Tjitji kutjuparriku (in Ngaanyatjarra) - Tjitji Tjiyinytjiku (in Pintupi) - “The changing nature of childhood”

A study of children’s practices from a Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi perspective in Australia: An interpretive approach to socialisation.

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Please note: This research is currently in the data collection phase. This paper seeks to provide an overview of the current body of literature, an outline of the proposed methodological framework used in this unique child centred, collaborative and multi-sited ethnography and details of emerging themes from recent fieldwork.

Keywords
Indigenous Australia; children’s practices; Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi; childhood; cultural variations.

Positionality
As a non-indigenous author, I seek to privilege the voices of First Nations Peoples throughout this article and the research process. I am a non-indigenous researcher who has worked in the education sector since 2011 in this geographical region. I have worked across all communities in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi region as an early years educator, early years consultant, training facilitator and adult educator. My positionality stems from Narayan’s (1993) paradigm of “insider/outsider” and contradictory to “native and non-native” and “indigenous and non-indigenous”. From my interaction with Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Peoples over the last eight years, together we have collaborated side-by-side to develop culturally responsive teaching and learning methods which align with constructivist grounded theory. In this research, constructivist grounded theory will provide a foundation for Yarnangu (Ngaanyatjarra)/Anangu (Pintupi) community-based research collaborators, the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Early Years
Group [NPEYG] and Walypala (non-indigenous) researchers to collect and analyse data simultaneously in first languages. Aligning with the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008), Article 14, this research seeks to provide a platform for Yarnangu and Anangu Peoples to govern their own educational structures. In addition, I hope to co-construct a framework to open communication with Yarnangu, Anangu and Walypala early years educators to discuss culturally appropriate methods of teaching and learning for Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi children.

**Explanation of terms**

Understanding terms and how they are used in the context of local knowledge systems and contemporary life is very important to the culture and values of First Nation Peoples in Australia.

**Anangu** - The people, separate from plants, animals, land (Luritja, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara language groups).

**Anglo-European** - non-Yarnangu/non-Anangu.

**Children’s practices** - The term ‘play’ has not been used as the concept needs to be ethnographically problematised to see if it can be transferred cross-culturally. For this research, the term ‘children’s practices’ has been used to collectively refer to all movements, social interactions and behaviours of children.

**Cultural variations** - cultural practices that differ from individuals or collections of individuals deriving from a specific ethnic group association (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

**Tjitji kutjuparriku** - changing children (Ngaanyatjarra).

**Tjitji Tjiyinytjiku** – changing children (Pintupi).

**Remote community** - Using the *Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia*, all communities in this study are classified as ‘very remote’. Very remote is based on the distances people must travel to get to service centres where they can access goods, services and have opportunities for social interaction (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2001).

**Yarnangu** - The people, separate from plants, animals, land (Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra, Manytjiltjarra language groups).

**Walypala** - Non-indigenous person (Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra, Manytjiltjarra, Luritja, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara language groups).
Introduction

Around age three, indigenous children in remote communities in Australia undertake a major transition from the home to formal schooling. This very important period of child development is typically monitored by non-indigenous educators. Yet these educators typically know little about indigenous child development of children aged two to six. Children whose home language and cultural practices differ from the mainstream are being disadvantaged when making the transition from home to school and this plays out as youngsters progress through schooling. Despite copious efforts, the ‘gap’ between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is continuing to widen, particularly in education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016; Ford, 2010; Osborne & Guenther, 2013; Price, 2015). Children are “learning to learn” (Bateson, 1972) through play, yet we know little about the nature of childhood practices in remote indigenous settings. This study will investigate: what is the everyday practice for children in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands; its impact on the development of social, cognitive and linguistic skills required for the commencement of formal education; the relationship between child practices and learning in early childhood and pre-school settings; and the impact of child practices on language socialisation and enculturation.

