

## DRIVING 6700 KILOMETRES TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

For Ms. S.D. Gurruwiwi & Batumbil Burarrwarja

### **Abstract**

We can make improvements in Aboriginal English literacy and numeracy in remote and very remote areas in a relatively short amount of time. For any program to succeed education at home has to be based on 'first language first' studies at home and school. This encourages school attendance and familiarity with the written word and page. On this strong base of culture and language can be built rich English language and numeracy learning opportunities outside communities. Mainstream communities want to learn and understand Aboriginal cultures and languages. Two-way learning relationships between small communities, schools, families and football and netball clubs across the country can create enormously rewarding learning opportunities for Aboriginal children and their mainstream counterparts. But once again the silos of education and government have to learn from the community and literally get on board the bus!

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**Percentage of Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Students Below National English Literacy and Numeracy Standards (NAPLAN 2015)**

School Year	National								Northern Territory				
	National		NT		Remote		Very Remote		Remote		Very Remote		
	%	NI	%	NI	%	NI	%	NI	%	NI	%	NI	NI
<b>Reading</b>													
Year 3	18.6	2.6	55	6.2	32.4	12.4	52.3	36.4	32.4	12.4	52.3	36.4	
Year 5	23.4	3.7	59.6	6.6	36.8	14.3	60.9	44.8	45.5	22.6	77.3	70.9	
Year 7	16.4	2.1	52.5	3.5	26.6	10.1	54.9	41.2	33.9	10.1	68.9	41.2	
Year 9	25.5	4.7	64	7	39.8	6.7	69.7	8.4	45.8	16	84	51.6	
<b>Spelling</b>													
Year 3	23.3	2.7	62.5	7.1	37.2	15	59.2	42	51.4	27	81.4	73.6	
Year 5	21.4	2.9	63	8.1	34	13.9	58.3	43.3	44.4	23.2	82.6	76.1	
Year 7	16.4	2.1	65.3	8	33.1	14.9	65.6	50.6	43.3	23.6	86	80.5	
Year 9	25.5	4.7	65.8	11.9	41.5	19.3	69	52.6	50	26.7	85.5	80.9	
<b>Numeracy</b>													
Year 3	19.1	2.8	48.9	4.3	29.8	11	50.5	34.9	39.8	11	64.9	34.9	
Year 5	18.5	2.2	52	3.8	31	10.5	53.5	39.1	42	20.6	67	62	
Year 7	14.5	1.7	35.2	17.2	21.4	7.9	46.1	34.5	24.5	11.5	59.3	55.2	
Year 9	14.3	1.9	40	2.4	21.1	7.6	44.3	32	23.8	10.8	55.7	52.6	



Mark Gurruwiwi,  
Declan Moore and  
Marcus Gurruwiwi  
having a kick with the  
emus on a quiet stretch  
of the Kennedy High-  
way on the way home  
to Mata Mata across  
the Gulf of Carpentaria  
(July 2016)

Why is it necessary in 2016 for two young Yolŋu brothers and their cousin to drive 6703 kilometres back and forth from Arnhem land to the South Coast of NSW in pursuit of good primary schooling and engagement through a football and netball competition? The short answer is Abstudy does not cover school travel allowances for remote and very remote Aboriginal children at below age 14. Without assistance flying is out of the question. It can cost more to fly out of a region like Arnhem land than from Australia to London. So even when a profoundly rewarding experience is on offer that can set up high school, if you want it, under current Federal government policy settings, you have to invariably pay for the exorbitant airfares yourself or drive. Hopefully in the future things will change. Hopefully education officials will realise that they are currently investing in failure by only supporting travel to and from high school in remote and very remote communities.

Let's make no mistake. Education must begin and end at home. And let's have no doubt driving such distances can be onerous for all concerned. It is a tribute to the children and their parents and grandparents that they would take such journeys. But right now every kilometre adds value in a context of very poor school attendance, over-crowded, under-funded schools and housing and where basic standards of English literacy and numeracy may not be obtained by even the end of high school. A relatively short immersion in school and family in the south can reap life-long rewards, two way relationships and bi-cultural understanding. This is only the beginning of what can be a rich and rewarding series of educational exchanges that could have a profound effect on the outlook of all Australian children in the future. Above all this is about the best of both worlds interacting and ensuring mutual prosperity, growth and development.

