

## Encounters with genre: apprehending cultural frontiers<sup>i</sup>

J R Martin & David Rose

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### 0. Pseudo-Dreaming

When Jim's son Conal was 8 years old, in Year 3 of primary school in New South Wales, his writing portfolio contained a wide range of genres, reflecting the impact of the so-called 'Sydney School' on literacy pedagogy and curricula across Australia. It appeared that several types of factual writing and story writing, as well as expositions and book reviews, had been successfully modelled for him and established themselves in his literacy repertoire. The factual genres Conal wrote included description, report, explanation, procedure, protocol and procedural recount, and his story genres included recount, narrative, observation/comment and exemplum. Also included in his portfolio was the following story genre, whose presence the functional linguists involved in designing genre-based literacy programs would have found harder to predict<sup>ii</sup>.

[1] *How the sparrow could glide*

Once when the white people came to Australia there was a little bird called a sparrow. It was a very nice bird but the white people that first came to Australia they thoute that the sparrow as a very annoying bird because it slowly flew around them slowly. One time they got so annoyed that they got a gun out and tride to shote it so he got his gun out and shot his gun but it didn't hit the bird it was write behind the sparrow the sparrow's aims got so tiyard that he had to stop flapping its wings and it sort of glided just near the ground and he moved and the bullets went away and that is how the sparrow's lernt how to glide. And they lived happily ever after.

Judging from its title, this text looks like a recontextualisation of the just-so story genre, inspired perhaps by adaptations of Rudyard Kipling's *Just-So-Stories for Little Children* (1902) - such as the picture book *How the Camel got his Hump* (Kipling & Zwerger 2001). As such the story has a familiar structure, culminating in an explanation stage spelling out the fantastic *raison d'être* of the genre (*and that is how the sparrow's lernt how to glide*). Conal in fact carries on to conclude with the closing element of another story genre, the fairy tale (*And they lived happily ever after*), which makes us wonder whether the just-so genre had in fact been modelled for him, or simply inspired by reading he had done. Too many years have passed to find out exactly what went on.

Another possibility is that Conal or his teacher were inspired by the just-so stories in Scholastic's *Aboriginal Stories* series (e.g. *How the Kangaroos got their Tails, How the Birds got their Colours*). And we do know that in at least one primary school program (the Northern Territory's *Getting Going with Genres* 1993), just-so stories were explicitly introduced to children - apparently by way of orienting genre writing to Indigenous content. It's to these Australian recontextualisations of Kipling's genre that we now turn.

### 1. Just-so 'Dreaming'

One of the Scholastic series, *How the Birds got their Colours*, is reproduced as text 2 below (excluding images). The story is described as having been told by Mary Albert, of the Bardi people, to Aboriginal children living in Broome, and compiled by Pamela Loftis, who claims to have adapted her illustrations from paintings by these children.

[2] *How the Birds got their Colours*

This is the story of how the birds got their colours. Long, long ago - in the Dreamtime - when the land and animals were being made... ..all the birds were black - all one colour. Till... ..one day, a little dove flew around looking for food. He flew down to the ground to catch a big juicy grub. But instead, he landed right on a sharp stick! It pierced his little foot and made him very sick. For days, he lay on the ground in pain. His foot swelled up. He was dying! All his mates gathered around to see how they could help. All except crow. He just wandered around with his hands behind his back. Suddenly, the parrot rushed forward - and with her sharp beak... burst the little dove's swollen foot! Colour splashed out all over the parrot. Red and green and blue ran down her chest, wings and tail. It splashed out all over the other birds. Some got red, some brown, some blue, some yellow. Some got spots. Some got stripes. All got colours. All except crow, who was standing away from the others. Crow got no colour at all! So that's how the birds got their colours. And as for the dove, he soon got better, thanked the parrot... and was able to fly away. [Albert 1983]

As far as text structure is concerned, text 2 displays the canonical stages of a narrative; it sets the story in time, and by implication, place (Orientation), develops a problem (Complication) and then develops a solution (Resolution). But it also includes a couple of other elements that we might expect in explanation genres: it begins by introducing a phenomenon to be explained ('Phenomenon') which had been forecast by the title of the book, so that the narrative is offered as an explanation of the phenomenon with which the story began ('Explanation'). These stages of this story are outlined below; note that the 'Explanation' in fact interrupts the Resolution, since it is offered before the dove's recovery is confirmed.