From an Anglo-European standpoint, play is a crucial component of child development as it enables an exploration of ‘lifeworlds’ where children can mimic real life situations through meaningful and thoughtful experiences to make sense of their world. However within the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi context, the concept of play needs to be ethnographically problematised to see if it can be transferred cross-culturally. Australian indigenous early childhood policy and programs are dominated by Anglo-European values and practices and are driven by deficit discourse. This study seeks to describe the process of acquiring social and cultural practices that enable a child to become a dynamic, knowledgeable participant in a remote indigenous context from a strengths perspective (Heath, 2008; Ochs, 2000). As a child-centred ethnography, the study will provide insights into how to develop positive collaborations between indigenous families and early years’ educators that will provide the missing link between home play activities and pre-school education. Through this research, Yarnangu and Anangu families will be able to reflect on everyday out-of-school practices of children through environmental cultural variations such as time, objects, language, place, technology and social relationships. To provide effective early childhood education, policies
and practices, we must identify the strengths and goals of indigenous peoples to successfully respond to their needs.

**The Field**

This study is situated in three remote communities in the Western Desert region of Australia, namely, Kiwirrkura, Warakurna (Figure 1) and Warburton. These communities are part of a region known as the ‘Ngaanyatjarra Lands’. For this research, I have included the regional name ‘Pintupi’ in the title to be fully inclusive of the key language groups of whom I am collaborating with. Within this region, speakers of the mutually intelligible Western Desert dialects Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra, Manytjiltjarra, Pintupi and Pitjantjatjara dwell (Ellis, Kral, & Green, 2017) (Figure 2). The region is comprised of over 250,000 square kilometres in Western Australia, “approximately 3 percent of mainland Australia” (Kral, 2012, p. 14). There are thirteen remote communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, namely, Cosmo Newberry, Irrunytju, Warakurna, Mantamaru, Papulankutja, Patjarr, Kanpa, Tjirrkarli, Tjukurla, Warakurna, Wanarn, Warburton and Kiwirrkura. Each of the communities has its own unique sequence of events within the collective history of the region.

![Figure 1: Warakurna Remote Community. Retrieved from: https://www.ngaanyatjarra.org.au/](https://www.ngaanyatjarra.org.au/)

The Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Peoples have had uninterrupted life on their land. This was largely due to remoteness as the act of dislocation and distress arising from the ‘stolen generation’ experience not effecting this area. Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi People have never left their country and “the difference in the quality of the ‘people to country’ bond is palpable”
(Brooks, 2002, p. 78). This site was chosen because it provides a unique set of influences and a diverse range of local histories in which the study of childhood learning and the impact of
cultural variations can be explored. Within the Western Desert region, the changing nature of childhood has not been investigated from an education and anthropological lens. I have worked in this region in the early childhood education and adult learning sector for the past eight years, including the completion of Master’s fieldwork and thesis from 2013 to 2016. From these experiences, I began to consider children’s practices, play and learning, and the bridge between family and school. As an early childhood teacher, I saw children arriving in the classroom as fluent first-language speakers but with limited knowledge of Standard Australian English and with limited preparation for formal learning that is required for the school setting. This is due to limited or no access to pre-school programs prior to arriving but also the disjuncture between out-of-school learning and in-school learning.

I began regularly visiting the community shop, houses, clinic and other locations in the community to meet the families and to observe the child rearing practices that were taking place. These observations allowed me to better cater for the children when they arrived in the classroom environment. In 2011, I began using Montessori teaching and learning practices in my remote early childhood setting to try to bridge the gap between home and school life. As a result, I completed a Masters of Education (by dissertation) entitled, “The introduction of Montessori teaching and learning practices in an early childhood classroom in a remote indigenous school.” In 2015 and 2016, I travelled to Italy to complete Montessori training to learn more about the Montessori pedagogy. These observations and professional learning experiences catalysed my desire to study this important area further to better understand the nature of childhood in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi region and how cultural variations impact learning in out-of-school learning.

The ‘roots’ of childhood and the change in childhood through cultural variations
Culture changes within communities and participants are a key component of cultural transmission (Rogoff, 2003).

* A community involves generations that move through it, with customary ways of handling the transitions of generations. To continue to function, a community also adapts with changing times, experimenting with and resisting new ideas in ways that maintain core values while learning changes that are desired or required (Rogoff, 2003, p. 81).
To date, the majority of human development research has been carried out in “middle-class communities in Europe and North America” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 4) and from this research generalisations are broadened to universal terms. Professor Mick Dodson is a Yawuru man from the Broome region of Australia and in his 1994 speech, *The End of the beginning: Re(de)fining Aboriginality*, he quotes a Guatemalan woman:

> Many things are changing in this time. But we remain Indigenous... Although certain things have changed in our thoughts, in our statements, in our traditions... We did not quit being what we are. There are always these roots that make you who you are. That make you different from the others (p.2).

