

GROWING OUR OWN: A 'TWO WAY', PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO INDIGENOUS INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN REMOTE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

Growing Our Own is an innovative and unique program for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in the remote Northern Territory. As a partnership between Catholic Education, Northern Territory (CENT) and Charles Darwin University (CDU), lecturers travel to remote Indigenous communities to deliver unit content to local 'Assistant Teachers' enrolled in the Bachelor of Education: Primary degree. However, it is much more than an effective scheduling exercise; the program has been intentionally established to function under the 'two way' pedagogy whereby the pre-service teachers, their mentors and lecturers engage in a process of epistemological dialogue and exchange. There is also a place-based emphasis, with a clear pattern of teaching 'on country'. Overall, such a process of genuine negotiation to incorporate localised Indigenous Language and Knowledge within the Australian Curriculum is opening up new and exciting possibilities for (school) student learning and a tertiary Indigenous 'standpoint'.

Growing Our Own was established in 2009 and has been refined over the years to meet the increasing demands on Initial Teacher Education and local community desires. This paper is both a report concerning the successes of the program thus far and a critical reflection on some of the key findings that have evolved in regards to such a 'two way', place-based, Indigenous andragogic approach.

Keywords: Indigenous ITE, 'two way', place-based pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2008 will long be remembered by those involved in Indigenous education in rural and remoteⁱ Northern Territory. It was the year the government unexpectedly announced its controversial 'First Four Hours in English' policy in an attempt to usher in short-term improvements to 'mainstream' educational standards as assessed under the (then) new, NAPLAN regime. In contrast, in the same year, but at the other end of the pedagogical spectrum, '*Growing Our Own - A two-way approach to teacher preparation for Northern Territory Catholic schools*' was being finalised. It was an ambitious, long-term vision to train a new generation of Indigenous teachers for remote Indigenous schools whilst maintaining the intercultural desires of local communities. As a partnership between Catholic Education, Northern Territory (CENT) and Charles Darwin University (CDU), *Growing Our Own* has progressed from vision to reality, to successful

graduations. However, even more importantly, the program has maintained a genuine ‘two way’ pedagogy of negotiation and interaction within the ‘cultural interface’ (Nakata, 2007) despite the ever-increasing demands for standardised national curriculum and assessment. The emphasis of place-based teaching and learning in a literal, resource and ‘on country’ sense of the expression has also continued to offer wonderful opportunities for the development of relevant, integrated lessons and a tertiary Indigenous ‘standpoint’.

PROBLEM

It is not common to read of *problems* in Indigenous education anymore. Rightly, there has been a rejection of the deficit-model of language inherent in much ‘closing the gap’ rhetoric and a push to broaden the issues to include Indigenous perspectives and priorities on what constitutes a ‘good’ education and holistic welfare of children overall (Guenther & Bat, 2013). However, in regards to the whole area of Indigenous teachers currently working in the Northern Territory, there is a genuine *problem*. For, despite the Indigenous student population of the Northern Territory of around 40 per cent, the number of fully-qualified Indigenous teachers sits under 4 per cent.ⁱⁱ But these statistics actually account for the entire Department of Education including urban settings such as Darwin; there is certainly an even higher percentage of Indigenous students and an even lower one of Indigenous teachers from rural and remote community schools. Indeed, most remote and very remote schools have virtually 100 per cent Indigenous student cohorts with no Indigenous ‘teachers’ⁱⁱⁱ at all. The five Indigenous Catholic Community Schools (ICCS) of the *Growing Our Own* program are no exception, with 2015 figures of Indigenous students shown in the table below.

Table1: Indigenous Enrolment in Participating Schools

School	Percentage Indigenous students
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr	100
Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic Primary School	99
Xavier Catholic College	98
St Francis Xavier Catholic School	98
Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School	100

(Source: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016).

