

August 2009

Unequal Schools

A case study documenting what some people may call institutionalised racism in the Northern Territory of Australia.

This case study compares the resources provided to two similar school communities. One school community located in Arnhemland, where students speak Aboriginal languages, the other in a regional location where the students speak English.

This story is about unequal access to schooling opportunity based on race. It is about the Federal and Northern Territory governments actively and deliberately further marginalising the most alienated and disadvantaged pupils. These policies conflict with the governments' 'Closing the Gap' commitments and run contrary to what Australians call a 'fair go'.

Background

The allocation of educational funding in the NT actively discriminates against Black students. This discrimination is achieved through a 'special' class of Black-only schools, referred to as Homeland Learning Centres (HLC). There are no 'white' Homeland Learning Centres in the NT.

Currently in the NT there are about 15 schools with attendances below 20, all of which receive full government funding. Yet, 45 remote Aboriginal school populations with at least comparable and in many cases greater numbers are unable to access the same level of schooling facilities and service as their white counterparts because they are classified as HLCs.

Although HLCs have operated in the NT for over thirty years, NT Department of Education and Training (NT DET) still has no policy guiding the department, principals and community residents.

Both levels of government have said for decades they will deliver equity in terms of services. The Australian Government's Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, recently wrote:

*"The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have agreed that A Working Future approach must align closely with the principles set out in the National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery including the agreement that Indigenous Australians living on outstations (homelands) receive services **comparable to those received by other Australians living in a community of similar size, location and need.**"*

The NT Government has also committed to "roll out services to communities who are significantly disadvantaged¹." The case study shows that this is not happening in education.

The case study communities

The **Dundee Beach** community was originally established as a weekend fishing retreat. It is a small, predominantly non-Indigenous township located about 180 kms, and about two and a half hours drive from Darwin. Dundee Beach School has 6 students enrolled in 2009.

Mirrngatja is a small, permanently occupied township located in east Arnhemland. The airstrip was built in 1959 by local labour. Mirrngatja has all year round access by road and plane. Mirrngatja is about 250 kms and about 3 hours drive from Nhulunbuy, or a 25 minute flight from Galiwin'ku. Mirrngatja school has 13 students enrolled in 2009.

¹ NT Deputy Chief Minister and Treasurer, Delia Lawrie on ABC News, 27 August 2009.

Location	Dundee Beach	Mirrngatja
Years opened	1998	1982
NT DET classification for the level of service offered ²	School	Homeland Learning Centre ³
NTDET classification of asset	School	Remote School ⁴
Years of operation	12	28
Enrolment numbers in 2009	6 ⁵ Attendance records for 2004 unavailable.	13 ⁶ In 2004 ⁷ , an average attendance of 100%.
Threat of closure by NT DET	No threat	Constant threat ⁸
First language(s) of students	English	Djambarrpuynu, Ganalbingu
Resident teacher(s)	Yes One fulltime	No A Visiting Teacher attends for one day per week ⁹
Resident Assistant Teacher	Yes	Yes ¹⁰
School infrastructure		
classroom	Yes Paid for by NT DET	Yes Paid for and built by parents.
library room	Yes	Nil
air conditioner - classroom	Yes	Nil
ablution block	Yes	Nil
shaded play area	Yes	Nil
office	Yes	Nil
teacher accommodation	Two bedroom	Nil
carport	Yes	Nil
Classroom resources		
Reading schemes	Yes	No
Class sets of readers	Yes	No
Class sets of text books	Yes	No
etc		
Languages formally taught at school		
	English, Indonesian, Auslan	English

³ In 1987 and 2001 Mirrngatja applied to NT DET for a full-time teacher. No response has yet been received.

⁴ Classified as Remote School: See:

<http://www.bams.nt.gov.au/prod/bams/inventory/index.cfm?fuseaction=listthumbnails&hreflink=01667B>

⁵ Enrolment details accessed from <http://www.schools.nt.edu.au/tegs/dundee/dund.htm>, 19th Aug 2009.

⁶ Attendance in the mid-1980s was around 30. Lack of government investment in Indigenous schooling has impoverished Mirrngatja.

⁷ See: *Kids Tracks*, April 2005, Issue 2, page 1.

⁸ Mirrngatja HLC is under constant threat of forced closure by NT DET due to low enrolment numbers. There is not such threat to Dundee Beach School, despite having only 6 students (2009).

⁹ The daily school program is managed and implemented by the resident Assistant Teacher.

¹⁰ An Assistant Teacher (AT) - in charge of a Homeland Learning Centres may receive an annual allowance of \$1,053 for the responsibility and title "Assistant Teacher In Charge of a Homeland Learning Centre".

	Dundee Beach	Mirrngatja
Classroom services:		
interactive distance learning	Yes	Yes, by phone ¹¹
internet	Yes	No
Classroom equipment:		
computers	Yes, 8 computers	No
smart board	Yes	No
printer	Yes	No
scanner	Yes	No
etc		
School vehicle	Yes	No
Office equipment:		
computer	Yes	No
photocopier	Yes	No
fax machine	Yes	No
printer	Yes	No
etc		
School Services		
office internet	Yes	No
telephone	Yes	Yes
running water to school	Yes	No
electricity	Yes Provided by generators purchased by the NT government, power available 24 hours per day	Yes, through solar installation for community. Up until 2005 parents expected to pay for power generation, with no government contribution. Installation of fans and lights paid for by parents.
\$'s spent on infrastructure by government over life of school.	\$1,500,000 (estimate only)	\$200
\$'s spent on school infrastructure per year of operation.	\$150,000 (estimate only)	\$65
Repairs and maintenance carried out on school.	Yes	Rarely
Received funding through the Rudd \$11.7 billion funding "available to every Australian school."	Yes	No

We ask: when will the NT Government rectify its discriminatory policy on education provision?