Professor Dodson, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at that time adds, “The roots which make us what we are the connection between the past and the present”. Through this study, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi children and families will be provided with a platform to outline their own ‘roots’ relating to childhood and document Yarnangu and Anangu “timetables” of child development. A timetable is how different cultural communities expect their children to engage in activities at different times of development (Rogoff, 2003). When another cultures timetable is applied to another context, it can be “surprising or even dangerous” for the children and families of that community (Rogoff, 2003, p. 4). With the partnership of Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi community-based research collaborators, we seek to outline the out-of-school ‘timetable’ of child development in the region.

**Child language socialisation and practices research**

Cultural research is significant as it provides a foundation for all human beings to not be situated as ‘the same’. Cultural research in human developments seeks to:

> Move beyond overgeneralisations that assume human development everywhere functions in the same ways as in researchers’ own communities, and to be able to account for both similarities and differences (Rogoff, 2003, p. 7).

Children in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands have experienced a great level of cultural change with in ‘invasion’ of Walypala settlers and explorers through religious missions, processed food, shops, Anglo-European schools, Anglo-European health care, digital technology, written language, polychronic time measures, industrial services and utilities such
as: electricity and Anglo-European health care, to name a few. To document the change and cultural variations of childhood in the region, we will adopt a sociocultural-historical approach. Lev Vygotsky and his team laid the pathway for the sociocultural-historical theory through the process of integrating “social, cultural and historical context” to “integrate individual development” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50).

Through the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky argued that it is through the child’s skills and tools that they learn in their culture, that he or she can participate effectively in activities and learning and scholars have supported these claims (Heath, 1983, 1989, 1991; Miller, 1982; Ochs, 1988; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Rogoff et al., 1993). These cultural tools and skills are transgenerational and change over time through adaptation. However, Rogoff (1990, 1998) argues further that human development is the combination of individual participation and sociocultural change from others. As children participate in cultural activities with others, they develop their tools and skills. I agree with Rogoff and seek to understand this process in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands to better bridge the ‘two worlds of childhood’- Walypala way and the Yarnangu/Anangu way. I hope to characterise childhood through the dynamic development and constantly shifting cultural community in the Western Desert. I seek to understand the “rituals of daily care” (Health, 2008, p. ix in Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008).

Universally, there has been a range of studies relating to play, childhood and language socialisation (Bowen, 2015; DeMarrais, Nelson, & Baker, 1992; Friedl, 2004; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Maynard & Tovote, 2010; McConnochie & Russell, 1982; Mead, 1928, 1930; Morton, 1996; Munroe & Gauvain, 2010; Raum, 1940; Watson-Gegeo, 2001). I seek to address the lacuna in literature on play and child practices in the Western Desert Australia. Currently childhood studies in the region have focused on youth and adolescence (Kral, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013; Kral & Heath, 2013) and there has been limited literature on childhood, specifically early childhood (Ellis et al., 2017; Jacobs, 1988; Kral & Ellis, 2008; Shaw, 2002).

Anthropologist, Zazie Bowen conducted research in Odisha, a rural northern village in India exploring the relationship between peer play and local landscapes. Findings indicated that “play is foremost an exercise of adaptive flexibility” and games, accompanying play, provided an “open-ended context within which to develop their own peer responses to their social and spatial circumstances” (p. 330). Like Bowen (2015), I aim to understand how play/children’s practices impact learning in relation to place, space and social interactions but also through
objects, time, digital technology. However, firstly the concept of play needs to be cultural problematised to see if it cross-culturally correlates.

