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Pirnilu Nintipungkupayi (Everyone Is a Teacher): Keeping Old People's Spirit Healthy Through Education

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Abstract

In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of desert Western Australia, older people are being encouraged to participate meaningfully in student education. This initiative is being led by two of the authors of this article, senior Ngaanyatjarra women, both of whom work with the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School with its campuses in eight remote communities spread over hundreds of kilometres. Elderly men and women, some of whom are residents in the Ngaanyatjarra Aged Care home (Ngaanyatjarra Health Service, 2021), are eagerly participating in the planning of bush trips, gathering their traditional resources, seeds, grinding stones, bush resins, recalling stories, songs, and dances—as they prepare for the bush camps with students. During the camps the schoolteachers step back and the elderly lead in what is known as two-way science. At first glance, this work may look like it is simply focused on the educational needs of students with senior Yarnangu acting in a supporting role. However, this article will demonstrate the continuous connections and responsibilities, laid out in the *Tjukurrpa* (the Dreaming), between the old and the young, to their ancestral lands. It sets out how according to “*Tjukurrpa* thinking,” the principal way to provide good care is by helping senior people remain *on country* with family, pass on their knowledge to younger people, and thus keep strong languages and *kurrunpa* (people’s spirit) alive.

Keywords

Aboriginal Australian; Central Australia; inter-generational respect; *Tjukurrpa*

1. Introduction

In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in the desert of Western Australia, Old People have a long history of participating meaningfully in young people's education. It is important to note that, in these regions, the Aboriginal English term "Old People" is used as a mark of respect and authority. The initiative to be described is led by two of the authors, senior Ngaanyatjarra women, both of whom work with the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School with its campuses in eight remote communities spread over hundreds of kilometres. Senior men and women eagerly participate in bush trips, gathering traditional resources, seeds, grinding stones, and bush resins, while recalling stories, song, and dance. During the camps, the schoolteachers step back and the elders lead in what is known as two-way science.

At first glance, this work may look like it is simply focused on the educational needs of students with senior Yarnangu (Aboriginal people from the region) acting in a supporting role. However, the camps also build social connections and follow processes laid out in the *Tjukurrpa* (the Dreaming). This provides an important way to help senior people visit country with family, pass on their knowledge to younger people, and thus keep strong languages and *kurrupa* (people's spirit) alive.

This article allows readers to see, hear, and get a feel for what happens when senior people take on "up front" roles as educators in "on-country" learning for students, schoolteachers, Aboriginal rangers, and other *maliki* (visitors). It describes activities that see senior people being involved in work that has them being carers and cared for. It also provides a case study of how to bring younger and older people together to support each other's wellbeing and sustain cultures that have long valued the elderly. This allows us to understand how people might see their identities and roles move from being "the aged in care" to "educators of young people."

2. A Few Words on Writing Together

The article is written in a way that some will see as unconventional. In part, this is because "Western" ways of writing are strange to Yarnangu whose systems of coming to knowledge are much more grounded in narrative, dialogue, or conversational styles and situated in the specific contexts of places in their *ngurra* (traditional country). It is also because this piece of work emerged out of a set of relationships rather than university-based research projects. Finally, the article draws upon a mix of sources including a film that was commissioned by the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, photo records of the camp, the direct participation in a two-way science camp by four of the authors, narratives of Daisy Ward and Lizzie Ellis recorded specifically to help illuminate what went on during the camp, and many hours of reflective discussion by the authors. In June 2021 four members of the writing team participated in the camp and were involved in filming by Fat Lizard Films who were commissioned by Ngaanyatjarra Lands School and the Western Australian Department of Education. The resulting film has been cleared by the school and those Yarnangu who were present to be made publicly available, particularly for those interested in two-way science and working to support the future of Yarnangu young people. The film titled *Pirnilu Nintipungkupayi: Everyone is a Teacher* (Turner, 2023) is the second film across a trilogy examining the work of the school as it incorporates Yarnangu education content and processes into its curriculum.

Daisy Tjuparntarri Ward is the senior Yarnangu educator and Lizzie Marrkilyi Ellis is the Yarnangu curriculum writer for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School. Both are Yarnangu and grew up in the Lands. Jan Turner is an anthropologist and filmmaker who has spent considerable time on the Lands and working closely with Daisy

and Lizzie. The film narration was unscripted. Daisy and Lizzie viewed the film and each provided an explanation of the content. Jan edited the final narration with ongoing feedback from Lizzie, Daisy, and others from the school who were present during the camp. Jennie Buchanan was a member of the film crew and worked with Lizzie in providing a reflective process for teachers to analyse their own learning from the camp. Dave Palmer has been working with the team for several years and is an independent director of one of the local Aboriginal corporations.