Furthermore, this situation has not been improving. Up until 2010, the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education was the primary source of initial teacher education programs for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, but the data for 2002-2006 actually demonstrates significant decreases in overall enrolments, most particularly from remote communities (Nutton, Moss, Fraser, McKenzie, & Silburn, 2012, p. 19). This alarming trend is further exacerbated by the fact that it is not just an issue of the *parity target for student enrolments* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012, p. 10) matching non-Indigenous cohorts in regards to higher education; the lack of Indigenous teachers directly impacts the quality of teaching and learning in remote communities. This is due to many factors. Firstly, all remote communities are complex, multi-lingual/multi-cultural environments operating with a mixture of Indigenous ‘traditional’ Languages, Kriol and Aboriginal English. Standard Australian English (SAE) is often only used in the schooling context. Importantly, many communities utilize, or desire to reinvigorate formal bilingual and intercultural schools, where traditional languages and culture are both respected and actively taught within the curriculum. Thus, remote Indigenous communities are an extremely rewarding but challenging environment for non-Indigenous teachers to work within, and coupled with the ‘culture shock’, the intermittent quality of health and other services and the physical isolation of such communities, it is no great surprise that the average stay is about a year.^{iv} To break this cycle of teacher turnover and to best educate remote, Indigenous students overall, the training of local

Indigenous teachers to work within their own communities is of paramount importance. Such teachers live permanently in the community, already have long-term kinship relationships with the school students, are in the unique position to maintain the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Language, and pertinently, fully understand the needs of students as English as Additional Language/ Dialect (EAL/D) learners. For the last two decades at least, all the significant reports with some bearing on Indigenous education in the Northern Territory have highlighted such 'workforce planning' issues as fundamental, bemoaning a lack of clear policy and implementation (Collins, 1999, p. 89, Masters, 2011, p. 42, Nutton et al., 2012, p. 59; & Wilson, 2014, p. 192).

PARTNERSHIPS

The *Growing Our Own* program was established in 2009 to address this exact need. It was a time of heated debate and controversy. The 'First Four Hours in English' regime was ushered in by the Northern Territory government and education department, despite an outcry concerning the lack of consultation and adequate research (Devlin, 2009). Meanwhile, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was belatedly, formally supported by the Federal government in April, 2009.^v Article 14 is unambiguous:

1. *Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.*

Growing Our Own was designed as a concerted attempt by various stakeholders (schools, systems, tertiary institutions and most importantly, Indigenous communities) to partner together for the long-term fulfilment of such a fundamental right, with pre-service teachers in five Catholic schools in the four communities of Wadeye (Port Keats), Wurrumiyanga (Bathurst Island), Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa) and Nauiyu (Daly River) being supported to complete the Bachelor of Education: Primary degree, *in situ*, in their home communities. For two days each week, students study various units, supported by an on-site coordinator and CDU lecturer who makes fortnightly visits to deliver course content and assists in assignment preparation. Students are also mentored by their 'team teaching' partner in the practical development of teaching skills and have their overall pastoral and academic journey case managed by a Project Coordinator and Manager.

It is a reliance on genuine partnerships that is characteristic of the *Growing Our Own* program. In one sense, this comes as no surprise as the original vision for the program was the brainchild of friends Ms Brenda Keenan (Deputy Director, CEO) and Professor Alison Elliot (Head of School of Education, CDU), *developed in response to the urgent need for qualified teachers in remote Australia and particularly, for Indigenous teachers who are already culturally connected to their remote home communities* (Elliot, 2009, p. 2). But even then, they were really actually responding to the desires of Indigenous Catholic Community Schools, principals and elders, such as: Ms Miriam Rose Baumann from Daly River, Nauiyu who famously commented: *I look behind me and I don't see anyone walking there* (Avery, 2016) when reflecting on the need for a new generation of Indigenous teachers. This interplay between the Indigenous Catholic Community Schools, the CEO and CDU so evident at the outset of the program continues to underpin the success of the project. The Project Coordinator (CDU) and Project Manager (CEO) liaise regularly with each other and with the on-site school based coordinators and principals. Decisions are made jointly on such issues as enrolments, units to study, intensive weeks, visiting lecturers chosen and timeframes. In summary, it is a collaborative and interactive leadership structure which is clearly apparent, with all parties given a significant 'voice'. This partnership approach is powerfully depicted by the *Growing Our Own* graphic.

In terms of the university context, it is also worth noting that the program functions within the School of Education itself and not out of a separate 'Indigenous Unit' of the university. *Growing*

Our Own pre-dates the national review into Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (2012), so it is pertinent to note the recommendation there, that despite the level of inclusion and support in such Indigenous Units, incorporating Indigenous students within the usual faculty structures is crucial as explained by Behrendt (2012:

... faculties can provide discipline-specific tutoring, mentoring, and connections to the professional world and employment. Faculties are where academics and teachers and older students can be partnered with students as mentors or role models (p. 12).