In Australia, a range of research has been carried out in other First Nation contexts related to play, childhood and language socialisation (Byers, Kulitja, Lowell, & Kruske, 2012; Disbray, 2008; Eickelkamp, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2010, 2011; Fasoli & Moss, 2007; Haagen, 1994; Kruske, Belton, Wardaguga, & Narjic, 2012; Lowell, Maypilama, Fasoli, Gundjarranbuy, Godwin-Thompson, et al., 2018; Lowell, Maypilama, Fasoli, Gundjarranbuy, Yunupiŋu, et al., 2018; Moss, Harper, & Silburn, 2015; Ryan, 2011; Shaffer, 2006; Shaw, 2002; Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008; Tamisari & Milmilany, 2003; Tonkinson, 2011). There have been a range of studies relating to child rearing practices (Hamilton, 1981; Jewell, 2008; Palyapayi, 2001; Priest, King, Brown, Nangala, & Nangala, 2007). In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Gillian Shaw conducted research in the field of child rearing practices specifically in Warburton and I hope to build on her work (2002). Similar to Lowell, Maypilama, Fasoli, Gundjarranbuy, Yunupiŋu, et al. (2018), I will use a combination of both a constructivist grounded and a collaborative approach to carry out the research process however, I will also work side-by-side with community-based collaborators. This is due to my years of experience working alongside Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Peoples to explore the local process of how children are participants in the transmission of culture (Schwartz, 1981).

**Two cultures – ‘two worlds’**

Contemporary Australian society expects First Nation Peoples to live between ‘two worlds’. The two earliest pieces of literature relating to ‘two worlds’ are: 1) *The People in Between* by Winified Hillard (1968), a non-fiction book about Pitjantjatjara people of Ernabella and 2) *Boy Between Two Worlds*, a fiction text about Tjakamarra, a young desert boy by Mary Durack in 1977. However, today in contemporary society, the rhetoric lives on. In 2006, Channel 9 (an Australian television channel) opened the Wadeye Program (a show about a community in the Northern Territory) with “the young people of Wadeye are caught between two worlds” (McCoy, 2009). In relation to two worlds and assimilation, recently at the Garma Festival in the Northern Territory, William Tilmouth, an Arrernte man from the Central Australia and the Founding Director of Children’s Ground, stated:

_I am mix-matched – a creation by others who decided they knew what was best for me. I am a product of assimilation. I am a product of being denied my_
identity, my family, my country, culture and my language. In the west I am a success. I was the kid who came good – became a model working citizen, living in my own home, paying my rent in advance, hiding my identity and keeping my relatives at a distance. What you see today, you might think is acceptable – but to me it’s not (2018).

McCoy (2009) suggests there are two cultures in Australia: the “western and white world-view” (Anglo-European) and the “indigenous and ‘traditionalist’ world” however at times, they may “unite, blend, amalgamate, compromise and negotiate” (p.21). First Nation Peoples continually shift between the two cultures. Culture should not be viewed as static and it is important to note that Australian culture is evolving and shifting to reflect contemporary society however, assimilation cannot be the answer to the production of contemporary society, nor can indigenous culture be viewed as ‘past’, ‘historic’ or ‘static’. Australian society must pave the way for a modern inclusive society encapsulating a multi-cultural and culturally responsive population.

In this research, the bridging of two worlds, refers to the two worlds of Walypala way and the Yarnangu/Anangu way. The Walypala way is comprised of dominant Anglo-European discourses and Yarnangu/Anangu way is related to childhood practices in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi region of the Australian Western Desert. As an early years educator in the region, I was constantly being made aware of the importance of the two worlds and this research aims to provide a platform in which these two worlds can come together harmoniously, instead of being counter-intuitive for children their families. From my experiences, I have witnessed the two worlds damaging one-other and subsequently, like Mr Tilmouth’s life experiences, the child can be left in ‘limbo’- culturally, linguistically, socially and academically.

A recent paper by Lowell, Maypilama, Fasoli, Gundjarranbuy, Yunupingu, et al. (2018), entitled, We’re still being dragged to be white: Learning from Yolŋu growing up children in two worlds, presents a longitudinal case study conducted by Yolŋu researchers developing research founded on a strengths-based approach. The authors suggest that Yolŋu Peoples feel that they are forced to be white in the space of early childhood education and this is represented in current national policy, Closing the Gap (a government strategy established in 2008, that aims to reduce disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and
employment outcomes). This policy is driven by deficit discourse (Kukutai & Walter, 2015; Pholi, 2009) and in 2017, cartoonists Alan Moir, presented the process of ‘closing the gap’ in a cartoon in the Sydney Morning Herald (Figure 3).


