



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

'creating', 'experimenting', 'exploring', 'learning' and 'celebrating'. I suppose it's all too soft and mushy — too 'primary' — in the hard-headed world of 'competencies' and 'excellence'.

Let us remember that for the Tiwi teacher (and I would stress here that this is true of all Aboriginal groups) it is the **who** they relate to that is important. Each group has an insider's knowledge of their group — sometimes not easy to articulate.

We need to take note of the hidden meaning of ways of being and doing, and who better than the people from the inside. The 'spirit' is what gives life, so for the Tiwi it makes immense sense to have a leadership which children sense can give life — hence the representation from each of their 'spirit'-'yiminga' groups gives life to Tiwi education.

In conclusion, having invited you to 'dance' with us as we move into the reality of education at Murrupurtiyanuwu, you will, I hope, have seen that this reality for the Tiwi is becoming firmly rooted not only in the content of the curriculum but in the very warp and woof of their world view. Having placed their own infrastructure via the Milimika ring, I believe that they have taken on what Hedley Beare urges all educators to do, 'to value gaiety, playfulness and an organic connectedness in our education'.

**Sister Anne Gardiner** is the Principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island. □

## Group Leadership Towards Aboriginalisation or Localisation at Murrupurtiyanuwu

### **Teresita Puruntayemeri**

Principal-in-Training, Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, Northern Territory



Milimika commenced at Murrupurtiyanuwu when we realised that for a Tiwi person it is too difficult to stand alone in leadership. Thus as Principal-in-Training I came up with the idea of a Milimika group.

The word 'Milimika' has two meanings in Tiwi:

- a cleared ground made by families to eat, sleep and talk when they are out bush
- a cleared ground made for ceremonies, 'pukamani' where Tiwi people 'yoyi' dance inside the ring, remembering the deceased person.

Also in the 'kurlama' ring, only men perform singing as they walk around inside the circle.

The meaning that I took from 'Milimika' is that school is like the ceremonial ring. Sometimes as a leader I dance, sometimes as group leaders we dance.

Our philosophy of the leadership role in the Milimika circle is that people work together as a group:

- group discussion
- listen to one another
- each has their own say
- group decision-making on educational issues, e.g. bilingual education and interviewing new staff. If it's a Tiwi person we ask the spouse to be present.

We perform different dances in the Milimika ring, sometimes in pairs or in a group. Our major ceremony at this stage is discipline/behaviour problems. If a teacher cannot control a child's behaviour, s/he is sent to the office; then Zita and one of the Milimika persons in the same skin group talk to the child. We expect non-Tiwi teachers to work closely with our Assistant Teachers and we make sure that Tiwi children are given quality education, not second-rate education.

At Murrupurtiyanuwu now there is no Assistant Principal, but rather in our ceremony ring there are five people. These five are Tiwi, dialoguing together at times, and at times with the whole staff. Each one of them has a class, yet each one of them has taken on further responsibility in the Milimika circle.

### Role of the Milimika Group

Leah Kerinauia is already the Jirñany Co-ordinator, and her added duty is to work with Zita, the Principal-in-Training, on the strengthening of professional development for Tiwi teachers and the strengthening of the teaching of the Tiwi language. Leah works closely on language with Sr Jenny Kirby, our Teacher Linguist. Also, she will work with Jacinta and Aurelia in the office for half-an-hour every Thursday to become familiar with office procedure.

Ancilla Puruntatameri, who is already a literacy worker and works full-time on Language Maintenance and Art, will share her expertise in the Milimika group in the Language/Art area. Cilla will also work with Aurelia and Jacinta in the office for half-an-hour every Wednesday. In this way we hope that all members of the Milimika group will eventually know the importance of what is happening in administration.

Carmelina Puantulura who is the daughter of the well-known artist and culture expert, Declan Aputimi, will bring cultural expertise to the group through her vast knowledge and skill in story and song writing. She will also spend half-an-hour with Jacinta and Aurelia every Tuesday.

Elizabeth Kerinauia is the senior member of the Milimika and she is a pre-school, Pwakayini teacher

who has taken on the extra responsibility of liaising with parent on school happenings. We see this as a very important step in localisation.

We hope that in dialoguing together in the Milimika circle and communicating our ideas to the whole staff, Murrupurtiyanuwu will grow in strength as a place for education.

We sincerely thank Sr Trudy Keur, Assistant Director of Catholic Education Office for her support and interest in our Milimika group leadership.

As time passes, we know we have much to give to our children. We also realise that we need support to really understand the many and varied issues relating to education, especially Aboriginal education.

**Teresita Puruntayameri** is Principal-in-Training at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School. □