This was particularly revolutionary in the Northern Territory context as previously, virtually all Indigenous tertiary students enrolled in courses through Batchelor Institute. Thus, the partnership with CDU, and with a faculty within CDU was initially controversial, but has certainly fulfilled Behrendt’s claims in terms of expert support. As a by-product, such a partnership has also elevated the *Growing Our Own* students’ reputation overall as they are seen to be completing the exact same units and degree as all other pre-service education students. Another relevant strategy mentioned in the Behrendt report which was pre-empted by *Growing Our Own* concerns case-management of Indigenous students. Behrendt notes:

... this involves employing dedicated staff to manage the student relationship, including establishing contact with students, assessing their support needs, helping them to secure support and monitoring their progress’ (p. 183).

The *Growing Our Own* provision of on-site coordinators (with two days release time per week to spend with the students during lectures and as proxy tutors on the ‘off’ weeks) and the interplay between the Project Manager and Coordinator also allows for the dovetailing of pastoral and academic support to be provided. Indeed, there have been many personal stories of students being supported and even coming in and out of the program, through sicknesses, deaths, floods and other crises which stand as testimony to the holistic nature of the program. Undoubtedly, without the case-management structure within *Growing Our Own*, if it had simply been established as external, online students, the withdrawal rates would have been much higher. As it stands, the statistics are very revealing:

Table 2: Growing Our Own statistics.

Total Enrolments (2009-2016)	Retention	Graduates	2016 Enrolments
54	40/54	21	19
	74%	90% working as teachers.	21% male 95% under age of 40.

The purpose of this report is not to engage in comparative, quantitative analysis of data in reference to other similar ITE courses or Indigenous higher education pathways. However, in the key indicators of ‘success’ (enrolment, retention and graduation), the statistics are incredibly impressive, easily surpassing other CDU initiatives, non-Indigenous cohorts and even national and future benchmarks. To briefly note, *Growing Our Own* comprises 55 per cent of the entire CDU Higher Education enrolments from very remote Northern Territory settings for 2016, the retention rate of 74 per cent is significantly higher than the overall Indigenous cohort (the official 2025 aim is 60% for Indigenous students (Charles Darwin University, 2015) and, in fact, surpasses the non-Indigenous student cohort. And lastly, graduations to employment of 90 per cent compares very favourably to the 49 per cent national average over the same time period (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016).

PEDAGOGIES

From the outset, *Growing Our Own* was established with deeper pedagogical aims, beyond increasing the level of participation of remote Indigenous people in the formal realm of higher education. In particular, the pertinent issue concerns the capacity for tertiary educational institutions to develop a truly responsive curriculum (for ITE), that embraces the epistemologies and pedagogies of local Indigenous communities, whilst maintaining AITSL standards for tertiary outcomes and professional knowledge of ‘mainstream’ curriculum. In this sphere, *Growing Our Own* relies on the rich, if somewhat ill-defined ‘two way’ pedagogy developed within remote Indigenous education. Indeed, the full title for the program: *A two-way approach to teacher preparation for Northern Territory Catholic schools* hints at the ‘two way’ philosophical approach to holistic education that has been evolving since the early 1980s. In fact, the history of remote Indigenous education in the Northern Territory is inextricably tied to the phrase ‘two-way’, albeit in vastly differing practical manifestations. ‘Two way’ education has been utilised to encompass approaches as varied as Indigenous Learning-Style to Team-Teaching to full Bilingual/Bi-literacy, and even domain separation policies (van Gelderen, 2016). It has also (sadly) degenerated into summarising almost any generic, bureaucratic attempt at *two way/cross-cultural... undertaking within ‘Aboriginal communities’* (Ford & Klesch, 2003, p. 33). However, despite the variations, ‘two way’ education at its core is an acknowledgement that ‘mainstream’ educational goals, and indeed, curriculum, need to be balanced by local, Indigenous priorities and leadership systems. It will, undoubtedly, look very different in the diverse communities of the Northern Territory, but such diversity is a ‘two way’ dynamic itself, a hallmark of taking the local perspectives seriously. The initial aims of the *Growing Our Own* elucidated this ‘two way’ philosophy succinctly:

- (i) *To empower indigenous educators to join culturally relevant ways of being, knowing and doing with contemporary curriculum and pedagogical knowledge;*
and
- (ii) *To empower non-indigenous teacher mentors to understand culturally relevant indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing and infuse these with contemporary curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to strengthen opportunities for children’s learning* (Elliott & Keenan, 2008, Appendix A, p. 5).