The backdrop for the need for the long drives is that there has been a series of government created disasters in the Northern Territory and all of the remote and very remote regions of

the North. Many will be familiar with the Northern Territory intervention which usurped and depressed Aboriginal natural governance and moral authority and diverted resources to the wrong people, the wrong instruments of government and the wrong infrastructure and had few positive results. But this was one catastrophe amongst many. Across the country the Abbott and Turnbull governments have de-funded dozens of important Aboriginal organisations at grass roots community levels and also notably have restricted and reduced the levels of funding available to Aboriginal children to study outside their homelands through Abstudy.

Equally destructive and profound in its detrimental effects was the Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day policy introduced by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training in 2008 under a Labor government. Labor soon recognised the folly of this policy but it lost the 2012 election and the current Country Liberal Party that was elected continued to discourage bi-lingual education with disastrous effects on school attendance and the confidence of Aboriginal communities in school. It also undermined arguably the best thing about Northern Territory remote education, namely its rich linguistic capability and capacity. It is probably no exaggeration to say that one whole generation of Aboriginal primary school children in some remote and very remote areas of the Northern Territory lost the will to go to school and now moves on to their high school years completely un-prepared and unable to read and write their own primary languages as well as English. Thankfully the resilience of bi-lingual teachers is remarkable and it seems their forty years of innovation and development cannot ever be suppressed. But the damage has been done to the current generations .

Perhaps it was the focus on the national NAPLAN results which led Labor and Marion Scrymgour to implement the First Four Hours policy in 2008. If it did then the results have got worse under the disastrous policy. As the table on page two indicates there is a disturbing and widening English literacy and numeracy

gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in the primary and secondary school in remote and very remote communities and in relation to national standards.

We can make improvements in Aboriginal English literacy and numeracy in remote and very remote areas in a relatively short amount of time but first and foremost the outstanding bi-lingual education that was pioneered at places like Yirrkala in North East Arnhem land have to be not only restored but lauded. Secondly to repair the educational prospects of the current children who have lost out so badly we have to create relationships of trust, knowledge and cooperation between small communities, schools, families and football and netball clubs across the country. In other words we have to share the rich educational resources that exist across the country in a two way exchange. We might even improve the whole fabric of the nation in the process.

6700 kilometres is a long round trip between school and home. There are closer destinations, schools and communities that might enable good education and engagement opportunities. There are also many great projects and good works going on in NE Arnhem land schools. But the bottom line is that even with the attention of government, multiple models and great projects and people of good will in schools and families, as the chart on page 2 indicates, we are failing the current generations of Yolŋu and other young Aboriginal children in primary and secondary school in northern Australia. Drastic and timely action is necessary not tomorrow but today.

It is not an easy thing to create good educational exchanges to suit individual children and families. The wheels of government can churn but in the case at the heart of this paper, creating trust between Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu families and organisations, matching a good family environment, a high level schooling environment and a supportive football and netball community is not something that is easy to pull off. It requires intense personal involvement of family, children and a wider network of

supporters developing over many years. Nevertheless the raw materials are there and several projects are paving the way. The brilliant Maypuru school and its annual visitations from Melbourne supporters, the Marrma' Rom Foundation initiated by Cam Begg and his family in Geelong and the ideas that are at the heart of this article which turns the focus to primary age children are important examples of mutual cultural and educational exchanges that make real improvements for children, schools and communities.

Even with the focus of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Sept 2015) on closing the gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes. As a result of the policies of the past, the gap is widening not narrowing. Without special energetic and direct action, above and beyond the norm, there is little chance of the children that have inspired this article, for example, getting a one on one ESL teacher working with them in a small class to improve their English literacy and numeracy to high school standard at a critical cross ways (Grade 6) in their schooling. There are also no under 12s, 13s, 14s football or netball competitions across NE Arnhem land. There are only after school activity programs targeting these and younger age groups. So while these are important they provide none of the real community engagement that team competitions provide for young people in other communities. Sporting participation programs target young adults across Arnhem land so the ability to connect literacy and numeracy and school attendance with wider community team sport is arguably not so intense. There are football and netball engagement programs but the demonstrated effect that playing for a team of peers in a local competition is absent. In part this is because the social capital of a small remote community is invariably stretched thin so it is no criticism of the highly valued and consistently improving programs that currently exist across Western and Northern Australia including those run by the Polly Farmer Foundation and Clontarf College. In the current situation the point is we must do more. Giving young people the opportunity to play football with clubs where there is an active competition at 12s, 13s, 14s, and 17s is so important



Mark and Marcus Gurruwiwi playing for the Bomaderry Tigers 2016

and of course is a potential pathway to professional sport that does not readily exist at home.

