



Murdoch

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*On Country Learning: Promoting Remote Australian Aboriginal
Children's Wellbeing and Creativity*

Progress report prepared for the Froebel Trust
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by

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Out of respect, the research team working on the On Country Learning project acknowledges that this final report was penned on Noongar boodjar.



Introduction and Background

In this project, we set out to explore the impact of On Country Learning (OCL) for Aboriginal children living in a remote region of Australia. The report that follows summarises our findings in relation to each of the following research questions, aims and objectives as stated in our initial project proposal. We provide detailed data from interviews. There is a discussion of project limitations and we make recommendations for future work.

Froebelian Principles underpinning this project are referenced throughout this report using the following numbering:

FP 1 - The integrity of childhood in its own right

FP 2 - The relationship of every child to family, community and to nature, culture and society

FP 3 - The uniqueness of every child's capacity and potential

FP 4 - The holistic nature of the development of every child

FP 5 - The role of play and creativity as central integrating elements in development and learning

FP 6 - The right of children to protection from harm or abuse and to the promotion of their overall well-being

Research Questions

At the outset of the project we posed the following question/s:

- How is the relationship of every child to family, community and to nature, culture and society understood and practiced in a remote community by schools and Aboriginal peoples? (FP2)
- How can a model of OCL be developed that recognises the rights of the child to play and creativity within an otherwise centralised and mandated curriculum? (FP1, FP5)
- What opportunity does OCL present in terms of collaborative culturally responsive pedagogies to support Aboriginal children's learning and development in remote settings? (FP4, FP2)
- How does learning On Country with strong connections to the community and cultural relevance impact Aboriginal children's wellbeing, involvement and engagement in learning? (FP6)
- How does OCL develop the cultural and pedagogical responsiveness of educators to support the development of each child and recognise and encourage their competencies? (FP3)

Aims

In order to answer these questions, the project had the following aims:

1. to determine the efficacy of On Country Learning in remote Aboriginal Education in Australia.
2. to ascertain whether OCL enhances Aboriginal children's wellbeing, learning and creativity through participation in an experiential program based on place, culture and community.
3. to monitor the project through a process of continuous feedback in all stages.
4. integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the school curriculum by supporting school based educators to respond to the experience of OCL through their planning and provision at school.
5. Insight into effective pedagogies for vulnerable children.

Objectives

In line with international early childhood research literature highlighting the benefits of outdoor learning for young children's health, wellbeing and engagement in learning (Waller 2007) this project had three main objectives that align with Froebelian Principles, the aims of the project and the research questions.

1. To support and develop the relationship of each child to family, community, nature and culture and thereby enable their holistic development and learning (FP 2, FP 4)
2. To improve Aboriginal children's wellbeing (FP 2, FP3, FP5, FP 6)
3. To support school based educators to build a culturally responsive curriculum to benefit children (FP2, FP3, FP4)

To meet these objectives we invited the knowledge of local community Elders and Traditional Owners to develop, from a culturally relevant perspective, children's understandings of the land, their culture, to the interconnected rhythms of nature.

Summary of Findings in relation to the Research Questions

How the relationship of every child to family, community and to nature, culture and society understood and practiced in a remote community by schools and Aboriginal peoples? (FP2)

As a result of this project, we have ascertained that there is a rich potential and appetite for remote community schools to nurture this relationship further. In this study, members of the Community repeatedly enabled the relationships between children, family, community and nature by providing opportunities for direct experiences on Country. Educators and school leaders valued this as an important and hitherto missing ingredient in successful remote education. The project highlighted these relationships as the key element of children's wellbeing and strong community-school partnerships.

How can a model of OCL be developed that recognises the rights of the child to play and creativity within an otherwise centralised and mandated curriculum? (FP1, FP5)

Educators recognised that the OCL project enabled children to communicate their ideas in contexts and modes that were not previously available to them in the regular classroom. Children's agency in this approach assisted teachers to recognise ways in which classroom programs might be more inclusive of children's 'funds of knowledge' (Moll. et. al., 1992)

What opportunity does OCL present in terms of collaborative culturally responsive pedagogies to support Aboriginal children's learning and development in remote settings? (FP4, FP2)

OCL presented a wide range of opportunities for developing collaborative pedagogies to support children's learning and development in this setting that would likely be transferrable to similar remote settings. However, we have identified some challenges in relation to this. Namely, the need for continuity of staffing in the school and the availability of community members to facilitate OCL. These are factors beyond the control of the project and are very much tied to the context of the project in a remote location.

