



Photo: Penelope Cook, Makinti Minutjukur, Kerryn Jones and Katrina Tjitayi.

KEEPING ABORIGINAL VOICES CLOSE: FINDING A THIRD SPACE IN WHICH TO TEACH

We have worked together in the South Australia (SA) Department for Education, providing leadership and advice to 10 schools in the remote communities of the Anangu (Aboriginal) people. As a team, we have supported early childhood teachers, often new graduates, working in preschools, playgroups and child and family centres in these communities.

'THE THIRD SPACE BECOMES A PEDAGOGY OF STRENGTH ...'

The Anangu Lands stretch from the far north-west corner of SA, down to the Great Australian Bight, and across to the Western Australia (WA) border. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages are spoken in these communities and children learn English as a second, third or even fourth language. The Anangu people have a strong cultural connection to Country and many 'traditional' cultural ways continue to be practised.

As Piranpa (non-Indigenous) women, the challenge for Penny and I (Kerryn) to authentically conceptualise culturally welcoming, safe and respectful ways of providing early childhood education has given us the opportunity to learn from our Anangu colleagues, Katrina Tjitayi and Makinti Minutjukur.

In her paper *Kurunta Kanyintja: Holding knowledge in our spirit*, Katrina challenges Piranpa educators to ensure that young Anangu children experience their right to hear their home language and engage with their culture in the early childhood services they attend. In response to this challenge, it has become the shared responsibility of Anangu and Piranpa educators to find culturally competent practices.

At the heart of this shared responsibility is the building of relationships and the sharing of our knowledge and worldviews. To develop relationships with Anangu, we are respectful of being visitors, not just to the Country, but to Anangu culture, which means being challenged to reprioritise our 'western' values. Katrina describes this as 'being together in a good way' and opening ourselves up to different ways of knowing and being that are neither 'right nor wrong, just different'.

We have come to understand cultural competence through the lens of co-creating what Ann Haas Dyson describes as the 'third space' (Haas Dyson, 2016). Haas Dyson describes the third space as 'not a single space inserted between the localised and global culture, but rather an intricate and layered space interwoven with

meanings' (2016, p. 50). By conceptualising and organising our early childhood services as embodying a third space that reflects both Anangu and Piranpa ways of teaching, learning, knowing and being, we create **a pedagogy of place** where we can teach with place in mind. We have also drawn upon the principles of Reggio Emilia to develop **a pedagogy of listening**, in seeking to find ways of working that honour Anangu voices. The third space becomes **a pedagogy of strength** where Anangu and Piranpa worldviews come together and seek to disrupt the discourse of disadvantage that exists, and to disrupt the assumption that the 'white way is the right way'.

Educators have responded in innovative ways to the invitation for authentic and culturally competent practice in our early childhood services on the Anangu lands. The following are two examples of what this can look like in practice.

MILPATJUNANYI—HONOURING ANANGU LITERACY PRACTICES

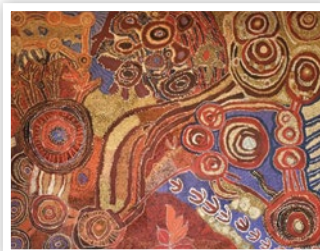


Milpatjunanyi is a girl's storytelling game, involving placing sticks and leaves on the ground to represent family members, and making marks on the ground with a bent stick or piece of wire (Goddard, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary, 2001, p. 74).

Confronted by the image of a number of story-wires (long pieces of wire with a bent handle used for Milpatjunanyi) left at the front of the school gates, we learnt they were not allowed into the school, giving the message that Anangu ways of teaching and learning were to happen outside of school. To recognise the knowledge children bring with them and to teach with place in mind, many of our preschools have now set up spaces where Anangu educators, families and children use story-wires as a valued literacy practice and way of teaching and learning.

STRONG TJUKURPA (STORY)—CREATING A SHARED PHILOSOPHY

At the new Fregon Child and Family Centre, Anangu and Piranpa collaborated to develop a shared philosophy statement to describe this 'third space'. Ten local artists documented this philosophy in a painting that is displayed at the entrance. Katrina explains this painting as a strong story for young families to have in their spirit:



Our philosophy

Our children are learning two ways: Anangu way and Piranpa way. Our children will grow strong and healthy when their families, their teachers and Anangu Education Workers (AEWs) work together to look after them and teach them in a loving and caring way. Our children learn first from their families about Anangu culture and Pitjantjatjara language. They learn stories and songs and when families share books they learn about reading and writing too. At our preschool, teachers and AEWs

listen to family and support them to teach their children. The children hear English and begin to learn Piranpa ways too. The teachers and AEWs think carefully about all the children and plan good programs for them. We want our children to feel strong and happy living in two cultures. We want them to be confident to keep on learning at school and all through their life.

But this work is tricky. There is either the potential for two worldviews to clash, or the opportunity to create this third space. What does it take to work in this way? It requires Piranpa educators to know when to step back, suspend judgement, and surface assumptions. It requires us to open ourselves to other worldviews and to actively seek to understand and respect perspectives other than our own. It also means learning to recognise and live with 'the rub' of very different ways of seeing and being in the world.

What might a third space look like in your setting?

KATRINA TJITAYI'S RESPONSE TO LORIS MALAGUZZI'S POEM THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN

Tjukurpa Tjuta (*The hundred languages*)



Before the baby is born, she hears the mother's voice and this relationship is the number one language. The language and stories are carried inside ... they're already there. If I see a person I can see language in their kurunpa (spirit). When children are moving around and playing they have language. Language in talking, singing, story-wire, painting, hunting, Inma, dancing, storytelling ... it is all connected—tjunga. I have a relationship with trees, Country, land and when I see something like a tree, my kurunpa (spirit) hears its language ... the relationship is already there. Many languages make us rich and proud (Katrina Tjitayi, 2018).

Kerryn Jones, Katrina Tjitayi, Penny Cook and Makinti Minutjukur

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Kerryn Jones and Penelope Cook presented *Keeping Aboriginal voices close: Creating a third space* at the 2018 ECA National Conference, as part of the theme 'Rights and respect'.

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