**'Phenomenon'**

This is the story of how the birds got their colours.

**Orientation**

Long, long ago - in the Dreamtime - when the land and animals were being made... ..all the birds were black - all one colour.

**Complication**

Till... ..one day, a little dove flew around looking for food. He flew down to the ground to catch a big juicy grub. But instead, he landed right on a sharp stick! It pierced his little foot and made him very sick. For days, he lay on the ground in pain. His foot swelled up. He was dying! All his mates gathered around to see how they could help. All except crow. He just wandered around with his hands behind his back.

**Resolution**

Suddenly, the parrot rushed forward - and with her sharp beak... burst the little dove's swollen foot! Colour splashed out all over the parrot. Red and green and blue ran down her chest, wings and tail. It splashed out all over the other birds. Some got red, some brown, some blue, some yellow. Some got spots. Some got stripes. All got colours. All except crow, who was standing away from the others. Crow got no colour at all! <<...>> And as for the dove, he soon got better, thanked the parrot... and was able to fly away.

**'Explanation'**

<<So that's how the birds got their colours.>>

As is typical of just-so stories, text 2 deals with natural, not social phenomena - it is aspects of the biological and physical environment that are 'explained', not social relationships and responsibilities. As we will reinforce in section 2 below, this means that Loftis' recontextualisation of Albert's tale has drifted a considerable way from the Dreaming story on which it is apparently based. This led us to wonder whether the elements 'Phenomenon' and 'Explanation' really are traditional features of Dreaming stories, or derived some other source. A glance at Kipling's *Just-So-Stories for Little Children* suggests the latter. Each one starts like Loftis', with a 'Phenomenon' and ends with an 'Explanation':

How the Whale Got His Throat

... from that day on, the grating in his throat, which he could neither cough up nor swallow down, prevented him eating anything except very, very small fish; and that is the reason why whales nowadays never eat men or boys or little girls.

#### How the Camel Got His Hump

... And from that day to this the Camel always wears a hump (we call it 'hump' now, not to hurt his feelings); but he has never yet caught up with the three days that he missed at the beginning of the world, and he has never yet learned how to behave.

#### How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin

... and from that day to this every rhinoceros has great folds in his skin and a very bad temper, all on account of the cake-crumbs inside.

This type of story, which Kipling popularised but perhaps did not invent himself, reconstructs the religious narratives of indigenous peoples in the British empire as charming but childish attempts to explain a world that educated Europeans understand as adults. Although this may seem harmless, it is worth considering the historical context that produced this genre. The next example of Kipling's makes this context starkly apparent:

#### How the Leopard Got His Spots

...

Then the Ethiopian put his five fingers close together (there was plenty of black left on his new skin still) and pressed them all over the Leopard, and wherever the five fingers touched they left five little black marks, all close together. You can see them on any Leopard's skin you like, Best Beloved. Sometimes the fingers slipped and the marks got a little blurred; but if you look closely at any Leopard now you will see that there are always five spots—off five fat black finger-tips.

...'But if I'm all this,' said the Leopard, 'why didn't you go spotty too?'

'Oh, plain black's best for a nigger,' said the Ethiopian (Kipling 1902).