How does learning On Country with strong connections to the community and cultural relevance impact Aboriginal children's wellbeing, involvement and engagement in learning? (FP6)

There is evidence from a range of data collected in this project that OCL directly improved children's levels of wellbeing, engagement and involvement in learning.

How does OCL develop the cultural and pedagogical responsiveness of educators to support the development of each child and recognise and encourage their competencies? (FP3)

OCL provided a context in which children's cultural knowledge was valued and encouraged. Children's confidence to share what they knew about Country with their teachers provided them an opportunity to be the experts in that space. Children demonstrated both knowledge and skills during the OCL experiences that would not have been visible under regular classroom conditions. These opportunities enabled educators to see children in new and positive ways thus strengthening teacher's perceptions of children as competent learners.

Summary of Findings in relation to the Project Aims

Project Aims	Outcomes	Evidence
To determine the efficacy of On Country Learning in remote Aboriginal Education in Australia	There are benefits to children, schools and communities when OCL operates in a remote school setting.	Interviews Attendance Data Wellbeing Scales
To ascertain whether OCL enhances Aboriginal children's wellbeing, learning and creativity through participation in an experiential program based on place, culture and community.	<p>There is evidence that OCL does enhance children's levels of wellbeing both using the scales and anecdotally.</p> <p>There is evidence that creativity is strongly enhanced by OCL. This was achieved through collaboration with Elders and Educators using local materials such as sticks, grasses, rocks and ochre as well as movement experiences.</p>	<p>Wellbeing scales Teacher interviews</p> <p>Artefacts Interviews</p>
To monitor the project through a process of continuous feedback in all stages.	Feedback was ongoing throughout the project. Some continuity issues arose due to people being absent from the community at points during the project, however, continuous community and school consultation ensured that the project monitoring was thorough.	Meetings Informal Yarning Emails
Integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the school curriculum by supporting school-based educators to respond to the experience of OCL through their planning and provision at school.	<p>This was mostly achieved when the project team was physically on the research site.</p> <p>Teachers in remote schools are under enormous strain for a range of reasons. Additional 'work' as they saw it was sometimes not welcome.</p> <p>Arts integration was the most easily embedded and successful (see Progress Reports July and October 2017)</p>	Interviews Field visits

	<p>Some Wajarri language integration began to occur toward the end of the project (see Progress Report October 2017).</p> <p>Integration continues through the storybook project which at this stage remains incomplete.</p>	
<p>Insight into effective pedagogies for vulnerable children.</p>	<p>In interviews, the principal and teachers noted that OCL provided opportunities for children to share their knowledge in ways they did not manifest in the classroom.</p> <p>Our own observations and field notes indicate that children bring their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, et. al. 1992) to tasks and experiences on Country that are not evident in regular classroom activities. This points to pedagogies that are uniquely available in the natural environment of Country. We believe this is attributable, in large part, to children’s heightened sense of wellbeing in this setting and also to the fact that they are part of something that is valuing their cultural knowledge and ways of being.</p>	<p>Teacher, AIEO and Principal interviews.</p> <p>Field notes</p> <p>Teacher interview</p> <p>AIEO interview</p>