Thus, the aims of the program focus on the broadly positioned ‘culturally relevant indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing’. Furthermore, there is an interactional imperative as pre-service teachers ‘join’ this knowledge with the contemporary Australian Curriculum and the mentor teachers, in their turn, come to ‘infuse’ their existing practice with such knowledge. These aims highlight processes of negotiation and integration and the entire ‘two way’ interaction is ultimately, to strengthen opportunities for children’s learning, acknowledging the genuinely interconnected and holistic nature of ‘education’ in remote Indigenous settings. In terms of a precedent, the *Growing Our Own* model is most akin to the educational philosophy entitled ‘Bothways’. Again, stemming from a rich history from the 1980s, the ‘Bothways’ philosophy was developed largely at Batchelor College (as it was then known), incorporating a number of traditional Indigenous metaphors to highlight the interactive and negotiated interplay between ‘Western’ educational outcomes and traditional Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies (Ober & Bat, 2007). This is a rich and complex area, but for present purposes, the emphasis and benefits of such a bicultural (or to be precise, *intercultural*) philosophy is beautifully summarised by Mr. Tobias Nganbe, elder at Wadeye during his speech at the *Growing Our Own* launch in 2009:

Come, meet us half way. You will learn about us for who we are. This will help you to teach our children in a real way. It will help you at school. It will help you in the classroom. It will help you become wise. It will help you build strong respect towards

us and toward yourself. The way of teaching Aboriginal children will start to become clear... clear... and CLEARER if you willing to meet us half way with an open mind and heart (Quoted in Thornton et al., 2011).

Thus, the pedagogical emphasis of the ongoing, interactional positioning of teaching and learning between the *Growing Our Own* students, their mentor teachers and ultimately, the school students is presented as the key focus of the project. The ultimate aim therefore, to empower both Indigenous educators (as they already are in the true sense of the term; *a teacher, then, rather than being defined by registration, can be defined as an educator working as part of a collaborative team* (Bat & Shore, 2013, p. 7) and the non-Indigenous teachers, all to better serve the learning needs of the school students. This 'two way' dynamic of negotiating epistemologies, of working within the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007), of establishing a 'Bothways' pedagogy (Blitner et al., 2000) is fundamental.

But how does this look in practice? Of course, with such an interactive focus, it is largely dependent on the relationship between the students and the visiting lecturers and their willingness to engage with Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies as they deliver the content of the specific Bachelor of Education: Primary units. Fortunately, since its inception, key staff members at CDU have embraced the intercultural philosophy and have encouraged the production of texts, lesson plans and assignments which highlight local Indigenous perspectives, whilst maintaining the academic rigour necessary to comply with university course outcomes. A recent example as part of the unit ESC 101: Science Education: Physical and Earth/Space concerned students in semester 2, 2015. Assignment 2 involved writing a unit outline and specific lesson plans focussing on soil, erosion and landforms. Students completed all required sections concerning 'western' scientific knowledge but also included information and activities for school students concerning Indigenous land-forming stories and (public) information on sacred sites and physical consequences of certain actions around them. Thus, the topic of land formation was considered from the two knowledge systems, sitting alongside each other, not in competition.

Another specific example concerned a student who was studying ECU 102: History for Schools in semester 1, 2016. The second assignment required students to read/view a piece of Australian historical fiction and review it, commenting on how it *developed (their) historical understanding while stimulating some notion of ethics or morality in response to the recorded event or social history* (Charles Darwin University, 2016). The student chose a book entitled *Murrinhku Thepini pumpanpunmat*' produced by the local Literacy Production Centre which was illustrated and written in Murrinhpatha. It concerned the infamous Namarluk who featured in various fights, killings and jail breaks in the 1930s in relation to both white Australians and Japanese pearlers around Wadeye and Darwin. The interesting consideration is that there is uncertainty amongst historians regarding his final capture and death in relation to the bombing of Darwin, swimming the harbour and returning to his home community, and the student's essay, based on the book and other oral histories from the region opened up new and contrasting versions. Issues of bias, silences and interpretations; just what a history lecturer loves to see! But most importantly, it was a wonderful opportunity to use a detailed and textually dense Murrinhpatha story as part of the university unit, to powerfully advance the notion that 'two-way' bilingual learning is quite compatible with the new Australian Curriculum: History. In fact, the student went on to use the essay and book to develop a number of lessons to teach with her mentor teacher in their Year 4 class, as it matched quite superbly a number of Content Descriptors including:

The nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example, people and environments ([ACHASSK086](#))

These lessons involved looking at the text *Murrinhku Thepini pumpanpunmat* as well as internet sites on Namarluk and the contact history of the 1930s in the local area and in broader Australia.