Importantly, all of the authors are related through time and cultural affiliations. Although Daisy and Lizzie are Yarnangu and Jan, Jen, and Dave are Walypala (non-Aboriginal people), all are considered either sister, brother, or sister-in-law according to Yarnangu conventions. This reflects the fact that Daisy, Jan, and Lizzie have been sisters for over 30 years, and Jen and Dave have been invited to take on various roles over the past five years and are treated by Daisy and Lizzie as brother and sister-in-law.

This article did not emerge out of a research project conducted as part of a research institution. Rather it came from two main inspirations. The first was the documentary of the two-way science camp, produced through a collaboration between the school, Fat Lizard Films, Daisy and Lizzie, and with assistance and the blessing of all present. This served as “data” and helped shape the structure and content of this article. The second was a desire for those involved (including senior women) to talk about elements of the two-way science approach that are concerned with passing on knowledge and keeping people healthy across the generations. This aspiration is shared by all the authors. The work is part of a larger agreement between those involved to support Yarnangu wellbeing and help prepare others who may seek to do this in the future. In this way, the article represents part of an ethical practice of working across cultural borders to articulate what respectful practice might look like. In this specific case, the following ethical processes were followed: regular conversations between the writers to check that cultural safety was not breached; co-authorship; drawing upon material (the film and photos) that had been cleared by the school and those present for publication; and checking the work against Yarnangu written and filmed sources.

We have decided to follow a Yarnangu practice of moving between *tjuma* (a rich description of events as they occurred) and *yitingka* (diverting and making aside remarks by thinking, showing, and sometimes explaining what is behind the events). While this does not follow the rules of some academic journal writing, we believe this brings the reader more fully into the cultural and physical experience of the work being described. In this way, we invite the reader to shift their position from reading and feeling the *tjuma* (story) to understanding the *yitingka* (context and analysis).

3. *Tjuma*: Setting Up for Two-Way Science

Pirnilu Nintipungkupayi: Everyone is a Teacher is a film that offers a condensed story of a two-way science trip based out of Warakurna in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The story starts with vehicles following behind a Ngaanyatjarra Lands School bus. The vehicles are bumping along a single track through bush ten or so kilometres northeast of the remote community of Warakurna in Central Australia. The bus contains a precious cargo of Yarnangu students, young people, and elders along with school teaching staff. In the convoy of four-wheel drive utes (utility cars) and cars are also Aboriginal rangers, other *maliki* (visitors), and people from a distant Aboriginal community.

The vehicles travel through low spinifex grass bathed in soft golden sunlight. The landscape has been shaped over many thousands of years by mosaic fire work practices. This includes the magnificent deep red ranges of Purli Yurliya (the Rawlinson Ranges). Prior to leaving the Warakurna community, *maliki* have been sung into safety by Daisy and other senior women. This process is part of old Yarnangu governance practices that ensure care and safety for people as they travel.

On the bus, and in the vehicles in front and behind, experienced and well-honed eyes are looking for goanna and other food sources. It is the Old People who have the knowledge of the seasons, habitats, and right times for seeking out food sources and making fire. Old People regularly sang out to *tjitji* (children) to keep a lookout, ever ready to stop and reach for their mobile kits of self-sufficiency in the desert (bags, knives, sticks for digging and stunning, and blankets for warmth).

When we arrive, a drone camera is launched to offer us a bird's eye view of things being set up. Daisy and other senior people choose where everyone should camp. Senior ladies walk through the bush, exchanging observations with loud and joyful voices, one with her blankets on her back; "this is a good spot here....Look at the *waru* [firewood]!" They carefully set up windbreaks, choosing soft sand for sleeping.

There is much laughter and instructions in *wangka yuti* (everyday language). Students lay out their swags side by side for warmth. Minky blankets are shaken and set down on school swag mattresses so that a wonderful sea of colours spread across the site. These warm blankets are as soft as animal fur, but made of synthetic polyester fabric, mimicking the plush texture of mink fur but at a much more affordable cost.