Summary of Findings in relation to the Project Objectives

<i>Project Objectives</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
To support and develop the relationship of each child to family, community, nature and culture and thereby enable their holistic development and learning (FP 2, FP 4)	<p>Children’s relationship to culture and nature were notably enhanced as a result of this project. Their families and communities were involved in all aspects of the project and children were able to participate in activities alongside community members who would not normally be involved in day to day activities with the school.</p> <p>Principal, Teachers and AIEOs were able to articulate the benefits of OCL for children’s learning and development.</p>	<p>Field notes</p> <p>Interviews</p>
To improve Aboriginal children’s wellbeing (FP 2, FP3, FP5, FP 6)	Wellbeing was generally high during school hours, depending on the tasks being undertaken, however, participating in OCL enabled some children to experience observably higher levels of wellbeing.	<p>Wellbeing Scales</p> <p>Field Notes</p>
To support school-based educators to build a culturally responsive curriculum to benefit children (FP2, FP3, FP4)	Initial planning meetings with educators were held following the field visits on Country. We found educators to be lacking time and energy to carefully consider the programming implications of OCL. The researchers adopted an approach of modelling this by supporting classroom teachers in the classroom with experiences connected	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Field notes</p>

	<p>to OCL. A couple of experiences were followed up in the classroom by educators with little additional support, for example, educators followed up the completion of clapping sticks (See Progress Report October, 2017).</p> <p>We would like to improve this aspect in forthcoming projects by gaining the necessary support and commitment from the school provide teaching relief in order to work collaboratively on planning with teachers.</p> <p>Unfortunately, in the Burringurrah context, relief teachers are not readily available and if one teacher is away then the staff are operating at full capacity.</p>	
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Project Implementation

Our detailed plan for the project implementation was been revised due to Dr Lee-Hammond's ill health in April and May, one trip had to be cancelled, however our subsequent visit was double the length of our usual visit time and we were able to take two trips out on Country with the school. The original schedule was provided in the midway project report and the revised schedule follows:

Term and Weeks For OCL	Elders OCL With Teachers and Kids	Data collection
*27/3 (T1/week 9)	One trip with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial interviews, • OCL and classroom observations, • support for teacher planning, • collect enrolment and attendance data (de-identified)
*5/6-13/6 (T2/week 8/9)	Extended visit to make up for cancelled visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCL and classroom observations, • support for teacher planning,

	Two trips with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collect enrolment and attendance data (de-identified)
15/5 (T2/week 4)	One trip with 1 Elder	Community run, researchers not in attendance
29/5 (T2/week 6)	One trip with 1 Elder	Community run, researchers not in attendance
*12/6 (T2/week 8)	One trip with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Midway evaluation and interviews,</i> OCL and classroom observations, support for teacher planning, collect enrolment and attendance data
24/7 (T3/week 2)	One trip with 1 Elder	Community run, researchers not in attendance
7/8 (T3/week 4)	One trip with 1 Elder	Community run, researchers not in attendance
*21/8 (T3/week 6)	One trip with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCL and classroom observations, support for teacher planning, collect enrolment and attendance data
4/9 (T3/week 8)	One trip with 1 Elder	Community run, researchers not in attendance
*16/10 (T4/week 2)	One trip with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCL and classroom observations, support for teacher planning, collect enrolment and attendance data
*30/10 (T4/week 4)	One trip with 1 Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Final evaluation and interviews,</i> OCL and classroom observations, collect copies of work samples, planning documents and digital records, collect enrolment and attendance data

*indicates field visits by researchers

Budget Implications

The travel budget for the project has not been fully spent to date. This is due to two factors:

1. Researcher illness (one trip cancelled for Lee-Hammond, one trip cancelled for both Lee-Hammond and Jackson-Barrett) meant that the project schedule had to be altered.
2. The school paid for a charter plane to fly us into the community on two occasions, significantly reducing costs for car hire and overnight accommodation.

We would like to request that the Trust allows us to utilise these unspent funds to continue the project in Term 2 of 2018. The purpose of this is to ensure project sustainability with a new cohort of teachers and to complete the Burringurrah Book Project (see below).

Interview Data

The interviews reported here were conducted face-to-face, recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then analysed for themes and these are presented below with exemplary quotes for each participating informant. Informants names have been changed for the purposes of this report in accordance with ethical requirements.

Children's Interviews

Interviews with six children were undertaken on 29th and 30th November, 2017.