This research seeks to challenge deficit focused policies and practices that shape early childhood education and aims to highlight the importance of combining Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi language and culture and Anglo-European language and culture in early years learning programs to support a strengths-based place-based approach to learning that mirrors sociocultural contexts, honours indigenous culture and is framed by shared values (Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Priest et al., 2007).

William Tilmouth further commented at the Garma Festival, “Our [First Nation] kids don’t need to be fixed. Our kids need to grow up as Aboriginal children with rights and opportunities, with a voice and the ability to control their own destination.” In line with Mr Tilmouth’s comment and similar to the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s national early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki (1996), I hope to deepen the literature of childhood in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands to highlight that children do not need to be ‘fixed’ however, early childhood education must use a culturally appropriate approach to protect Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi language and
cultural practices, and the transmitting of Yarnangu and Anangu knowledge, pedagogy, skills, and attitudes should be carried out through the use of Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi language. Australia is over two decades behind New Zealand’s place-based approach to early childhood education and it’s time to reconfigure and set a new way forward for contemporary life in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands.

Reconfiguring childhood

Popular Anglo-European epistemologies for First Nation education programs have continued to dominate early childhood pedagogy and practice in First Nation communities in Australia and are derived from a deficit discourse. This is the “result of deeply paternalistic policy approaches based on evidence based decision-making that are detached from local realities” (Emery & Habel, 2017, p. 17). Mick Gooda (2009), a Gangulu man from Central Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (from 2010 to 2016) and the Royal Commissioner for the Royal Commission into the Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems in the Northern Territory (from 2016 to 2017) stated, “We (Aboriginal people) are constantly playing to and highlighting what are perceived to be our weaknesses – we are always playing catch-up. I would prefer to play to our strengths as Aboriginal people” (p. 2). This research aims to provide a paradigmatic shift towards the combination of early years education and cultural variations, to strengths-based approach that is founded upon local First Nations knowledge systems (Gooda, 2009; Gorringe, Ross, & Fforde, 2011; Sarra, 2005).

Affrica Taylor (2013) refers to this shift in her text, Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood and suggests adopting a “common worlds framework” (p. 61). A common world framework seeks to “not only add a new relationship to nature and childhood, but also portends a shift in understandings about the ‘nature’ of learning and gestures towards some new pedagogical possibilities” (p. 119). Through this type of framework, Taylor argues that educators can tackle twenty-first-century issues. In this thesis, I argue that through this type of framework, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Peoples will be able to drive their own pedagogy to support local knowledge systems by exploring and problematising cultural variations (e.g. time, objects, language, place, technology and social relationships).

The role of Early Childhood Education [ECE] in childhood

High quality early childhood education programs provide children with the best start of life and the benefits are seen throughout all stages of life (Dodge, 2004; Harrison, Goldfeld, Metcalfe, &
Moore, 2012; Heckman, 2000; Hertzman, Tremblay, Boivin, & DeV, 2010; Melton, 2011; Mustard, 2010). In relation to society, these benefits carry through as early childhood education correlates to less financial spending on ‘expenditure on remedial education, school failure, poor health, mental illness, welfare recipiency, substance misuse and criminal justice’ (Fox et al., 2015, p. 3). From my experience living in the Western Desert of Australia, there has been minimal support for pre-school programs and is an area that requires urgent attention. This thesis hopes to provide an opportunity for Yarnangu and Anangu children and families to present their experiences of early years education in the region from the past until now and what Yarnangu and Anangu Peoples hope for the future.

A recent children’s literature text by Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council Aboriginal Corporation (2016), entitled, Tjulpu and Walpa: Two children, two roads tells the story of two children (Tjulpu, the bird and Walpa, the wind) going down two different roads in life. The story tells the reader about the care given to a child and how this shapes their life through the analogy of an anthill. “We can see the anthill rising up, but there are other things – like children’s experiences and their needs – hidden beneath the surface” (p. 65) (Figure 4). The figure pictorially displays the milestones of a child’s life as represented by the NPY authors. Like the NPY story, I hope to explore the process how childhood has changed over time due to the introduction of Anglo-European variations such as: toys, schools, time, written language, changing dynamics in family relationships and the introduction of digital media, the internet and multimodal devices.