As it turned out, the student's essay also received the second top mark from the whole unit cohort for this particular assignment. Such a scenario demonstrates a thorough 'two way' benefit to both the *Growing Our Own* student, and for the intergenerational knowledge transmission aspirations of her community. 'Two way' teaching and learning at its best.

PLACE

Probably the most significant reason *Growing Our Own* is succeeding is the foundation of place-based pedagogy. This expression can be understood in a number of ways, but almost all of them are relevant to the *Growing Our Own* model.

Firstly, in a literal sense of place, there is incalculable benefit for students being able to stay at home, in community, to complete their tertiary studies. As Wallace notes, for remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities, '*taking part in formal education (is) often described as opposing full participation in family or community identities or activities*' (Wallace, 2008, p. 11). The tension between furthering 'mainstream' ambitions/ job prospects and maintaining kinship-relationships and connections to ancestral land through participation in ceremonial life is a very real concern for remote Indigenous students. It is often positioned as a question of identity:

Learning in community also means student teachers do not have to compromise identity in order to become teachers in their own schools: the ongoing need for Aboriginal teachers and community teachers to assert their right to maintain their identity in order to become a teacher is another of the tensions presented in the literature (Bat & Shore, 2013, p. 13).

As Shore and Bat note in their review of the 'grey literature' regarding the history of remote teacher education programs in the Northern Territory, the same concerns and desires have been expressed by Indigenous communities since the first handing over of schools from the Missions; from the first days of self-determination in the early 1970s. And there were some attempts at 'community centred teacher education' like the RATE (Remote Area Teacher Education) program offered through Batchelor College in the 1980s and early 1990s. Although funding arrangements altered and policies changed so that the model was abandoned, the various reasons behind the approach received consistently strong Indigenous support. The following quote is lengthy and from a different time and area of the Northern Territory (Arnhem Land) to the ICCS of *Growing Our Own*, but its rationale clearly resonates with the place-based pedagogy of the current program:

Community centred Teacher Education is important to us because it is the only way we know that will ensure that teacher education programs actively include Aboriginal community members and opinion. Being able to work in your home community means that some potential students are not excluded from the course or program because of geographical remoteness by locating all of the program at a Tertiary Institution like Batchelor College, in the N.T. Working in a community based and centred way means that the program can be responsive to the individuals' and their communities' needs. The program then can recognise the impact that non-educational factors have on achievement in the courses.

In addition to the educational arguments which support community-based study there are other important questions about the tremendous social and human cost of study in institutions located away from the student's community. Yirrkala community leaders have clearly stated that the maintenance of the wholeness of each individual's wellbeing is of great importance. Study away from the cultural and other support systems of our community and family threatens this wholeness and wellbeing. Community centred Teacher Education gives the program the opportunity to actively respect the local Yolngu culture and contemporary perspectives. This is important for us as we realise that new understandings and knowledge come from the knowledge

of our Yolngu people's struggle for social and educational justice around Australia (Marika-Munungiritj et al., 1990, p. 42).

Thus, the fact that *Growing Our Own* functions under a form of 'reverse block release' model of delivery where a provider representative travels to students' home community or communities to deliver on-site training (Behrendt, 2012, p. 80) means that more students will potentially study, their everyday lives will remain relevant, and their overall well-being will be better maintained.

A second, more recent and academic understanding of 'place-based pedagogy' focusses on the role of the local environment and community as a source and resource for learning. That is, the specific culture, history, art, literature, ecology etc. of the student's own 'place' is highlighted vis-à-vis more standardised national and international concerns. As key theorist Gruenewald states:

Place-conscious education, therefore, aims to work against the isolation of schooling's discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling. Furthermore, it aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620).