Older young people work with four- and five-year-old students, shovels in hand. They smooth away the prickly spinifex bush or dig a little *waru* (fire) place. It is all hands on deck as the camp comes into being. A central tent and a blue ground tarpaulin peek out from under two gazebos set up as food preparation and learning spaces sheltered from the raging sun. Later in a post-camp reflective workshop facilitated by Lizzie and Jennie the schoolteachers confess to being confused and baffled, unused to camping, to not giving the directions, and unaware of the cultural and educative significance of carefully setting out where people sleep.

This work is reliant on senior ladies who possess a deep knowledge of kin and family relationships, people's proximity to areas of origin, opportunities for learning, food resources, the wind and weather, access to wood and shelter, and esoterica associated with safety. This is critical to doing things "the right way."

4. *Yitingka*: Who Are Yarnangu and Where Are the Ngaanyatjarra Lands?

Yarnangu is the term used to describe Australian Aboriginal people who come from and often reside in the communities of the desert regions in the far eastern part of Western Australia. Some readers may know of *Uluru* (Ayers Rock). This is approximately 300 kilometres to the east. Ngaanyatjarra Lands include approximately some 250,000 square kilometres (about the size of Victoria or the whole of New Zealand). Approximately 2,000 Yarnangu live in eleven remote communities across the Lands (Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, 2023).

Most Yarnangu maintain a rich cultural heritage, holding onto their language, laws, and systems passed down over thousands of generations. Many of the senior people are amongst the first wave of those who moved

from the bush between the 1930s and 1970s into mission life in Warburton. These people have never lost contact with their *ngurra* (traditional country), living close to where they were born and continuing to visit and carry out important customs and practices. The main language spoken is Ngaanyatjarra, though many also speak other Western Desert languages such as Mantjiltjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Pintupi, Luritja, and Ngaatjatjarra (Brooks, 2019).

Yarnangu continue to hunt and gather and fulfil their obligations to carry out men's and women's "business" and take young people "through" various special processes of education and induction. The role of the Old People is to teach young people about *Tjukurrpa* and traditional ways of living and conducting themselves. This includes a strong emphasis on processes such as singing important songs, passing on *tjukurrpa* (stories and accounts of knowledge) painting, *tjanpi* (grass) weaving, and *purnu* (artefacts, tools, and instruments of power) making (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

As has always been the case, Yarnangu *kanyilya* (hold, carry, and teach) their children and young people very carefully (Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, 2023). For Yarnangu, there is nothing more important than their love for *tjamu* and *kaparli* (grandchildren). The word "love" is not just a feeling, it is everything to them. Yarnangu love their young people with all their heart, just like their *kaparli* (grandmothers) always loved them when they were young.

Several of the senior people involved in this story are now residents of the facility Kungkarrangkalpa Aged Care. This is the only specialist care accommodation on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and is located in the Wanarn community, 100 kilometres northeast of Warburton (the administrative centre of the Lands). *Kungkarrangkalpa* means Seven Sisters, an important *Tjukurrpa* story that people share across much of the desert (National Museum of Australia, 2023). Kungkarrangkalpa Aged Care has been built and is managed by the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the Yarnangu-governed corporation responsible for all remote communities across the Lands. Kungkarrangkalpa is an 18-bed facility that provides a home for older people with low-level to high-level care needs (Ngaanyatjarra Council, 2011). Although people in Kungkarrangkalpa are often not living with their families they are still on *ngurra*, close to *tjukurrpa*, culture, and *kurrurnpa* (the living spirits of others). Also important is that living here allows them to be close to other activities that help keep them healthy. For example, staff from Warakurna Artists visit fortnightly to assist residents in maintaining cultural strength through their arts.

5. *Tjuma*: Learning By Doing

On the first morning as people awake, students are laughing and having fun, dogs bark, and we hear the voice of a schoolteacher saying: "Let's go! We are going to look for honey ants." Within minutes the sounds change to those of digging in the sand.

There are yellow acacia flowers blooming amidst the low branches as students, teachers, Aboriginal rangers and senior ladies start to dig and test for ant activity. Some of the Old People have done an earlier walk around to note the likelihood of finding honey ants. Daisy tells us that this is "how we get honey out...how we teach about finding the nests...the kids are so happy!" Emphasising this point, we hear squeals when ants are found; "Come this side, that's right." In the excitement, cries of "*walkamunu!*" (good, great) are heard. Lizzie points out that "everybody is watching; others are giving instructions on how to, where to dig, and...finally...the nectar."