Themes from the children's interviews include:

- Children enjoyed OCL as part of their school experience
- Children enjoyed making cultural artefacts (tapping sticks, weaving)
- Children learned and recalled detailed cultural knowledge
- Children explored new places with guidance from Elders
- Children valued their non-Aboriginal teachers learning about Aboriginal culture

The children's most frequent comments about OCL were in relation to their enjoyment in making the tapping sticks and painting the rocks (see progress report October, 2017). Children also recalled in some detail the knowledge that they had gained about Country during their OCL visits, Kylie remembers distinct details such as:

There are these purple flowers, like pinkish-purple. They smell like bubblegum.

And

You get water and then you get a rock and hit it onto another rock, like white, brown and then you've got paint. That's how you can paint your arm, and on your face or on your legs and feet (referring to ceremonial painting using ochre).

Kylie further reflected on the value of her teachers going out on Country:

It was nice to see the teachers go out and watch what Aboriginal people do, stuff like how they cut trees and make tapping sticks, and finding rocks

She also distinguished between learning at school and learning on Country, eventually deciding that both were 'good for your brain'.

Working in the classroom is good for your brain. Going out on Country is learning about your culture. Learn about your culture and think about stuff with your brain, make your brain more smarter (sic).

Other children commented on the opportunities OCL gave them to “see some things we’ve never seen” and finding bush tucker. Most children we interviewed were a little shy but all of them expressed that OCL was fun and that they enjoyed it. They particularly liked the trips when we went out in the school vehicles and visited places like the Mountain (Burringurrah). All the children recalled the tapping sticks as a highlight of these excursions. The sticks were actually made back at school – the field trip consisted only of locating and cutting down the branches from the right tree to make the sticks.

Aboriginal Education Officer Interviews

Two Aboriginal Education Officers were interviewed on the 30th November, 2018.

Themes from these interviews include:

- the observable changes in the children when on Country
- the need for practical support to sustain OCL into the future

Betty has worked in the school for many years and noted the changes in the children when they participated in OCL as opposed to the classroom:

I think it's really good for the kids, they get out more and they like it. I see it in them... the kids like really want to know what's what (on Country)... I think the classroom just locks them up... I've been here for a while and I noticed like when you came out, some of the kids – they enjoy it. Going out – even just going walking. So I see the changes in them. And they love it.

In the interview, she was asked to reflect on her own relationship with the classroom teacher and children during OCL field trips.

Yeah – its good - like out there like the kids they're not too sure – they look at you and ask like 'is it alright to go there?' They'll ask us (AEOs), you know and I'll say 'I think it is' – rather than ask the teacher, you know. So that's a good thing.

Betty acknowledged that the project gave her and the teachers different status whilst on Country. She was the cultural expert and the teacher was the learner. The children implicitly understood this and looked to her and other AEOs rather than non-Aboriginal teachers.

Patricia, another AEO we interviewed, also identified children’s disposition to learning change when engaged in OCL sessions. She said “they were different, they stood up and listened. I think they learned a bit about it, about the old people (ancestors).” She also identified the need for ongoing practical support for OCL to continue. She recognised the limitations within the community as far as being able to provide appropriate Elders with the

knowledge and permission to share cultural knowledge as well as limited options for transport to enable the project to continue.

Parent/Community Member Interviews

The community member we interviewed, Carl, was also the parent of a child in the school. This interview took place on 25th October, 2017. Other community members were unavailable at the time of the visit to participate in interviews due to a funeral in another community. We believe from our anecdotal observations and informal communications with other community members throughout the project that the sentiments expressed by Carl are shared by many others in the community.

Themes arising from this interview are:

- The need to forge a space in education at the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007)
- The need for teachers to undertake local cultural awareness training with local people prior to commencing classroom responsibilities
- Some community members are reluctant to support the school as cultural teachers due to their own experiences of education.

Carl identified what he saw as a 'barrier' to Aboriginal children's learning in the current structure of schooling in Australia. He identified a 'cycle' of disadvantage affecting Aboriginal children where western or European knowledge is the centre of the curriculum. He suggested a more equitable and successful approach would involve a two-way curriculum where both Indigenous and European knowledge are taught side-by-side, suggesting that the 'European' curriculum may be understood from a standpoint of Indigenous knowledge. Nakata refers to this point of coming together in the curriculum as 'the cultural interface' (2007).