Certainly, in the age of standardised school testing (NAPLAN) and curriculum (Australian Curriculum) and, indeed, tertiary degrees^{vi} it is very hard to maintain a 'critical pedagogy of place' (which probably necessitates its pursuit all the more). Nevertheless, the *Growing Our Own* lecturers are committed to such pedagogy by contextualising the unit content and assignments as much as possible. Some clear examples are mentioned in research papers, with students 'bush dyeing' as fulfilment of an assignment on designing and appraising an artefact that could be used as a teaching tool (Slee, 2010), and a 'bush-tucker' field trip and guide written in two languages as part of a literacy assignment (Giles, 2010). These examples show not just that it is possible to include place-specific knowledge but that it *ought to be done, not just for equity purposes but to create a learning environment that acknowledges the strengths rather than the weaknesses of its students* (Slee, 2010, p. 258). Furthermore, once lecturers and students begin to work on land and with language in a remote Indigenous context, questions of authority and sacred/secret knowledge will inevitably arise. But far from avoiding such issues (by playing it safe inside the classroom walls), working respectfully within this space is a testimony to its presence and power in schooling and only further legitimises the local Indigenous epistemology.

Inclusion then means more than presence or enrolment in a teacher education program. It means understanding how different knowledge traditions need to be rethought in the context of schooling on country where there are dynamic but clearly defined cultural authority structures that underpin how schooling happens on a day-to-day basis (Bat & Shore, 2013, p. 13).

Lastly, there is an even deeper subset of place-based pedagogy which matches the Indigenous priority of living and learning 'on country'. Again, this phrase is applied in slightly different ways, but usually in the Northern Territory context, it applies to Indigenous people's relationships with their own specific ancestral estates, as inherited through their particular lineage. It is often contrasted with life in 'towns' which are still remote Indigenous communities, but usually involve many clans and language groups living together on sites of previous Missions. But all parties have their own 'outstations' or 'homelands' which are the true inheritance of their family or clan; their country. It is here, 'on country' where true learning occurs, as the land itself both directly teaches and guides the process of learning. As expressed by the Yolngu elder at Gäwa where I lived and worked in a homeland school:

So when the Yolngu children learn on country, they are safe inside themselves, and confident to go forward... they know the land, they know the land and the breezes,

and the water, what time the tide will be in, when it will be out, because they are learning on country (Guthadjaka, 2010, p. 27).

And expressed more generally, by Professor Michael Christie:

Aboriginal people who have occupied the same areas of land and spoken ancestral languages for many thousands of years, the identity between the small bits of the knowable world which are your own, and the particular structures of your own specific language, is given, and continues to be an ongoing site for the work of Aboriginal philosophy (Christie, 2001, p. 34).

Thus, there is a desire to situate all learning locally, but more than this, to understand that all true learning is local and for many Indigenous people there are expressions and metaphors in traditional Languages which highlight the powerful, true and even transcendent learning that occurs when ‘on country’. It is true, *Growing Our Own* largely functions in the ‘towns’ where there are significant sized populations and schools, as outlined above. However, the small-group nature of the visiting lecture format means that field trips and excursions are distinctly possible. A recent example concerned ECU 103: Geography for Schools in semester 2, 2015, where the students and visiting lecturer spent a full-day, a few hours’ drive from the community at a grandfather’s country, both to work on course content and to produce a multi-perspective ‘map’ of a wet-season billabong as part of an assignment. These kinds of opportunities arise regularly, and are genuine highlights for both students and lecturers.

POSSIBILITIES

Growing Our Own is slowly and surely establishing its reputation as an innovative and successful program for Initial Teacher Education for remote Indigenous students. Indeed, it received a very explicit and public endorsement in the large-scale Wilson report on Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory, *A Share in the Future*:

The recommended option for AT advancement to teaching is to re-establish the RITE program in a new form similar to the NT Catholic Education Office–CDU program Growing Our Own, with external CDU lecturers supported by school-based staff. A working party inclusive of key stakeholders should be involved in the design and development of the new model. This is expensive, but it reflects a high government priority (Wilson, 2014, p. 197).

Wilson goes on to outline various practical criteria that would see such a program succeed; rigorous selection processes and attendance expectations for students, funding to provide school-based coordinators and delivery of content by tertiary lecturers, face-to-face, on site. In other words, Wilson recommends a virtual replica of the *Growing Our Own* model. Such a position undoubtedly also reflects the relative non-success of the Department’s RITE program (Remote Indigenous Teacher Education: 2009-2011) which was similar to *Growing Our Own* but relied on one Departmental employee living in community and delivering all the various CDU units as a proxy-lecturer. Under this model, the partnership aspect between the schools and CDU was weakened and greater weight was placed on the on-site employee to cover all pastoral, academic and administrative duties, which proved unsustainable. Thus, Wilson clearly endorses and recommends both the overall vision of *Growing Our Own* and its practical application. If his recommendation is taken up by the Department of Education, there is the distinct possibility of significant growth in the *Growing Our Own* model. As Wilson mentions, it would entail a cost as there are many more remote and very remote schools under Departmental authority than the five Indigenous Catholic Community Schools. However, as he also notes, it must remain a government priority.