The word “nectar” is said in a reverent tone. This sweet honey comes by with hard physical labour and strong intellectual knowledge. “Nectar” also serves as a wonderful metaphor for the way things are happening *on country*. This is precious work, outside the bounds of school sites and aged care homes.

What is most striking is the sheer physicality of the task. Most take a turn digging but it is a few people who dig to the source. One senior lady from the Kungkarrangkalpa Aged Care facility led this. Dogged and eager, she dug and instructed the younger students. She involved girls in collecting the ants for sharing. She was a superwoman on that day, exerting massive energy and strength, taking seriously her cultural obligations as an educator.

Digging for *tjarla* (honey ants) is crucial in Yarnangu deliberate practices associated with education and care, simultaneously a way of “taking care of our Old People,” by supporting them to take care of students. It also allows senior people the opportunity to teach students the “right way,” showing younger people how to take care of themselves in the bush if they were ever to get lost or need to survive away from their community. It also teaches deeper things about conduct for life. In *Tjukurrpa* thinkin there are layers of meaning with many everyday activities standing as metaphors for other elements of life. To dig for ants is not simply about satisfying one’s sweet tooth. It also introduces *tjitji* in how to take instruction in a respectful way.

At one point a young girl takes a honey ant and holds it in the palm of her hand. As Daisy notes, “she is really happy to teach her teacher how to eat and get the sweet part out of the ant.” Lizzie adds that in this way the schoolteachers are brought into the learning too. Schoolteachers are shown where to grasp the ant and how to access the sweet bubble of nectar on its body without eating the wrong bits. One teacher spent some time in a nervous state, repulsed by the idea of eating an ant. It is a joyful moment for everyone when she yells: “OH YUM! OH MY GOODNESS! IT’S QUITE STRONG AS WELL.” In this moment the teacher becomes the student.

The visiting ranger team is also excited to try this delicacy. There are no honey ants in the region where they come from. They know how special it is and appreciate the chance to learn and have a taste. They dig and watch, recording the process on digital devices (smartphones and tablets) to share with families back home. When they return, students will take what they have learned in the Yarnangu context and weave it into the state-driven curriculum. This is how two-way science works, starting with Yarnangu language, knowledge, and educational forms, and then bringing in Western science. The reach and value of senior people’s role in education are multiplied, challenging discourses that construct the aged as a drain, as needy, and of minimal value (Deslandes et al., 2019).

6. *Yitingka*: Being on Ngurra (Country)

This work occurs on *ngurra* (country). As is the case across remote Australia, the business of teaching children and young people is inseparable from country. This is because “country is literally and symbolically an extension of family and self” (Palmer, 2012, p. 46). The nexus between Old People, the generation of grandchildren, learning, and being healthy reflects long-established ontological traditions that connect the health of country, the health of persons, and sustaining knowledge across the generations (Palmer, 2012, p. 46). Rose et al. (2002, p. 14) put it beautifully when they explain:

In Aboriginal English, the word “country” is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: They speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, grieve for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life.

Here *ngurra* (country) is a sentient being, able to feel, act, respond and interact with Yarnangu. As Palmer (2012, pp. 46–47) observes, this means that the process of education on *ngurra*:

Not only involves the young and their living Elders “going along together,” it also demands a shared relationship with Elders and ancestors long passed away, but still living as spirits on country. Important here is the conception that the living and the dead are an integral part of the maintenance of life.

Not surprisingly, doing this work on *ngurra* makes Yarnangu feel happy and strong.

7. *Tjuma*: Cooking *Tjanmarta* (Bush Onion)

Later people sit on *ngurra* in the shade of the school bus. Next to this is the jaunty bright blue ute, sparkling against the bright reds, greens, and azures of the country. Spare swags, bags, and other gear rests in the carry tray of the ute. It is a fabulous windbreak offering a space where a circle of elderly ladies sit and work. They speak *wangka yuti* (everyday language) as they sit by their fire. They are positioned in a crescent that allows each to see what is happening and to look out at the gathering of students and visitors. Grandmothers are teaching and *tjitji* are ready to learn.

One of the ladies puts her hand into a large tin that holds the *tjanmarta* (bush onions) next to a well-tended fire with a good bed of ashes. Lizzie explains that bush onions can be collected in this country but these are a special gift from Ntaria (Hermannsberg) over 800 kilometres east, on the road to Alice Springs in Western Arrarnta country. This is a good reminder that Yarnangu are involved in far-reaching relationships often across distances that would see Europeans travel across three or four nation-state borders.