If you break down that barrier, two cultures – you know, European side and Indigenous side and bring them together, you're breaking that cycle where they are learning both things but from an Indigenous perspective

An aspect of the current arrangements at the school that Carl expressed surprise and dissatisfaction about was the fact that teachers arriving at the school are not given an appropriate local induction into the community by community members. They may receive a generic Aboriginal education induction in the capital city and an overview from the Principal on arrival, however this does not provide the necessary 'Welcome to Country' sufficient for teachers to be introduced and acknowledged by the community.

A community run induction is significant so teachers may observe local protocols, know the local languages and be aware of significant places that may be 'off limits' to those other than

the Traditional Owners. These practices are vital for the development of both a strong and mutually respectful relationship between teachers and the small community of which they are a part and the preparation of an appropriate curriculum for the children they will work with. Carl suggested the following approach had merit for improving the current situation:

When they send people up to work in the community, ring the community before-hand and maybe appoint someone to be the leader to set up of cross-cultural awareness on the starting date when they start working

We also asked for Carl's insights into why it was sometimes difficult for us to find an Elder or community member who was willing to accompany us on the trips on Country as there were a few occasions when we struggled to find someone willing to participate. He explained:

I think it's a bit personal. Sometimes some of the people, the board members and older people, my age, once they hit puberty they sloped off at school, went out, got drunk – did stupid things. I'm not putting 'em down, not educated properly. When they try to do something educational for the school here they don't have a clue what's going on, that's why they're too ashamed to come to you, to help you.

This provided a helpful insight for us and is a point upon which we need to reflect for future project implementation. We may introduce a community project induction to maximise community participation and dispel any misunderstandings about expectations.

Principal Interview

This interview took place at the school on the 25th October 2017.

The principal answered all interview questions and an analysis of this interview points to three key themes regarding what OCL offers:

- a relevant and engaging curriculum for children,
- improved teacher engagement and professional learning, and
- strengthened relationships between the school and the community

The Principal reflected that he chose for the school to participate in the project because the experience of OCL was, in his opinion, of more relevance to the students at the school than what he described as the “dry old curriculum”, he stated that he found that the project

Allows us the scope to be able to take what's in the child's natural environment and bring that back into the classroom.

This comment and the following one, speak to one of the strategic objectives of our project which was: *'to demonstrate how the application of Froebelian principles supports high*

quality learning and the deep and connected learning that engages children's curiosity, creativity, playfulness and sense of wonder' (Project funding application, p. 13).

In relation to student engagement as a result of project participation, the Principal stated:

The kids seem to be much more engaged than they were 18 months ago. Eighteen months ago we were grinding through a curriculum that suitable for suburban kids, definitely no relevance to the kids here. What I'm watching now is that they're much more engaged in the classroom, definitely.

In relation to community engagement, the Principal alluded to some constraints around child protection involving members of the community who, although they are cultural experts, are unable to obtain appropriate police clearances to work with children.

I would love to be able to say 'look all community members should be able to come in and take the kids out' but from a legal point of view that makes it very difficult. When I look at the number of community members who have got the requirements to be able to take kids out, that's maybe three or four people – and that's just always going to be an issue.

With regard to teacher development as a result of the project, the Principal noted improved staff and community relationships, stating:

I'm watching staff engage much more with culture and I'm watching staff engaging much more in with community members. Its less of an 'us and them' sort of feel, and those casual conversations that occur when they go out on Country or when they've got someone in the classroom, they develop beyond the program. So, I'm actually watching a change in my staff for the better because they're more willing to engage with the community.

The Principal's noted that his existing good relationship with the community has also been strengthened, he noted that “

The project assists me in my relationship with the community. Most definitely.

When asked if he would recommend the OCL approach to other remote school principals he stated that his advice to them would be to support the project:

I would say 'assist it as best you possibly can, allow the facilitation to occur...just let it happen'...I'm watching the teachers, when they get this stuff modelled to them, the definitely do it after you've (the research team) gone. I've definitely watched that.