There are further possibilities beginning to emerge from the program in terms of flow-back into the academe as well. As mentioned above, it was always envisaged that a ‘two way’ dynamic would

be at play in regards to the students and their mentor teachers, but a ‘third’ pathway involves the changes to university policies and practices that are emerging out of the success of the program. One clear issue revolves around best practice for Initial Teacher Education in any setting in regards to the balance of learning/practical work experience. As outlined, the *Growing Our Own* students work at least three days per week in their role as ‘Assistant Teacher’ where they have consistent time to both reflect on the teaching practice of their mentor teacher as well as the opportunity to implement the skills and expertise they are developing through ‘team teaching’ lessons. In other words, they have years of increasingly confident and maturing ‘professional experience’ to complement the specific units that require formal placement in schools. Such a set up represents a fascinating inversion, described by Reedy, Prescott and Giles as:

a paradigm shift in WIL (work-integrated learning)... generally used as a mechanism of providing university students with some work experience to enrich a basis of theoretical training. The Growing Our Own program, on the other hand, provides theoretical training to support the practical day-to-day work in the classrooms in which the students are already employed (2011, p. 327).

This is not to say that such a transition from Assistant Teacher to pre-service teacher is always easy; *it challenges their sense of efficacy and status in the classroom and requires them to break with their well-established and previously effective ways of being, thinking and acting in their professional role* (Strangeways, 2016, p. 2). These are serious and powerful issues of shifting identity, and there are also growing expectations to meet literacy and numeracy standards (LANTITE: Literacy and Numeracy for Initial Teacher Education) and professional standards (AITSL Graduate Standards) both within coursework, but also as testing regimes prior to employment. Thus, it is not so much a question of future possibilities, but of future restrictions. Wilson acknowledges in regards to LANTITE specifically that there is *potential for this requirement to make Indigenous recruitment to pre-service programs even more difficult* (2014, p. 196). However, support for this process is being identified as a vital, on-going priority for *Growing Our Own* as it looks to continually improve its own practices. In particular, more specific ‘literacy and numeracy’ scaffolded skill development is being built into unit development, and creative, realistic ways forward are being considered. For example, in one school the official *Growing Our Own* graduate and their new ‘Assistant Teacher’ are pooling the income from the two roles, ‘team teaching’ together virtually all the time, and sharing the income accordingly. This is an unusual approach, but a realistic one due to the circumstances of the individuals involved and their relevant strengths, and the growing expectations on neophyte teachers.

Perhaps most critically, at a deeper, long-term level, *Growing Our Own* offers exposure of visiting CDU lecturers to Indigenous community life, with its needs, challenges and unique perspectives. Almost all lecturers comment both informally and explicitly in academic papers on how they are learning as much as they are teaching:

... as lecturers in the program, we are continually confronted with how little we know of the context and of how much we can learn from the Growing Our Own students, both about their culture and about the knowledge that is embedded within it’ (Thornton, Giles, Prescott, & Rhodes, 2011, p. 243).

Such reflection also greatly enhances lecturers overall capacity to teach and prepare other CDU students to teach in local Indigenous communities. As Behrendt notes regarding tertiary andragogy;

Indigenous knowledge, translated into practical curriculum, teaching practices and graduate attributes, makes important contributions to helping professionals meet the needs of Indigenous communities (Behrendt, 2012, p. 94).

And at its very best, (and developing as a slow, evolving process), this interplay between more and more lecturers and remote Indigenous students' perspectives will help develop a genuine Indigenous 'standpoint' within the university. Nakata explains in his famous 'cultural interface' article that:

An Indigenous standpoint, therefore, has to be produced... It is not any sort of hidden wisdom that Indigenous people possess. It is a distinct form of analysis, and is itself both a discursive construction and an intellectual device to persuade others and elevate what might not have been a focus of attention by others. It is not deterministic of any truth, but it lays open a basis from which to launch a range of possible arguments for a range of possible purposes (Nakata, 2007, p. 11).