In light of the literature presented, I will now outline the research intentions, problems and questions. There is currently a lacuna of research relating to the link between cultural variations, childhood and learning in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands and more broadly, there is limited research surrounding cultural variations, childhood and learning across First Nation Peoples in Australia and universally. This thesis seeks to fill this gap and potentially continue to deepen the literature in future postdoctoral research to continue to strengthen local knowledge systems in early years education both in the formalised schooling and out-of-school environments, providing a bridge the between the two worlds.
Research Intentions, Problems and Questions

When I was working as an early years educator in Kiwirrkura, I felt the pressure to have a Anglo-European classroom and use the adjoining teaching and learning practices. However, when I was in the classroom with the children, Anglo-European practices did not align with the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi local knowledge systems and childhood practices. I continuously questioned “Why am I doing this?”, “What is this for?”, “This doesn’t align with family values-how I can adapt my teaching style?” From my experiences as a university student, early years educator and training facilitator, I had a bank of pedagogical approaches however, in the end, none of this mattered unless I (and the educational institutions) began to address cultural variations in the approach to learning (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). With these experiences, they...
brought a central research question: *What is the link between cultural variations in childhood practices and the impact on learning in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands?*

From this central research question, six topical research questions will be addressed (Figure 5):

1. **TIME:** How do Yarnangu and Anangu children aged 2 to 6 years of age spend their time in out-of-school settings?
2. **OBJECTS:** What are Yarnangu and Anangu children’s relationships to material objects?
3. **TECHNOLOGY:** What are Yarnangu and Anangu children’s relationships and engagement with digital technologies?
4. **LANGUAGE:** What is the role of oral and written language in the out-of-school environment?
5. **PLACE:** What is the Yarnangu and Anangu perspective on early childhood and pre-school settings?
6. **RELATIONSHIPS:** What is the role of relationships and social structures in Yarnangu and Anangu children’s day-to-day life?

*Figure 5: Outline of the research*

These six topical research questions have been purposefully posed to relate to the coding process of grounded theory (Creswell, 1998). The coding process includes: open coding, axial coding, selective coding and the development of propositions. Answers to these questions are important to analyse from a cross-community comparison. To best undertake this comparison, the research is a multi-sited ethnography across three remote communities in the region.

**Why have I chosen a child-centred ethnography?**

Typically within social science, children are presented as an ‘object’ within research however, I would like to place the child at the centre to understand how they creators of culture for cultural transmission (Mead, 1970). From my experiences with children in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi region, I have seen first-hand the ways children share experiences with one other,
as “elevators of their surroundings” (Friedl, 2004, p. 655). Until recently, culture in children has been ignored in anthropology (Schwartz, 1981). For this ethnography, children will be at the centre. An ethnography is a “long-term immersion, continuing involvement with community members, and some degree of comparative perspective that attempts to distinguish between what is common and what is unique across such groups” (Heath, 1995, p. 117). Like Brooks (Brooks, 2011), I do not seek to understand the past relating to childhood however, I hope to use the past to explore the cultural change and active participation children have in transmitting culture from the past and into contemporary childhood.

**Methodology**

This thesis is a multi-sited collaborative ethnography of Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi children and their families across three remote communities, Kiwirrkura, Warakurna and Kiwirrkura and it has grown from discussion, interaction and collaboration with children and their families. In 2014 and in 2016 in the role as training facilitator, I travelled approximately 800km a week on my own, on dirt roads, delivering adult education courses relating to child development to Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi men and women across the communities. During this time, families shared their concerns as local knowledge systems relating to childhood and child development, were not being incorporated into training packages. I was continuously reminded, ‘wiya (no), it’s different to Walypala way out here’. My experiences to date as an educator, have demonstrated to me first-hand that Anglo-European teaching and learning practices struggle to consider Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi knowledge systems methodologically, pedagogically, ontologically and epistemologically.

This thesis based on eight years of community-based interaction children and families, fieldwork conducted in 2018 and all of 2019. I have embedded a contemporary collaborative and engaged approach with Yarnangu and Anangu community-based research collaborators and the NPEYG to ensure the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi community is co-producing the research project. It is essential for all anthropological studies relating to First Nations Peoples move towards a collaborative approach and work side-by-side from the onset. I seek for local experts and outside researchers to be equal partners working towards a common goal, to co-design, co-produce and carry out the research based on community defined needs (American
Anthropology Association, 2002). The community-based research collaborators of this study are from each of the communities in the ethnography (Figure 6).