The principal did not have any recommendations for changing the approach to OCL used in this project but reflected at the end of the interview of the strengthened community relationships.

Teacher Interview

The three teachers who commenced the project had all left the school for a range of reasons by the stage in the project that the final interviews were scheduled to take place. As a result, one teacher, who had participated in OCL trips on two occasions, agreed to be interviewed. This teacher, we will refer to as Sally, is a new graduate and had been at the school for a term. This interview took place at the school on 30th November 2017.

The main themes from Sally's interview in relation to OCL were:

- children's levels of engagement and attendance improved,
- children's cultural knowledge was valued,
- teachers needed more support to integrate OCL into the curriculum, and
- teacher relationships with the community were strengthened

Children are engaged both On Country and back at school as a result of participating in OCL:

I think its been really good for the kids so far. You can tell they're really engaged when they go out and they explore the local area and they get hear stories from the Elders about how Burringurrah was put together and the history of the place. They are also really engaged in craft projects and other things that come with learning the various skills taught on Country.

Children's knowledge of Country was valued in the project. Sally was able to articulate an example of the ways in which OCL enables children to bring their 'funds of knowledge' to the learning environment:

Kids are bringing their own knowledge into the classroom, like when you go out and find different plants, kids are saying 'oh that's such and such'. Or even rocks, we had T (child, you know she found this sort of whitish looking rock and she goes (sic) 'oh that's a paint rock'. And she showed us how to use it and explained a few of the things that you can do with it. And just kids being able to contribute what they know and feel like their knowledge is valued. And being able to share it. It's great.

Sally further noted that as a result of OCL children were able to contribute more confidently and participate actively in learning, these are indicators of Wellbeing as measured by the Leuven Wellbeing Scales used in this project. She noted that children felt 'safer' or 'comfortable'

You get quite a bit more participation with the hands-on things, and kids that are sometimes a bit reluctant to get in there and contribute to class discussion will often express themselves in that environment, especially the ones that don't come to school all that often. Maybe they feel a bit safer or comfortable and yeah just like they're knowledge is a bit more relevant and valued.

Like the Principal, Sally saw the project had given her the opportunity to strengthen her relationships with Elders and improved her knowledge of the community and the culture:

I'm quite new to all of this but this has given me more of an opportunity to chat with some of the Elders and learn a bit of the history of Burringurrah and how the traditional ways fit into a modern context.

Sally identified that teachers needed more support for classroom integration, noting that:

I think from a teachers' perspective we're already struggling with an overloaded curriculum ...and we're just trying to teach basic literacy and numeracy. I think on Country can sort of incorporate those aspects so maybe if we could do a little bit of professional development on explicitly teaching teachers on how to work in the numeracy concepts, how to work in the literacy concepts, and make it tangible and sort of sell it a little bit more to some of the classroom teachers

Our response as researchers to this comment in the interview is that Sally was absolutely correct. We welcomed the opportunity to work with educators in this way but it was not always well received or appropriate due to teacher fatigue, illness or teachers openly stating that they didn't have time to do 'more'. No matter how we characterised this as being 'instead of' rather than 'more' there was some resistance from teachers to taking on anything new. Sally was not teaching at the school when our previous attempts at this had been only partially successful due to these reasons. As Sally was a new graduate in a challenging environment, we did not feel it appropriate to overwhelm her with our project aims. On reflection, it would have been better for us to make these opportunities available to Sally. Our observations of her at the school were that she often appeared overwhelmed or busy, so it was difficult for us to know how to approach this with her. We take this feedback on board for future projects, noting that teacher continuity in this context made our intentions for working alongside teachers in planning somewhat more complex than we originally anticipated. We also agree that dedicated planning time needs to be scheduled into the field visits rather than opportunistically attempting to work with teachers after a long day. In future we will request that schools participating in this work set aside a full day for teacher professional learning at the commencement of the project. In the remote context this is somewhat difficult due to teachers arriving in the community immediately prior to the commencement of a school term (or even after it has commenced).