The 2015 Closing the Gap report really only touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the issue of English literacy and numeracy in remote communities. Across the nation Indigenous English literacy and numeracy has not improved since 2008. In North East Arnhem land the figures are arguably showing that things are getting worse.

English literacy and numeracy is not everything in a community where most children can speak and communicate in at least half a dozen local languages. But it is the elders and parents of children who themselves recognise how important reading and writing English and local languages and being able in maths is for future generations. It is just practical and good sense. Those who were educated by the mission schools and the high schools of the 1970s can see that things are getting worse for their children and grand children and this is why two grandmothers Ms. S.D. Gurruwiwi and Butambil Burarrwanga alongside many other leaders have spearheaded multiple approaches to improving children's English literacy and numeracy in their communities.

If we wait to act, if we wait for governments, it is likely several generations of Yolŋu children will never learn to read or write English, or even local languages, by the time they are 18. It is Ms. Gurruwiwi and Burarrwanga who drove this point home constantly and consistently in their words and actions over several years. Ms. Gurruwiwi and Burarrwanga have encouraged the formation of the Gary Dhurrkay Foundation to facilitate more educational and sporting orbits for remote area children to participate and build their understanding of the wider Australian economy and society and most importantly to improve their reading and writing and skills in mathematics. Gary Dhurrkay was in this a role model for Yolŋu people advancing in the world.

Travelling to a school with a small class and a willingness to support and embrace Aboriginal culture, where there is trusted host family or organisation that is known and can communicate with the extended Aboriginal family back home and where there is a good community football competition for under 14s and below is a sensible option creating strong and ongoing engagement and outcomes. Creating orbits of choice and possibility for young Aboriginal children to travel back and forward from home to school and other opportunities as Noel Pearson and many others have emphasised has to be an important option into the future and this has to be a focus amongst many other developments to really make a difference right now.

It is not always easy. It is not always easy when young people are away from home and suddenly encounter a mainstream world of money, goods and seemingly endless supplies of food for the first time. But if we wait until high school age to attack English literacy and numeracy issues it will be invariably more difficult. It is ironical that boarding school is seen as a key option. Why? In many parts of Northern Australia there were no secondary schools. Non-Aboriginal people frequently sent their own children to school in the capital cities. The problem for remote and very remote Aboriginal children is that even for the small number who want to entertain this option namely through a desire to connect in the sporting and musical world is that the building blocks of learning are just not there. If you are an Aboriginal young person in a remote or very remote area Abstudy will ironically fly you to boarding school in Sydney or Melbourne or Brisbane or Perth but if you have a very limited ability to read and write then it is likely that the exercise will fail. Certainly mentoring projects like AIME will help in this but lets no have no illusions about the problems of getting to high school with very low primary English and maths skills and the capacity of even our most elite private schools to deal with these matters. It is not just a matter of having an English as a Second Language capacity it is a matter of having a skill in teaching English as a second language to Aboriginal children with a great number of oral linguistic skills but with no experience of written or grammatical rules.

So all this is why 6703 kilometres is a small distance to travel on the way to improved outcomes for the coming generations of Yolŋu children. Hopefully policy makers will make it easier for these orbits to occur by ensuring that primary school children are eligible for Abstudy remote area allowances and travel! On Sept 17 a small group of individuals and Yolŋu family members is walking with Mrs. Burarrwaja across NE Arnhem land to draw attention to these issues. We hope hope to facilitate more orbits between remote communities and good educational and sports programs and to encourage the Federal government to lower the age of Abstudy to include primary school students in appropriate circumstances where there are good options and outcomes.