The students and visitors are shown the *pirti*, a wooden “container” that holds these tasty treats. The same container is used to dig into the ash to reveal the hot sand to cook the bush onions. The Yarnangu teachers speak out:

Tjitji, there...try that.

Yuwo...yes!

Munta yuwa...oh, like that.

Walykumunu, *walykumunu*...great, wonderful!

Nuntu...you!

As Lizzie observed in her commentary on the documentary of the camp, “this is how we cook. This is how our ancestors cook. This is the teaching and learning classroom. The campfire.” The senior ladies continue to roast the onions. As a team, the educators offer their lesson. “Ninti...” implores Daisy as the students become quiet. Kids are then given bush onions to eat. Each different voice and instruction occurs in *wangka yuti* (language). The clear voice of another senior lady names the bush onion: “Tjanmarta...oh, that’s a big one...yuwo. Another look, *nyuntu look*....David [name of child]...*ninti...mapitja*...keep going.” The students are handed a cooked bush onion each and shown how to remove the skin to get to the creamy bulb inside. Students intensely watch the movement of their elders and each other as they rub their hands together to find the warm white onion. It is an image of great nourishment for all involved.

8. Yitingka: What Is Tjukurrpa?

To understand this story of community work with Yarnangu it is important to visit the idea of *Tjukurrpa*. Just as the practice of “aged care” is rooted in discourse, traditions, and knowledges of care, health, and medicine, this example of Yarnangu “social inclusion” is deeply shaped by *Tjukurrpa* and *Tjukurrpa* thinking.

As Lizzie, Daisy, and Jan have said elsewhere, *Tjukurrpa* is real (Turner & Ellis, 2023, p. 8). It is not simply a series of stories, folk tales, or mythology. Rather *Tjukurrpa* is the basis of all Yarnangu knowledge, the culmination of information, wisdom, and intelligence from the desert. Indeed, *Tjukurrpa* as a system of knowledge came into being long before contemporary Western thought and knowledge systems were taking shape (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

Imagine being given the task of trying to gather and capture the entire body of knowledge that is on the scientific record. Imagine if we narrowed this to knowledge made since the Enlightenment. The task would still be enormous even if we further limited this to a single discipline. Now imagine the totality of that knowledge being placed in a database called the *Tjukurrpa*, a culturally defined database that incorporates knowledge amassed over thousands of years (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

When Yarnangu talk about *Tjukurrpa*, they are referring to what non-Yarnangu sometimes call the Dreaming, or the Dreamtime. In other parts of Australia this is given a different word, for example: *alcheringa* (Arranda), *Jukurrpa* (Warlpiri), or *Bukarikara* (Karajarri). The *Tjukurrpa* is central to all Yarnangu lives. It is everything and all-encompassing and usually refers to the relationships between rules of conduct, for living and taking care of country, family, language, and future generations; teaching, learnings, and stories; the time when great events occurred that set down teachings for the future; something held inside and with each person, literally, intellectually, spiritually, and symbolically as part of one’s body; the past as it is now and continues to be; and the foundation for practices and how one acts as respectful Yarnangu (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

Tjukurrpa is important when understanding the worlds of senior Yarnangu. As they age, Yarnangu become more knowledgeable for the totality of *Tjukurrpa* both as a body of knowledge and knowledge embodied. The most knowledgeable of elders know how everything relates, from the past, the present, and the future, across different regions, and on the earth’s surface as well as from deep in the earth and up into the cosmos (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

When Lizzie and Daisy speak about *Tjukurrpa* they also describe it as something Yarnangu hold in their bodies. This happens in a variety of ways: in their behaviour and conduct, language and the various speech registers people use with one another, the way they relate to themselves and the universe, and of course, the way people take care of their *ngurra*. It is also literally inside their bodies, felt and made manifested in different parts of their anatomy. Some speak of this existing in one or more spirit animals, or *Tjukurrpa* beings that get carried in their bodies (Turner & Ellis, 2023).

Some ancestral *Tjukurrpa* beings are involved with day-to-day activities and their details are more open and accessible to the young and newcomers. Other *Tjukurrpa* beings are involved with life and death and their details are only revealed to persons with great maturity.

