.

When you want to make a business in many Aboriginal communities people want to go for business all the time but Yolŋu say no, no, you have to, you sit down first, you understand the law, you'll see our ways, we'll suss you out. When you come to know us more deeper then it's a good place, we will start establishing a good relationship before business. That's the Yolŋu understanding. We want to establish a relationship rather than whatever things like, business or buildings or whatever, entering into partnership or whatever. Yolŋu want to establish a good strong relationship so that they can have that mutual understanding and respect. That's the Yolŋu mind, the Yolŋu thinking. I think that's something that we have to really strive for as a nation because I've heard stories that Australia is like a fatherless nation going all over the place, you know, don't know where their connections are and they're, they needs to be embraced, they needs to be comforted, and I think the Yolŋu people has the ability to do that, to embrace, when you come to this true sort of reconciliation dealing, it can happen. When we know where we're coming from. I think there's something from this land, that we can offer to the wider Australian society. I think that's my thinking. And coming together like two springs coming together, or maybe some kind of a common ground that we can understand and we can respect one another and maybe complement one another, how we can make better our lifestyles.

Because Yolŋu see the holistic view, it's about law and order, how to fit one another in a good way, not to abuse things, our culture, because history as we know now, with the global warming and all that, civilisation has brought that to our world and some of the people don't know what they're getting, they're scared, they don't know what to do next. And we have messed it up, through our clever understanding. Not being respectful to our land. We have to be careful. There are some foundational stuff even with the Indigenous cultures that you have to take heed and understand and find out what this is all about the welfare of the human rights, how we can relate to one another. I think that's my bit, my thought.

Dhänjal:

Just taking from that story what you've heard, as the water flows out, in the songs, as it flows down, reaching other places. Take a look at yourself first, examine yourself

first, so you place yourself within that flow. As you go along, you'll receive information from certain things that you need to gain on the journey. In a peaceful way as the water flows out, taking you on, especially to your destination.

That's the Yirritja water and as for the Dhuwa, for me, mine is the billabong where it's still and the knowledge that both Yolŋu in the two ways, Dhuwa and Yirritja, what is there is not seen. It is there and we know it but it hasn't got a form. So you need to know that. And it all comes out in the songlines. What isn't seen is told in the songlines so that is what we have within us, that's what we want to share, that particular knowledge and the wisdom that people want to have, and they are most welcome to receive that. They have to take that journey in their lifetime.

Garngulkpuy:

Because everything around a river, just the grass, that knows when the rain will come. The animals there know, they talk, that it is time that the river will flow. The river itself, the water coming down, knows where its place is, and how it can come down to meet the salt.

So therefore it is teaching me, as a Wangurri person, how I can build up my knowledge to meet other needs from other people, to be able to teach and train and let other people understand where I'm coming from, what is there for me to be able to be lean on, or train other people, so you can understand what that really is, because that is my structure, my governance, my everything. And I have learned from that, and these are my people that connect to me, to be able to teach me, where I can stand.

Maratja:

Yolŋu people, we're coming from truth, we start off, our estates are different, and we don't ask questions like balanda. You've been trained up to ask questions when you were kids whereas the Yolŋu hasn't. And I'm beginning to ask questions now whereas I didn't have the opportunity before in my culture, growing up, I'm beginning to ask questions to find out the jigsaw puzzle, and I think when we're older and we get more experience, then we ask questions and then we have I think the right, we are more qualified to ask questions then.

This is where sometimes there's a bit of a clash, when a lot of questions are asked, there is some people who feel hesitant and, sometimes we forgive you guys when you are asking too many questions.

Most times it's really hard to answer when there's sometimes you know we are, you might be twisting our arm to do something your way. But these days asking questions is, all right but what I'm saying is we have to be careful, to be ready and have your antennas up, to stop asking questions when we're having cross cultural experience like Yolŋu-balanda. Try to minimise your questions I think. Just to sort of, some kind of, some warning light, you know, because sometimes people might feel offended a little bit or maybe sometimes, like I said, we're coming from different, the same point. I'm asking questions now even about my culture, I'm becoming analytical like thinking I've got, starting to ask questions now. But I didn't have that before. Maybe it's the Western understanding or Western thinking that is coming through my education, like I'm beginning to explore to become analytical, I don't know, maybe it is, I have to watch out myself too, when I'm approaching my elders. I'm not to ask too many questions. Because knowledge is power, knowledge is something you can make people

or break people. You can abuse and sometimes you know, people are in a position where I can't give this, some of our people are very clever, when you ask questions they'll tell you another story, when you ask for more, because what they see, they look for, is maturity in that person. Because he can't handle that answer or whatever and they think you might abuse this knowledge. We talked about copyright the other day. They might abuse this. What is this ceremony, it comes from the land. It's from this place. So people are willing to share but some people are, particularly old people, they are really clever people, they might be sitting down there doing nothing but they're always thinking about the protocols, thinking about their structure, how to look after their clan, law and order. So that they can balance. They're always thinking like that, the old people.