Marcus Gurriwiwi first prize at the small schools cross country competition on the NSW South Coast 2016

## II

### Remote and Very Remote Area Education in Australia

It is sometimes observed that Federal politicians fall over themselves at the Garma festival and that powerful organisations like the AFL are always looking to support Northern Aboriginal people while overlooking Aboriginal people in the South, but it seems clear that one area of considerable disadvantage for remote and very remote communities is early childhood, primary and secondary education. Every Aboriginal leader of substance over the past thirty years or more from Wesley Lahnupuy and Gallarwuy Yunupingu to Noel Pearson and Mick Gooda has argued there is a major under-investment in remote and very remote Indigenous education. Mick Gooda rang the warning bells in 2009 when he wrote that debates about boarding school versus home community education bi-lingual education versus English literacy saturation and other debates were a distraction from the major issue: “The focus on education approaches is a distraction from a simple truth: there are some very large gaps in the provision of education services in remote Australia”. If there is doubt about the substance of this statement then one only has to look at the NAPLAN results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in remote and very remote areas. National percentages of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children not meeting reading, spelling and numeracy minimum standards are between two and thirty times lower than for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in remote and very remote areas. (See page 2) The results suggest that early childhood, primary and secondary education options in remote and very remote areas need a dramatic boost of resources and careful thinking and development. Remote and very remote education in Australia, and particularly the Northern Territory, represents a ghetto of educational opportunity and disadvantage that seems to go un-noticed by the general Australian population decade after decade. But as we have observed remarkably things are getting worse not better.

Reflecting this there is a problem of English literacy and numeracy and a disjuncture amongst the Indigenous children of Arnhem land. It is not a crisis like the false crisis of the intervention years. Nor is it a problem that has one solution. It certainly cannot be solved by the military, police, welfare and any other so-called government interven-

tions. In fact this problem, as suggested above, that has been exacerbated by government policy including the so-called intervention to ironically 'protect children'. It diverted funding away from appropriate Indigenous educational infrastructure and resources towards arguably symbolic and ideological band-aids in the form of police and social workers, mostly non-Indigenous and non-local.

The current problem can be solved primarily by Yolŋu people themselves and supporting communities across the country. There needs to be a shift back to investment in Indigenous schools, Yolŋu teachers and assistants and bi-lingual teachers. This is starting to occur slowly. However, while we wait, as this paper suggests there also needs to be strategic and innovative programs that address the needs of children right now. Even if significant reforms and investments were to occur immediately many children will reach end of high school age with low levels of English literacy and numeracy.

The quality of linguistic education has arguably changed and deteriorated significantly in North East Arnhem land since the 1970s. The 2008 move away from bi-lingual education has had disastrous effects for Yolŋu communities. It undermined forty years of development that began with missionary linguists through firstly the Methodist Overseas Missions, then the Aboriginal Advisory & Development Services (1974) and the Aboriginal Resource and Development Service (ARDS). All have had an enormous and lasting influence on the cultural and linguistic proficiency of the whole region. Beulah Lowe, an important linguist missionary based in Millingimbi, developed the orthography of Yolŋu mata and the first Gupapuyŋu dictionary. Today Yolŋu radio, a very important communications vehicle, continues through the Uniting Church inspired ARDs. It is important to note that the careful linguistic proficiency of missionary teachers as well as the resources they and their successors built up were simply not appreciated by education administrators focusing on a kind of mono-cultural NAPLAN outlook. The first language proficiency of the linguist missionaries that translated automatically into a sophistication in the understanding of, not only English language, but many of the languages of the region, was de-emphasised in 2008. In addition the superb bi-lingual and cultural education pioneered by Dr. M. Yunupingu at Yirrkala was also under-

mined by changing fashions in the Territory and Commonwealth education system and administration. Thankfully this now seems to be changing back towards understanding the importance of first languages but the damage was done and there has been a constant pattern of ignorance, interruption, disruption and lack of investment. Grass roots educators of many years standing have learned to work around the problems and ignorance of successive educational administrations rather than count on their support. But this is clearly not good enough.

Demographic factors are at work too. The de-population of the bush and remote regions that began with the formation of the Christian missions has become far more centralised and dramatic than ever before. There has been a significant rise in the Yolŋu population living in towns as misguided government policy has rewarded families through welfare for living in over-crowded houses. In the misguided views of Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments having everyone in town is seen to be a better option for work, welfare and education than living on homelands. The natural rise in the Yolŋu population has in turn led to a housing and infrastructure catastrophe including in schools.

Forget the hyperbolae of the right and left on these issues the current practical dilemma of Arnhem land is that a majority of Yolŋu children at the end of primary school cannot read or write neither their own languages or English as well as their missionary educated grandparents. Although they can frequently speak and interact in several Yolŋu languages and dialects, they are far below the English literacy and numeracy standards of the average Australian primary school child.