Although such overt racism is no longer publicly acceptable, the infantilisation of indigenous peoples that pervaded European thought until very recently still finds expression in just-so recontextualisations of Dreaming stories. According to Loftis, *How the Birds got their Colours* had been told to children by Mary Albert, a widely respected Indigenous elder, but we have no way of knowing how much Loftis changed Albert's words to fit her and her market's ideas of what a Dreaming story should be, nor which children Mary Albert would have told it to, how and why; and we can now never know, as she has passed away. What we can say is that these kinds of adaptations seriously compromise the ability of texts of this kind to function as introductions to Indigenous culture. It might even be suggested that what we have in series of this type is a kind of pseudo-Dreaming, misappropriating Indigenous Australians' sacred discourse into a profane childish, even childist genre from another place and another time. In addition to misappropriation of the genre, we could also ask whether the imperialist discourse of colour, that is so overt in Kipling's text, could also have crept into Loftis' version. To what extent might the characters assigned to the colourless crow and little dove resonate with stereotypes that children may be exposed to? Which protagonist would they identify with or against?

Misgivings of this kind have not stopped the Scholastic series from being successfully marketed and reprinted a generation after its initial publication, and a century after Kipling. Not only do they induct new generations of European children into the just-so genre, but they are recycled to Indigenous children and teachers through the school system, and authorised as genuine Aboriginal culture by attaching the name of an Indigenous story teller. Generations of Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who do not have access to original tellings of Dreaming stories, are growing up believing that the just-so story is part of Indigenous Australian culture.

The just-so genre and the assumption that Dreaming stories 'explain' natural phenomena are so naturalised in European consciousness that even relatively well-informed European authors may

deploy them to recontextualise Dreaming stories. For example, Nicholls<sup>iii</sup> (2002-3), in a book series that is intended to introduce Dreaming stories in an authentic manner, with acknowledgements of Indigenous storytellers and interpretations of the stories, sometimes repeats the same patterns. In two stories from the Kimberleys, she, like Loftis, derives her 'edited' rewordings of the stories straight out of Kipling:

*The Cocky, the Crow and the Hawk* (2002)

... And that is why the crow is black, the cocky is white, and the hawk is brown and grey.

*Luurnpa the Magical Kingfisher* (2002)

... And that is why Luurnpa, the magical kingfisher, will always be a special bird to us.

While Nicholls provides useful information about her informants' stories at the level of 'moral and ethical' messages concerning social relations and responsibilities, her commentaries regularly reinterpret the stories as 'explanations'. One story's Coda explicitly states that a landscape feature functions as evidence of Dreaming activities:

*The Magic Fire at Warlukurlangu* (2003)

... Today the flames from this big Fire Dreaming can still be seen in that country, Warlukurlangu, in the shape of large anthills. They are there to remind the Walpiri people of what happened there in the Dreaming.

Then, at the end of the book, in her comments on the story, she refers to it as providing an 'explanation' of this landscape feature:

The Magic Fire at Warlukurlangu not only has a strong moral and ethical component, but also provides an explanation for the particular environment and topographical features of the country on which the events of the story unfold. Known as Warlukurlangu, this tract of land near Yuendumu in the Northern Territory is characterised by literally hundreds of anthills that are shaped like the flames of a fire. These anthills serve as a permanent reminder of the unstoppable sorcerer's fire that raged out of control and swept through the country during the Dreaming.

To its credit, however, this series comes far closer to providing a culturally sensitive window on the meaning of Dreaming stories than other just-so recontextualisations we have read. However we position ourselves around critiques of this order, there are important issues of scholarship in discourse analysis to consider as well. Presented as text 3 below is one of the *Getting Going with Genres* just-so stories mentioned above. It is entitled 'The Orphan Child', and appears as one of three examples of what are called 'myths' in the unit on narratives in these teaching materials.<sup>iv</sup> Unlike Loftis' text it does not begin with a 'Phenomenon' to be explained, but launches straight into a brief setting and complicating action. And in place of a simple Complication Resolution structure we have an ongoing problem (the orphan crying) and several failed attempts by the people at Kabbari to stop him. The orphan crying in fact leads to a further problem, namely the arrival of the serpent - who swallows everyone and spits them out again, thereby apparently putting the story's complications to rest. From our experience of Dreaming stories told by Indigenous elders, this does appear to be a genuine translation of an oral story.

[3] *The Orphan Child*

Long ago, at a place called Kabbari, a group of people had gathered. An orphan child said he was hungry. His brother said, 'I will go and hunt goanna for you to eat.' And off he went.