By its own definition, an Indigenous 'standpoint' is a shifting opening rather than a fixed position, but in the tertiary sector, it surely involves an increasing number of lecturers and administrators (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) becoming aware of and confident to discuss and manoeuvre systems of control to *better reveal the workings of knowledge and how understanding of Indigenous people is caught up and is implicated in its work* (Nakata, 2007, p.12). In truth, there were some fascinating early attempts at this within *Growing Our Own* in regards to the flexibility of CDU formal Assessment policies and their cultural responsiveness. The central question being posed was:

How can Growing our own use a curriculum which accommodates the 'capacities and experiences' of Indigenous students which in turn, are unlikely to be the capacities and experiences of non-Indigenous students, and yet have both cohorts qualify under the same award? (Slee & Keenan, 2009, p. 6)

The solution offered at the time was to utilise the 'culturally responsive' language of CDU assessment policies to argue for integrated unit content (for example, delivering Design and Technology and Science and Literacy units concurrently) with highly integrated assignments (Slee & Keenan, 2009; Slee, 2010). Such an approach came under some criticism in the inaugural review of *Growing Our Own* and currently units are delivered together, but usually when there are subject-area links. For example, two literacy or science units are delivered concurrently, even if they are first and second year levels, or geography/history units as connected through HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences) in the Australian Curriculum. There is also a formal 'moderation' of all students' assignments at the end of each semester by a group of relevant lecturers, to ensure contextualised assignments still meet core outcomes for units and are graded appropriately. For, as expressed above, contextualisation continues to play a vital role in the place-based and two-way pedagogical foundations of the program. But in terms of Indigenous 'standpoint' the whole area of assessment and what does or does not value the expertise and knowledge of Indigenous pre-service teachers is a fine example of how work in the 'contested space' between knowledge systems might progress. This is not an isolated example; issues of acknowledging First language literacy, cultural pedagogies and recognition of Indigenous teaching 'qualifications' continue to provide fertile grounds for consideration. Indeed, we are continually on the lookout for ways *Growing Our Own* can contribute to such policy discussions at the tertiary level.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, *Growing Our Own* is a successful partnership. The key stakeholders of Catholic Education, Northern Territory, Charles Darwin University and the individual Indigenous communities and schools all have on-going input into the development of the structures, teaching and learning styles and personnel employed in the program. It is a genuine 'win-win' scenario where remote Indigenous 'Assistant Teachers' are graduating with higher education degrees, having experienced and contributed to a 'two way', place-based pedagogy, which they are now in the best position to ensure continues in their home community schools. The model is sustainable and embodies clearly

articulated Indigenous priorities and thus is invaluable for long-term, school student learning; genuinely helping to ‘close the gap’ of equitable education practices in remote Australia. The insights of the *Growing Our Own* students themselves will need to be considered in further analysis, but it is only appropriate to finish with a quote from a student commenting on the impact of *Growing Our Own* on the next generation of school students:

At the moment, it’s really good for them cause they are actually looking at us and thinking ‘Wow, this could be great’. We get comments like ‘I want to be an AT. I want to be a teacher. I want to be working at the school’. That sort of comments lift your spirits, and that’s what we’re hearing (M. Williams, personal communication, September 6, 2016).

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ⁱ The term 'remote' itself is problematic in that '*remoteness depends on your point of view, the particular frame that you use. If you live on an island in the Arafura Sea, clearly you wake up each morning in the centre of the universe. It is Darwin and Canberra which are remote*' (Christie, 2006, p. 30). But due to its common acceptance, the term will be utilised throughout.

ⁱⁱ Based on (Wilson, 2014, p. 196) stating as of 2013 there were 2649 teachers total, 105 being Indigenous. Although these are Departmental figures, the situation in ICCS is not significantly different despite formal statistics being unavailable.

ⁱⁱⁱ Of course, there are many Indigenous employees in remote schools, variously known as Assistant Teacher, Teacher Assistant, Teacher's Aide and Indigenous Education Worker, and they certainly function as vital educators. But in terms of the control of actual classroom practice and authority to affect change at a school-wide level, almost all remote schools lack qualified, local Indigenous 'teachers'.

^{iv} For example, for the years 2007-2011, staff retained in 'Closing the Gap' schools for more than 12 months was consistently in the 30-40% range, 37.7% in 2011 despite the *Teach Remote* recruitment campaign of 2010 (Nutton et al., 2012, p. 45).

^v In fact, adopted by the General Assembly in late 2007, Australia was initially one of the four nations voting against the declaration, compared to 143 in favour (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010).

^{vi} The BEDP: Bachelor of Education: Primary itself, which all *Growing Our Own* students are enrolled in, has only one 'specialist elective' within the thirty unit degree, and there are only four options to undertake for this elective.