Is this such a problem you may well ask? Well yes it is. Everything from danger signs to licencing tests to employment and training questionnaires to bank statements and commercial contracts are written in English. In international law English is primary. Moreover if you cannot read basic labels like “diesel” and “unleaded” then you are in for a litany of significant problems and failures. Lack of English literacy and numeracy can be life threatening.

Without research funding we cannot drill down into the North East Arnhem land region, however, NAPLAN results give us a broad picture of the situation.

The irony is that at present all of the Commonwealth focus and most of the Commonwealth and Territory funding is directed towards secondary school and boarding school options. Primary schools in Arnhem land face a very difficult situation and for those parents who see the crisis and want to do something about it there are very few options. Abstudy ironically does not pay for airfares and away from home boarding allowances until the age of 14. By this time if children are lucky enough to win a sporting scholarship to study at school and can get through the myriad of questions on the Abstudy application they are doomed to failure in mainstream southern and northern secondary schools. Lack of literacy and numeracy is the principal reason for the failure of young people to stick out school, no it is not home sickness or cultural alienation. As children grow older the literacy and numeracy gap becomes more profound and harder and harder to bridge.

The boarding school for Arnhem Land remote area kids will be completed by the start of the school year in 2017 in Nhulunbuy. It will be a much watched experiment. Nhulunbuy High School will move from being a majority European school to a majority Yolŋu school and there will be an option for children to have high quality secondary education across the region. But it will not address the needs of the whole region by any stretch of the imagination. The inadequate funding and de-funding of other strong schools in the region notably at Garrthala has to be re-addressed. Nor should the school be seen as some kind of magic bullet. Given the massive literacy and numeracy gaps of most Yolŋu children it will almost certainly fail to engage students in the mainstream curriculum. The efforts of local teachers and administrators to meet the challenge in 2017 is very admirable and is a step in the right direction but there is much more to be done.

The fact is that while a comparatively huge level of money was put into military, policing and family supervision and welfare across the region in the 2000s, primary education has been neglected since the 1970s.

Then there was the catastrophic curriculum challenge to bi-cultural education which was the strong point of all of the Arnhem land primary schools. As this myopic focus occurred proper funding of primary schools also faltered. The mission schools founded in the 1940s and 1950s, the sole provider of education for the majority of Yolŋu children, have just not been supported to provide for the demographic needs of the region. This is why the majority of Yolŋu children of 2017 are not being provided with the quality of linguistic education of their parents and grand parents.

The first wave of children coming to the new boarding school in Nhulunbuy will almost certainly not have spent much time at primary school because of over-crowding, distances, lack of engagement and inadequate school curricula and teachers. So this becomes a massive challenge at many different levels. The easy road is to simply create a two tier education system which basically allows for streamed standards amongst students. This too is a complicated matter. For if it is a matter of informed choice to lean towards non-mainstream education options then certainly a two tiered mainstream and Yolŋu education path might be justified. But at present there is no semblance of informed choice and many Yolŋu parents who themselves struggle with English and mainstream communications are desperate for their sons and daughters to become masters of the forms of communication which oppress, restrict and frustrate them daily.



Kangaroo Valley Primary School Principal Andrew Smee, Mark, Marcus, Kih-toni Gurruiwi

### III Solutions

For fifteen years the ISX ([www.isx.org.au](http://www.isx.org.au)) has been working at the roots of the grass levels in Aboriginal communities and for the past several years intensively in NE Arnhem land. The problems we have worked on are not theoretical. They tend to hit you in the face. We make lots of mistakes for every one thing we get right. Over the past several years dozens of Yolŋu parents have presented their young children asking for education options following the successful placement of Yolŋu girls and boys at Sydney private schools. Guided by Ms. D.S. Gurruwiwi and Mrs. Batumbil Burarrwaŋa plans and activities have been pursued at a slow and steady pace. Only small experiments have been possible. However slowly some practical and symbolic projects have emerged.

Abstudy which provides educational assistance for Aboriginal students really only begins at first year secondary school and at age of 14. This means that for hundreds of Yolŋu families who want better options, students must wait until secondary school before they have any prospect of addressing literacy and numeracy issues in other places outside their local schools and remote communities. Only a handful of Yolŋu people have been able to afford the very high costs of primary education in Darwin or Cairns or in the Southern capitals and when high school options emerge these students find it very very difficult as do the secondary schools that receive them. In other words Abstudy in effect funds inevitable failure and difficulty in North East Arnhem land. There is no way that a young Yolŋu person from homelands or well established Yolŋu communities coming into Year 7 or 8 even in the most prestigious, and well funded private school with the best support money can buy, can easily catch up with their peers. This situation can be soul destroying, demoralising and inevitably leads to much angst.