The Burringurrah Book Project

There is a dearth of resources in the school with respect to local culture. There are generic 'Indigenous' resources (often originating from the East Coast of Australia) but none that are reflective of the local stories, plants, places etc. Along with the members of the community and the school staff we agreed that developing these resources would be a high priority but that it must involve the children.

In our final visit for 2017 we were privileged to spend a day with a Senior Lore Man and a Traditional Owner, who generously agreed to share some traditional stories for the development of resources for the school. We met off school site in a quiet meeting room and recorded the stories in writing and on audio, transcribing them immediately. The following day we returned the text to the two men for checking. We then produced story boards and presented them to the Elders for a final check. We have their permission to use these local stories as the basis of picture books for the children to illustrate. The school has agreed to meet the cost of publishing these books.

This is a part of the project that remains incomplete and one that we would like to facilitate in the year ahead.

Student Wellbeing and Attendance Data

Student attendance on the days OCL operated was definitely higher (Source: Teacher and Principal Interviews, Attendance data). Overall, a more compelling influence on school attendance is a strong commitment within the community to observe cultural protocols and to attend funerals. For the community, these matters are more important and significant than attending school and continue to be observed regardless of what special programs may be offered at the school at a given time. At certain times of the year the community is also flooded in and nobody can enter or leave other than by air. This affects school attendance also.

Our overall finding about the impact of OCL on school attendance is, notwithstanding cultural obligations, children who are in the community who are poor school attenders are more likely to attend school on the days OCL is operating. Children who attend school regularly are not influenced by the offering of OCL, however, they do report enjoying the experience more than 'regular' classroom activities (Source: Interviews with children).



Froebel Gifts

As mentioned in the Midway Report (July 2017), the project has received a generous donation of gifts 1-6 from Froebel-Zentrum Bayern. We endeavoured to introduce these slowly to the early childhood teacher and some of the children. As this was not a stated aim of the project we experimented with how the gifts might be part of our work.

We noticed the children naturally begin to create 'forms of life' and 'forms of knowledge' using rocks found On Country.

We would like to explore this as a more central focus of a future project.



Limitations

As previously reported, unforeseen illness prevented the project from progressing during the cooler months as planned and because of this some momentum was lost in the work. This meant that some funds remain in our budget. We have learned a great deal from the implementation of this project and recognise the challenges of working in a remote setting such as:

- Length of travel time to reach the community (2 days each way),
- Weather conditions (flooding) that led to the researchers being unable to return to Perth as scheduled,
- The optimal weather for the project in winter was disrupted due to illness, it is not possible to take children out for extended periods in the warmer months due to excessive temperatures,
- Challenging social conditions in the community resulted in some difficulty in finding appropriate people to accompany the children on OCL field trips,
- Teacher fatigue and stress inhibited some of the intended outcomes of the project in terms of classroom integration and planning,
- High teacher turnover made project continuity difficult,
- Discontinuity in Elder availability due to cultural commitments and 'shame' (see community member interview),
- Inability to employ some community members due to criminal history,
- Difficulty sustaining the project when the research team were absent.

Dissemination

Conference Presentations

Findings of this project presented at local and international conferences include one presentation of preliminary findings in 2017 and two forthcoming presentations in 2018.

On Country Learning with Traditional Owners, children and teachers.

The World Indigenous Peoples' Conference Toronto, Canada (July 2017)
(presented)

Australian Aboriginal Children's Wellbeing and Creativity: Exploring Froebelian principles in remote Western Australia

The International Froebel Society Conference, Hiroshima, Japan (September 2018)
(To be submitted)

On Country Learning as a transformative pedagogical approach

Western Australian Primary Principals Association, Perth, Australia (September 2018)
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Publications arising from this project to date

Jackson-Barrett, E. & **Lee-Hammond, L.** (in press) On Country Learning: Improving the Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Involvement of Aboriginal Children in Early Childhood. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*

Jackson-Barrett, E. & **Lee-Hammond, L.** (under review). From Pink Floyd to Pink Hill: Transforming the bricks in the wall to the connections of Country in remote Aboriginal education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal Special Edition: Working with Parents and Families Transforming Partnerships*.

References

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Nakata, M. (2007). The Cultural Interface. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36, 7-14.