As Lizzie explains elsewhere, the word for totem is also *tjukurrpa*:

Each person was something before they were born, that is in a “pre-life,” and this is their totem....You have to be respectful of your individual totem—for example, by not eating it. Should you eat it, it would be like eating yourself and you would become sick because you have been disrespectful to your own totem. (As cited in Kral & Ellis, 2020, p. 17)

Daisy similarly says: “It’s in our body—our totem. That’s what’s keeping me strong. That’s what happens when they are born, that *Tjukurr* goes into them” (as cited in Turner & Ellis, 2023, p. 24). Another word for these spirit beings is *Kurrurmtatja*. *Kurrurmtatja* have a level of agency, entering and leaving human bodies, precocious, brazen, wilful, their personalities informing that of their human host. They are not static, but rather constantly able to move (Turner & Viegas, 2023).

9. *Tjuma*: Mapping Country

Lizzie describes another session on the camp where the Aboriginal rangers team steps in: “The rangers joined here, they talked about two-way science and what they do in their role in looking after country.” One young man works with the rangers and the filmmakers, starting a drone from the ground and up into the air. We watch as a high school student begins to draw in little children to this activity. Lizzie notes: “In the two-way science approach with the older students teaching the young students, there are no white teachers in sight.” This is a continuation of what the elders have set up, the Yarnangu way of doing things, giving Yarnangu primacy.

People then move to an area where a large canvas painting of approximately three by four metres is rolled out on the ground. It acts as an aerial map created by men and women for a ranger team based 250 kilometres away. It is created in the style of western desert acrylics famous across the globe. It holds an encyclopedia of knowledge for the area. Daisy draws all present to sit, watch, and listen to senior people talking about the map. This is an important story and the role of the storyteller is also important. Also critical is the part this has in student’s learning, setting out how one should behave, people’s obligations, and the dangers associated with misadventure and carelessness. The map is also used to identify important places in the stories. Students hear accounts of families going out hunting, success with catching *kuka* (meat), of trips in Toyotas to look for *ninu* (bilby). This educational event is shared by a group of 30 people, aged three through 80.

Lizzie explains additional elements in the storytelling associated with the mapping exercise:

While we carefully examine the details on the painted map Old People talk about places associated with particular bush foods. The rangers then join in by pointing out what they do in different areas featured on the map.

Together with other senior people present the painter controls how much is shared and with whom.

More serious educational activities are mixed with play. According to Daisy, this is how it has always been and one reason the students are happy to learn. Lizzie notes that “students have moments set aside for leisure, as fun is important, so the Bush is the student’s learning classroom and also where they play.” This means that the soundscape of the desert is rich in the joyful mixture of peals of children’s laughter and playing sounds as games are conducted. Adults keep an eye on things and there is much encouragement, but little interference. While this happens, the older ladies sit down and talk about their childhood growing up in the bush. Clearly the playful rendition of learning, the sounds of joy and the youthful energy all act as a mnemonic that assists in the process of remembering for those senior people, some of whom suffer with dementia. Initially it is impossible to tell this having watched their animated rendition of story-telling and the part they all play in providing additions to other stories being told.

For the involvement of these senior ladies to be possible, several “practical health” care matters are built into the arrangements for the camp. Beds, portable commode chairs, sanitary products, support with specialist medications and diabetes testing are all provided. Basic needs are met in a dignified manner. In addition, there are plenty of able bodies to assist with camp set up, keeping wood in supply, food delivery, and preparation.

10. *Yirna Kamu Pampaya Tjukurrpaku Ninti Purlkanya Mularrpa (Old People Are Very Knowledgeable About Tjukurrpa)*

All of this keeps senior people feeling healthy. As mentioned, this is partly because this work occurs on *ngurra*, in conditions where many grew up and lived when they themselves were young. The Old People are in places undertaking activities and consuming food and water that is clean, nutritious, and where family are in immediate proximity. This is directly felt in the body and physical health of people. As one senior man explains elsewhere:

When old people look at things in the bush, they feel it with their body as well. They feel the country when old spirits that are still in the country enter their body. When they see each rockhole, they can feel the rockhole...and surrounding country. The families from that country who are there in spirit become happy and touch the people who are alive spiritually. The people who are alive feel the country and feel proud. (Lyllal Giles as cited in Kral & Ellis, 2020, p. 132)

It is this feeling that comes from being on country that senior people so intensely love experiencing. They are doing what all see as their obligation, educating and caring for their grandchildren. They share in *wangka yuti* (language), reliving early memories in guiding young people as they were guided by their grandparents. They are also spending time at places of spiritual significance, not rushing to get to a destination, and experiencing the *tjukurrpa* with all the senses possible.