For Aboriginal people in remote and very remote areas at the very minimum there needs to be a re-investment and re-inviogoration of homeland schools. There is a role for homelands services that fly into homelands but there is no substitute for actual schools on the home-

lands. It is doubtful that government alone can achieve the sort of renaissance that is needed. There needs to be partnerships between schools across the region and across the nation with homelands schools. There needs to be schools like at Maypuru but with an independent Yolngu school board and funded as private schools. They need to be able to pick and choose their own teachers and teachers must be prepared to live and teach in the communities for a minimum of four years. Obviously the ability to speak, read and teach Yolngu mata as a first language and English as a second language is a very high priority.

At present the need for school in the South is a matter of urgency. Children need to have the benefit of attending other schools and learning at places where there is high level infrastructure and low teacher student ratios. Hoist families need to be well versed in Yolngu culture with close ties to families. Ideally schools should be small country schools away from cities but above all there needs to be a corresponding football and netball competition that supplements the school program. The duration of visits to the South should be not more than twelve months and a minimum of three months. Obviously children who are not attending school cannot catch up to national standards of English literacy and numeracy in such short time frames and they should not be expected to. However it is remarkable the bi-cultural literacy and friendships that do emerge. There are a host of extra benefits from traveling south even when these cause dilemmas and difficulties such as the over stimulation of cities and mainstream life. As schools in the north are re-charged one can imagine children from the South traveling to the north to attend remote and very remote area schools and learning in depth about Aboriginal culture. This is the future but for now the challenge of creating opportunities for remote and very remote children with trusted host families, schools, communities and football and netball clubs remains the priority.

### *Costs and Value for Money*

We make no attempt to calculate the worth of the experience for an

Indigenous child from a remote or very remote community coming to school, playing sport and experiencing the cities, towns and villages of South East Australia. Rather for budget holders we calculate here the minimal dollars that are required to make things happen. On any calculation the value for money is very special.

Depending on the generosity of the host family the cost of a primary school child coming to a school in a non-remote area including airfares could be as low as \$11,700 per annum allowing \$3500 for three return airfares and \$8200 for food, lodging and mentoring at \$200 a week for 41 weeks of school. To be sustainable and for host families to take on the challenges there arguably needs to be stipend for the work which involves 7 /24 days of care. These costs depend on the host family and are also based on attendance at a public primary school. The school needs notice of the attendance of children in order to arrange ESL language support. Children should come in pairs or with a supporting adult. So in effect the minimum cost of a successful year long educational experience along these lines would be about \$23,400 for two children.

In order to support test the experience we had far less than this to support three children coming to school at Kangaroo Valley. It was necessary to drive back and forward to Arnhem land on three occasions during the school year. The children participating came for between six and eight months to school in Kangaroo Valley.

### *The Tasks Ahead*

There are many tasks ahead. If we use the Mata Mata homeland community as a starting point we can get some idea of the dimensions of the challenges. Children and parents at Mata Mata reside in the homelands and orbit between communities and schools at Galiwinku, Yirrkala and other homelands schools. It is clear that the original school at Mata Mata build in conjunction with the far seeing missionary linguist Harold Shepherdson and Batumbil Burarrwanja family needs to be renovated and revitalised. That is was ever let decline is an indictment of successive government policies and the overall tendency

to disinvest in and destabilise homeland communities over the past few years. If it were functioning it would form an important hub for the community and incentive for families to stay in the area. What does this mean in practice? The school should be a multi-purpose educational facility that can support young children as well as adults. For young and old alike the school needs to be supported and revived for primary school and long distance education instruction.

We need to be recruiting and culturally immersing families that would like to host Yolŋu children for between three and twelve months.

We need to be working with local schools across Australia that are well resourced and able to host Yolŋu children and to assist them learning English as a second language.

We need to be working with local sporting competitions in netball, AFL and rugby to actively support families and children who come to school in the South.

We need to be resourcing the Gary Dhurrkay Academy in NE Arnhem land to be planning with Yolŋu families, possible education orbits to suitable families and schools and also to be creating cultural awareness training for children and families interested in being hosts.

We need to be resourcing the famous bi-lingual schools in Arnhem land to work with southern schools to be a source of support as well as development for teachers, children and parents.