One of the group gave the orphan some cooked roots of a waterlily to eat. He had never eaten this type of waterlily before. He ate it. He cried for more. There was no more. His cries became louder and louder.

Far out to sea, the serpent heard the child crying. She swam towards the sound, stopping every now and then to listen to make sure she was headed the right way.

Nothing the people could do made the orphan stop crying. On and on he cried.

When the serpent reached the land, she swam under the land, towards the sound.  
 The people tried everything to get the orphan to stop crying. Still the orphan cried.  
 Suddenly the fire went out as the ground became wet. The people who were sleeping felt cold as the wetness touched their skins. The people knew the serpent had reached them and they were afraid.  
 The ground became wetter and colder. The serpent burst through the ground and swallowed all the people, every one. She made sure she swallowed the crying orphan first. At this moment the orphan's older brother returned with a goanna on his back. The serpent swallowed him too. Later, the serpent spat everyone out and they turned into rock forms.  
 This is the origin of the landforms you can see at Kabbari today. High on the escarpment stands the rock figure of the older brother holding a goanna on his back. Way below to his right, is the little rock of the orphan. Behind the orphan child are all the rock forms of the people. Further around is the serpent whose face can be seen clearly in the escarpment. [The Orphan Child 1993 *Getting Going with Genres: Narrative Genre* (NT Dept of Education). p 16.]

This is not the Complication Resolution structure of a narrative, with a 'hero' overcoming adversity (a natural reading of the parrot healing the dove in text 2), familiar to western readers. But it does appear to lead purposefully to an 'Explanation' phase, which is oriented in this case to physical rather than biological phenomena. This seems to suggest that the 'Explanation' phase is indeed a traditional feature of Dreaming stories, but on closer inspection the last paragraph has a number of troubling features. Although the first sentence resembles the just-so pattern '...from that day to this x became y', its nominalised expression as 'the origin of the landforms' is more characteristic of written than spoken discourse, contrasting strikingly with the very spoken language of the story. And this general statement is then elaborated by a genre we know as a topographic procedure, that leads the reader through a landscape, a common feature of tourist brochures. On reflection, this 'Explanation' phase appears to be a ring-in to the genuine Dreaming story it is appended to, recontextualising the purpose of the story as explaining the landforms. The story may indeed be associated with rocks at Kabbari, but its purpose is not to explain their 'origin' – this, we suspect, has been added by somebody familiar with written English genres.

Furthermore, *Getting Going with Genres* uses just one structural formula for all story genres, Orientation Complication Crisis Resolution, and imposes this structure here (their formatting):

**Orientation:** long ago, a group of people went to Kabbari.  
**Complication:** the orphan was given cooked waterlily roots to eat. He cried for more. There was none. Nothing anyone did made the orphan stop crying. His cries attracted a water serpent.  
**Crisis:** the serpent rose through the ground and swallowed the people.  
**Resolution:** the serpent spat the people out and they turned into the rock forms found in the Kabari today.

This is an over-simplification of the structure of text 2. In fact the story unfolds as series of worsening problems, none of which stand out as a distinct Complication or Crisis stage, and the final event, where the regurgitated people are turned to stone, could hardly be called a Resolution. In terms of genre we would analyse text 2 as a recount, as follows:

**Orientation**  
 Long ago, at a place called Kabbari, a group of people had gathered.  
**Record of Events**  
**problem 1**  
 An orphan child said he was hungry.  
 His brother said, 'I will go and hunt goanna for you to eat.' And off he went.  
**problem 2**  
 One of the group gave the orphan some cooked roots of a waterlily to eat. He had never eaten this type of waterlily before. He ate it. He cried for more. There was no more. His cries became louder and louder.  
**problem 3**

Far out to sea, the serpent heard the child crying. She swam towards the sound, stopping every now and then to listen to make sure she was headed the right way.

Nothing the people could do made the orphan stop crying. On and on he cried.

**problem 4**

When the serpent reached the land, she swam under the land, towards the sound.