There is ample evidence from other non-Yarnangu sources that in remote Australia senior people are critically important. According to King et al. (2009), senior people's involvement in the passing of culture is important given the massive and detrimental effects of communal trauma on younger people. They are central to the maintenance of cultural continuity so that their grandchildren have anchor points to the identities and systems their family has inherited (Varcoe et al., 2010). A range of research projects have demonstrated the efficacy of involving elders in community health initiatives (Muhunthan et al., 2017). This reflects that crucial role of elders that exists in traditional systems (Dunn, 2004). This continues today with most communities looking to their elders for guidance in matters such as governance, conflict resolution, land management and cultural transmission (Lewis, 2011). Additionally, senior people play important roles in community solidarity and holding things together, helping others deal with racism, trauma, and the effects of colonisation, helping build a better resourced community, and safeguarding identity (Busija et al., 2020, pp. 519–520). Clearly elders fulfill many important roles here (Busija et al., 2020).

11. *Tjuma: Kirti (Making Spinifex Glue) and Night-Time*

In another session, Daisy leads a demonstration of making *kirti*. She starts with placing lumps of termite mound on a grinding stone on the sand: "*Kirti* comes from the spinifex, *kirti* is a super glue." Students, teachers, rangers, and others watch as another senior lady crushes the hard nodules of termite mound to reveal the spinifex resin. Spinifex (*Triodiaeae*) is the tough hummock grass that grows across the desert, a kind of "porcupine grass" with sharpened leaf blades (Ausemade, 2023).

In the documentary Daisy shows us the grinding stone, *walu* and *tjiwa* (a small rock) she is about to use to crush the spinifex. Again, the work prompts much excitement, voices of curiosity, of respect—"wow, *yuwo, walykumunu*"—and cries of encouragement as the students gather around. While one elder shows how we make *kirti*, other elders describe the process: "*Wangka pini...lots of talk, kuliya...listen up...wantinta...where now?...walykumunu...good one, strong one.*" The session ends with the students clapping the good work as the hand-processed *kirti* is shown and passed around.

Later that evening learning and other activities continue when Craig, the school principal, issues instructions to play a game of spotlight: "So, you got to try and sneak up on me and try and tag me without me seeing you. If you get me, you all win. If I see all the kids, I win. *Palya?*" Students' voices shout: "*Yuwo...yes!*" The images of torch lights flash in the dark. There are glimpses of children and spinifex bushes lit by torch beams. The light animates a different atmosphere. Lizzie notes:

In two-way science the night-time is for learning as well...When the night-time comes, they are out, playing, story-telling, bedtime stories or little games to make kids feel tired so they could go to sleep early.

By this time the Old People are snuggled in their swags, some on camp cot beds for extra comfort. This is important as aging hips and bladders mean getting up more than once or twice at night. It is perhaps strange for western care providers to think of "aged" women and men in the desert communities regularly sleeping on the ground in the outdoors. However, here this is what it means to be healthy.

The teachers and staff had made sure the Old People had a good feed for dinner. Their campfire has a billycan with black tea leaves on the boil throughout the day and night. Greedy cups (large enamel cups) are nursed closely, next to each swag as people settle for sleep, beanies on heads to keep out the desert cold. The various little dogs that have been a big part of the camp are next to each person. They, along with the central campfire still burning gently, will keep people warm and safe. The sounds of the students playing the last of their night games ring out through the night. This is a little bit of *ngapartji ngapartji* (reciprocity) for the earlier night-time stories. Students reciprocate the healthy environment gifted by the Old People. How can the ladies not sleep well when they hear joyful children doing the things they did when they were little?

12. *Yitingka: Wanytjapurinyapa Tjukurrpanya Kamu Tjukurrpa Kulintjanya Ngarala? (How Is Tjukurrpa and Tjukurrpa Thinking Important?)*

As those who have often received the most induction (lifelong learning) into the *Tjukurrpa* and *Tjukurrpa* thinking, senior people are the most knowledgeable. They understand the laying down of customs, laws, and rules of conduct. The lifelong accumulation of this *tjukurrpa pirna* (*Tjukurrpa* thinking) as well as their careful nurturing of its transmission across the generations is critical to older people's health and status. This is so in several ways.