It is easy to go on listing things that need to be done. Each of these areas is full of challenges but the potential is also clear. We can move from a crisis to an opportunity for all concerned. We can make a difference and transform out thinking about remote and very remote areas of Australia as pereceived educational ghettos to their rightful status as sacred places of great significance and learning across cultures.

Homelands are sacrosanct but in recognising and respecting their sanctity, they can also be orbits for the greatest opportunities in the mainstream world and vice versa. Most importantly in all of this we stabilise and strengthen the economic, social and cultural base of the homeland community. Such is the dream.\*

\* Special thanks to Danny Gilbert, Tony Shepherd and the Western Sydney Giants and Mike and Cathy Gorman for their generous support of the children's school, football and netball journey. Kangaroo Valley Primary School staff, students, parents and community have been extraordinary, generous and supportive. Special thanks also to the coaches, players and parents of the Bomaderry Tigers.

## Endnotes

1. The 2016 International Linguapax Award went to Yirrkala school for 40 years of bilingual education and the promotion of multilingualism.

2 For those that might be confused by the apparent contradiction of the 2008 Northern Territory focus on English for four and a half hours of the five hour school day and the then Abbott government's apparent support of first languages of Aboriginal people across the nation – just think Yes Minister. A living breathing language culture was effectively challenged at the same time the Feds were saying yes to the revival of Aboriginal languages lost through exactly the same process of cultural ignorance and assimilation!

3. For more on the Marrima Rom Foundation see <http://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/cam-begg>

4. The benchmark here across the country remains Rumbalara FNC which achieves outcomes beyond any accounting or quantitative measurement. It is in its famous phrase “more than a football and netball club”. The positive results it achieves for Aboriginal young children are so extensive that it is impossible to quantify. These include benefits for school participation, literacy and numeracy, employment, social inclusion and community well-being. Rumbalara is worth, nothing short of tens of millions of dollars in social, cultural and economic benefits and savings to the wider Sheparton and Goulburn Valley community of non-indigenous and Indigenous people. See <http://www.rfnc.com.au>

5. Closing the Gap Report 2015 Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Driving Records Cairns to Mata Mata across the Gulf of Carpentaria

Date	Place	\$	Diesel/ litres	\$ per litre	Odometer	Distance Kms
20-Jun	Sydney to Cairns					
21-Jun	Mossman	\$100.00			365000	
21-Jun	Mareeba	\$88.00	70.53	1.247696	365107	107
	Mt Surprise				365,348	348
	Croydon	\$73.19	112.77	1.540784	365,559	559
	Little Bynoe River Camp			365735	735	
	Lerichardt River				365842	842
21-Jun	Burketown	\$84.38	60.27	1.400033	365907	907
	Hells Gate Camp				366069	1,069
22-Jun	Boorooloola	\$113.90	77.48	1.470057	366306	1,306
	Stuart Hwy	\$79.82	57.58	1.386245	366710	1,710
22-Jun	Wilton Creek Camp				367,164	2,164
23-Jun	Nhulunbuy	\$189.31	111.14	1.703347	367563	2,563
23-Jun	Mata Mata				367,769	2,769
		\$728.60				

### Driving Records Mata Mata to Kangaroo Valley

Date	Place	\$	Diesel/litres	\$ per litre	Odometer	Distance
	Mata Mata turn off				368,778	
3-Aug	Rocky Bottom Creek				368,962	184
	Gulin Gulin				369,098	320
	Lookout				369,223	445
	Beswick	\$ 50.00	25	2	369,277	499
	Mataranka Camp	\$ 186.19	134.43	1.38	369,382	604
	Dumarra	\$ 65.80	42	1.54	369,588	810
4-Aug	3 Ways	\$ 116.99	60.27	1.65	369886	1108
	Barkly Homestead	\$ 67.50	37.73	1.78	370,069	1291
	Mt Isa Camp	\$ 101.10	84.32	119.9	370056	1278
	Longreach	\$ 75.84	63.25	119.9	370463	1685
	Blackall	\$ 40.52	31.19	129.9	371,051	2273
	Charleville	\$ 65.67	53	123.9	371246	2468
	Back of Bourke Camp					
5-Aug	Nyngan	\$ 97.06	79.1	122.7	371,521	2743
	Cowra	\$ 59.88	49.94	119.9	372118	3340
	Kangaroo Valley				372,420	3642
	Final	\$ 926.55			372,731	3953