The community-based research collaborators and I have worked together in education environments across the region for the past eight years. We all come from an education background and aim to apply an interdisciplinary approach with education from an anthropological socio-historical lens.

**Interdisciplinary Approach**

The central approach to this research is influenced by anthropology however, I have drawn upon a range of other disciplines to explore the topic. These include: education both Anglo-European and First Nations knowledge systems, sociology and cultural-historical approaches. The changing research paradigm calls for research protocols between the researcher, community-based research collaborators and the community to be set out prior to the commencement of a project. When commencing a research project with the community, it is important to work with a flexible and open-ended nature. In adapting this paradigm, I have
used the constructivist grounded theory to frame this research. This research will be conducted as a collaborative ethnography and is the “collaboration of researchers and subjects in the production of ethnographic texts, both fieldwork and writing” (Lassiter, 2005, p. 84). Prior to proceeding with the research, I approached the communities (Martin, 2008) to partake in research design and to cultivate strong, respectful relationships.

**Researching Responsively and Respectfully**

Two standpoints and practices have informed the theoretical framework of this study: First Nation Peoples perspectives and practices (Berryman, SooHoo, & Nevin, 2013; Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012; Smith, 1999, 2013) and, prioritising the views of children (S. Morrow & Smith, 1995; V. Morrow, 2003, 2009; Sinclair, 2004; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998; Wilson & Wilks, 2013). The following two sections will outline how and why these standpoints are central to this research process.

**Research with First Nation Peoples**

First Nation Peoples continue to challenge current perspectives and practices in the field as research methodologies are driven by colonial, paternalistic Anglo-European responses. As a result, First Nation Peoples are not being included within the research process and have continued to be ‘subjects’ within the research (Martin, 2008; Smith, 1999, 2013). To address the concerns, institutions have adopted guidelines and protocols such as the *Guidelines of Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 2011). When conducting research with First Nation Peoples, researchers should integrate epistemology, ontology and axiology that supports the exchange of benefits to the community, relatedness and place of the research (Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Nakata et al., 2012; Rigney, 2017). During this research, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi cultural, language and knowledge systems will be at the core of methodology and practice.

**Research with children and young people**

Between the years of 1980 to 2000, a new sociology of childhood emerged and began to challenge the application of research with children and young people. In particular, children and young people are now able to represent their own views (Hendrick, 2015; Prout, 2011). Through this research, I aim to provide Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi children with a platform to share their own views and practices of childhood. Child centred research allows children to
social actors (Benthall, 1992). When researching with children and young people, the researcher must adhere to ethical research theory and practices. As the researcher, I am aware of the development of methods used to research with and by children, to adhere to children’s rights as stipulated in current national and international policy. Key practices such as: ensure informed consent has been obtained and the impact on the child as a result from the research must be central to the research process (V. Morrow, 2009; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Throughout this study, I will be continuously reviewing and planning for these theoretical and practical considerations. I have read a range of literature pertaining to research with children and young people and, will endeavour to implement the suggested strategies to ensure research is carried out ethically (V. Morrow, 2003, 2009; Save the Children, 2005; Sinclair, 2004; Wilson & Wilks, 2013).

Data collection methods
The general research question examines the link between cultural variations in childhood and the impact on learning in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands. Therefore, a range of data collection methods:

1. Naturalistic play interactions recorded through video, audio and photography. The child has access to a small digital camera to capture the social and physical interactions within the environment.
2. Semi-structured interviews about daily routine and child rearing with the caregivers.
3. Workshop at the end of the data collection period to draw together the views and thoughts of the multi-sited participants.
4. Participant observation

Please note: data collection will only occur after informed consent has been granted by the participant.