Tjukurrpa sets out that those with the most knowledge and rights are those who have the greatest obligations and responsibilities. Elsewhere, Daisy explains about lay (*yara*):

Under our law, the traditional owners are responsible to look after the land and look after the *Tjukurrpa*. If a *Tjukurrpa* place is damaged, we, traditional owners, will be upset and sad. It's like they are doing it to our bodies—the feeling is like cutting us in half. The people holding the *Tjukurrpa* will get really sick and might even finish [die]. (As cited in Turner & Ellis, 2023, p. 53).

At every part of the lifecycle of Yarnangu, senior people, particularly the grandparents of the young, are those who set out how the young ones move through different stages from baby to elder (Douglas, 1959/2020, p. 5). As Lizzie describes, this begins in childhood:

I learnt from an early age, when my siblings and I were told stories by our parents and grandparents, at dusk, many of them from the *Tjukurrpa*....We learnt that the rules of our society are linked to the origin stories that are embedded in specific locations in the country and along the "songlines"....We learnt that there were places we could not go into. We also learnt that there were things that could or could not be touched or taken. And we quickly learnt that there were harsh consequences for breaking the rules....We did not learn all this knowledge in one day—it happened gradually throughout our childhood, our teenage years and into our adult years. (As cited in Kral & Ellis, 2020, pp. 16–17).

Lizzie also notes:

This is what Ngaanyatjarra people call *tjamuku* and *kaparliku yara*—grandfathers' and grandmothers' law....Through the [Ancestral beings] encounters, actions and words, the law, that is, the "right ways of being," the "right ways of doing" and the "right ways of communicating" evolved. (As cited in Kral & Ellis, 2020, pp. 15–16).

To breach these protocols of behaviour is to incite ill-health. In part, this is because the rules of *Tjukurrpa* set out conducts that help keep spiritual forces in balance. When these rules are not followed, even when a breach occurs in ignorance, negative forces can be released, troubling events can occur, and ill-health to individuals and communities can be unleashed. Being able to contribute in this way brings great satisfaction to the Old People. Others may call this the practice of generativity, of giving something back to younger generations. This brings a sense of meaning and fulfillment in older people's lives (Tanaka et al., 2020, p. 1428).

13. Conclusion

On the final morning of the camp, students and adults gather as Daisy and several other Old People sing to all. Teachers, non-Yarnangu, and Indigenous visitors join in as best they can, humming and moving their arms as Daisy demonstrates. The students join in and swing their arms in time to the communal goodbye and safety song whereby visitors are sung safely home. Daisy explains that song is critical in keeping people safe and well, particularly as they travel home: "We are saying goodbye to the Fitzroy ladies and the others."

The title of the film recording is *Pirnilu Nintipungkupayi: Everyone is a Teacher*. The title signifies the importance of everyone contributing to education. However, in this situation, it is the Old People who are the central players in the maintenance of *Tjukurrpa*. This is because they have special talents and skills in helping young people experience *Tjukurrpa*.

During the camp, all enjoy an embodied experience of *Tjukurrpa*. They eat and are nourished by the "nectar" of the ants, in many ways the nectar of the *Tjukurrpa*. They watch as *kirti* (spinifex resin) is fashioned into a ball for ease of carrying. Students hear songs sung as guests are welcomed and farewelled. Students touch and are touched as they are painted in preparation for dance.

As Daisy points out, similar rituals of education and cultural transmission have been built into the rules for conduct over thousands of generations:

Grandparents and their grandparents...have been passing on that knowledge and skills to the younger generations...the people have to hold on to that *Tjukurrpa* and keep passing it on to future generations because it's not an empty wasteland—it's full of sacred places, it's full of stories, it's full of memories, that they haven't forgotten, they've still got it [and] they want the younger people to get that knowledge. (As cited in Sackett, 2014, para. 294).

This is how Old People, many of whom will soon move on and into the *Tjukurrpa*, have their identities, roles, and experiences confirmed, shifting from being constituted as "the aged" to being "educators." They become the conduit that helps prepare others to live a good life as Yarnangu (the motto of Ngaanyatjarra Lands School), drawing the living and "dead," the past and the future, the learned and the learning together.

In some of the Western literature, the term "aging in place" has been used to describe the importance of people remaining in the context of their homes and families. Often it refers to living in one's community rather than in residential care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 2). Perhaps we could think about this story as one example of "aging in *ngurra*," of a thoughtful and practical way of supporting senior Yarnangu to age "at home, in community, on-country, with country, and into the *Tjukurrpa*."

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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