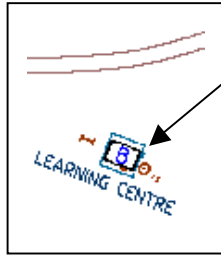
¹¹ Recently provided (2009) via Katherine School of the Air. In 2001 distance learning through Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) was delivered to 66 remote schools and 65 other remote locations, however the Federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) excluded all Homeland Learning Centres from this provision.

In 2008, 250 remote NT DET sites were provided with remote IDL capability. Mirrngatja, like the vast majority of HLCs, was excluded from this provision.

Mirrngatja Remote School

Information accessed from the following link on 29th August 2009

<http://www.bams.nt.gov.au/prod/bams/inventory/index.cfm?fuseaction=listthumbnails&hreflink=01667B>



Mirrngatja school building

Here Mirrngatja is classified a Remote School



Same scale used in both examples

This site is best viewed with Internet Explorer 6.0 or greater!

MIRRRNGATJA HOMELAND CENTRE (2)

Summary Asset Details			
Portfolio: DEET			
Treasury Division: SCHOOL EDUCATION			
Region: GOVE			
Occupant: EDUCATION			
Client Region: ARNHEM CLUSTER (EAST ARNHEM)			
Client Category: PRE-PRIMARY			
Asset Type: REMOTE SCHOOL			
Locality: MIRRNATJA			
Address: Lot#0003 COMMUNITY ID 535			
Internal Gross Floor Area: 1 sq. m			
External Roofed Floor Area: 1 sq. m			
Asset Tenure: Govt-Owned			
Land Information System data: (About ILIS)			
Locn	Parcel	Land Area	Land Ownership
000	01646	Unknown sq. m	

Northern Territory Government

legislation | contact BAMS | disclaimer, privacy and copyright | freedom of information
 interpreter services | search the NT Government
 All data is updated by DPI in an ongoing program



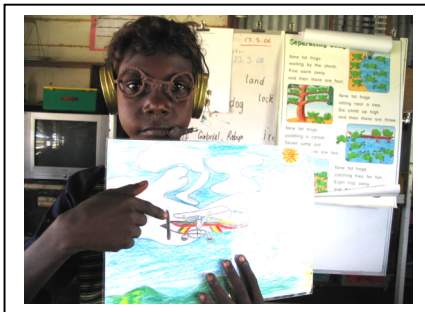
The Mirrngatja school building.

This building was paid for and built by parents in 1982.



Inside the classroom, note there is no wall or ceiling lining.

The fans and lights were paid for by parents.



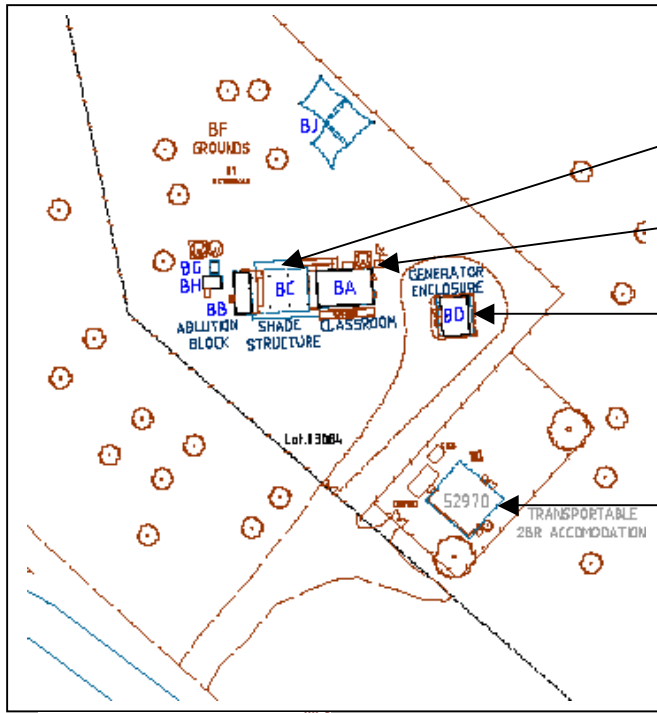
This Mirrngatja student has a vision of what he hopes to achieve. He has in mind his uncle who was a pilot. What a pity NT DET doesn't support his vision.

Dundee Beach School

Information accessed from the following links on 29th August 2009

http://www.schools.nt.edu.au/tegs/dundee/photos/dund_photos.htm?photo=7

<http://www.bams.nt.gov.au/prod/bams/inventory/index.cfm?fuseaction=print&hreflink=02444&pdfmgsrc=/pdfbatch/02444.pdf>



Shaded play and assembly area, ablution block

Classroom and office

School electricity generators

Teacher accommodation



Same scale used in both examples



The Dundee Beach School classroom, shaded area and ablution block.



Students under shaded area



Students in classroom

Postscript

On the 24th February 2010, the ABC national television program 'The 7:30 Report' presented a story based on this case study. This program can be viewed at:
<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2010/s2829391.htm>

A joint media release by the Minister Education and Training and the Minister for Indigenous Development on the 19th April 2010 announced the provision of up to \$300,000 for "Mirrngatja to receive new classroom facilities" this media release can be found at:
<http://newsroom.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=printRelease&ID=6791>