Naturalistic play interactions
Naturalistic play interaction observations provide minimal constraints on the child’s interactions and can be generalised into real-life stations (Pepler & Craig, 1995). In particular the naturalistic nature overcomes the constraints of laboratory situations and the difficulty of naturalistic observations with school aged children. During the data collection period, the researcher will collect video-recorded, audio-recorded and photographs of interactions during a free play setting at randomly selected times for interactive sessions of comparable duration. We will record incidences, for example: materials and objects being used, the use of digital
technologies and playmates. In each of the three sites, Kiwirrkura, Warakurna and Warburton, data will be collected from three naturalistic play interactions: 1. in the home, 2. on-country, 3. in a random unstructured play setting. In addition, children will be given a camera to self-record their own play interactions. In addition, a separate video-recorder will be placed in an unobtrusive position in the environment to record discrete naturalistic play interactions from an externally valid manner. With this equipment, children’s interactions will be recorded for data analysis processes. This methodology will allow a distinctive opportunity for researcher to gain access into the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi child’s social interactions.

Interviews

Interviews with the caregivers will be structured to obtain information about daily routines and child rearing techniques. The semi-structured interviews will be video-taped and transcribed. Interviews will occur at the beginning of the data collection period with a Ngaanyatjarra translator in the home environment. Before conducting the semi-structured interviews, I will speak with Elizabeth Ellis, a Ngaatjatjarra women and an Australia National University Researcher, who will be able to guide us and ensure we are approaching the interviews is a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner with families. Interviews will be recorded with the use of a ZOOM H5N and an additional microphone.

Workshop

At the end of the data collection period and after the consultation with the NEYCG, a workshop will be held in a central location to the three sites. This workshop will aim to draw together the views and thoughts of the participants. The workshop will be over a period of 1-3 days and will be guided by the participants and the community-based research collaborators.

Emerging themes

To date, the topic of Tjitji kutjuparriku (in Ngaanyatjarra) - Tjitji Ttjiyinytjiku (in Pintupi), the changing nature of childhood, has been present in the data and themes have begun to emerge relating to time, place, technology and social interactions.

- The everyday life of a child is being influenced by the Anglo-European concept of ‘boredom’.
- Educational programs such as school and youth programs, are always providing ‘something to do’ away from the family environment.
- Prior to the introduction of Anglo-European forms of education, there were no designated child-centred activities however, children followed their parents and caregivers in their daily life and activities. During this time, the child observed and learnt by watching.
• In contemporary life as a child in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi region, adult agency appears to have been removed from everyday life and parents and caregivers are spending less time actively initiating child-centred activities with their children. This is possibly due to the increased role of education programs and their influence on daily life as a child and their time.

• Access to food and money has been a reoccurring theme within the data as parents and caregivers have limited financial stability due to recent welfare programs such as: the Remote Jobs and Communities Program [RJCP] and the Community Development Programme [CDP]. These programs have driven the contemporary child to seek food and money through anti-social means such as break-ins. In turn, food has also influenced the changing dynamic of social relationships within remote communities as education programs give free food daily in exchange for attendance to the program. This has been strongly influenced by recent federal school attendance strategies.

It should be noted that due to the multi-sited methodological approach to this study, the data varies for each of the three communities. Each community varies in population and the distances to services. In addition, each has its own unique history and engagement with Anglo-European influences. However, some themes have emerged from the data relating to big communities compared with smaller communities. These include:

• Smaller communities have decreased access to services and have increased levels of child-family out-of-school learning. E.g. increased adult agency in child-centred activities such as: taking children on-country and intergenerational learning practices.

• Bigger communities have increased access to services and have decreased levels of child-family out-of-school learning and engagement. E.g. less adult agency in daily life as youth services and education programs provide child-centred activities without families.

• Smaller communities have decreased contact with Anglo-European influences due to less exposure therefore, there is an increased mirroring of past practices relating to childhood. E.g. children and families are engaging more in pre-Anglo-European child practices. For example, going bush to hunt and gather is a part of daily life.

• Bigger communities have increased influence of Anglo-European influences due to more exposure therefore, there is a decrease in mirroring of past practices relating to childhood. E.g. children are engaging in Anglo-European child practices. For example, going to the pool, hanging out at the drop-in centre or playing on a digital device is a part of daily life.

Lastly, children are engaging in more peer to peer social interaction than in previous times. This could be attributed to an increase in education policy related to attendance of Anglo-European education programs therefore, children spend less time with their family and wider community networks. Prior to Anglo-European influence, children spent most of their time observing the adults in their family and interacting mainly with their siblings.
References


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