The people tried everything to get the orphan to stop crying. Still the orphan cried.

**problem 5**

Suddenly the fire went out as the ground became wet. The people who were sleeping felt cold as the wetness touched their skins. The people knew the serpent had reached them and they were afraid.

**problem 6**

The ground became wetter and colder. The serpent burst through the ground and swallowed all the people, every one. She made sure she swallowed the crying orphan first.

**problem 7**

At this moment the orphan's older brother returned with a goanna on his back. The serpent swallowed him too.

**denouement**

Later, the serpent spat everyone out and they turned into rock forms.

Similar problems of over-simplification and functional misrepresentation occur throughout the *Getting Going with Genres* materials. What seems to have happened here is that the genre structure designed for narratives of personal experience by Labov & Waletzky (1967) has been adapted through the addition of a Crisis stage and then applied indiscriminately to a wide range of story genres which in fact have their own distinctive generic structures reflecting their specialised social functions (cf. Martin & Rose 2007 who discuss the story family in some detail). This compounds the problems associated with adding a 'Phenomenon' and 'Explanation' phase to Dreaming stories, recontextualising their function as 'explaining' natural phenomena, in the manner of Kipling's fantasised just-so genre. In fact across northern Australia, stories of swallowing by serpents and regurgitation are associated with male initiation, so one of the social functions of text 3 is an analogy for this pivotal event in Indigenous cultures; but we have neither the knowledge nor permission of the story's custodians to expand on this meaning. Suffice to say that recontextualising its function as explaining a landform trivialises both the story and the culture to which it belongs. Even more questionable is recontextualising it further as a model for children to invent their own 'Dreaming stories'. One could imagine the public reaction if the same practice were applied to sacred stories in the Bible, Torah or Koran.

We have no doubt that Scholastic's *Aboriginal Stories* series and the Northern Territory's *Getting Going with Genres* materials have been designed with good will to promote understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in Australian primary schools. But changes will have to be made if students like Conal are going to deploy just-so stories and alternative genres more productively in cross-cultural communication. Summing up this section, we have two problems to address here - one has to do with the ways we recontextualise one culture's 'dreaming' into another's; and the other has to do with the way we recontextualise linguistic theory into educational practice. In the next section we look closely at what is being recontextualised, by analysing one Dreaming story that we know well and have the authority to discuss. In the following section we then examine ways in which linguistic theory can productively inform teaching across cultures.

## 2. Really Dreaming

Where does the drive to recontextualise Dreaming stories as explanations come from? And where do the authors of just-so recontextualisations derive the elements 'Phenomenon' and 'Explanation'? An answer to the second question leaps out from the following example of an

explanation from a high school geography text book, about the ubiquitous Australian acacia known as *mulga*.

[4] *The mulga tree*

**Phenomenon**

How can plant life grow so well in such dry, hot and infertile places?

**Explanation**

The shape of the mulga tree is the key to it surviving dry times. The branches of the mulga fan out from the bottom – like a huge half moon. The branching leaves and stem catch the rain and it trickles down to the soil. This traps more rainfall than if the tree grew straight up. The mulga catches more water than a gum tree. The water is stored in the soil to be used by the tree during the next drought.

Even the mulga's leaves help it to survive the drought. They are a silvery grey colour. The sun's rays bounce off the leaves helping the plant to stay cool. Also the mulga tree makes its own food by dropping thousands of leaves (Scott & Robinson 1993).

Here plainly is the kind of source from which just-so stories have derived their 'Phenomenon', a 'How-question' that for western readers strongly expects an explanation. In text 4 this is fulfilled by the explanation genre. In the just-so genre, a story is inserted instead, making it appear to explain a 'Phenomenon', and this manufactured function is then reiterated by a final 'Explanation' phase.

In Europe, the explanation genre evolved with the development of modern science. It is not an apparent feature of indigenous or pre-industrial cultures where there is no scientific-industrial context for it to evolve. Instead Dreaming stories are supposed to fulfil the function of 'explaining' the origins of contemporary phenomena. This is a widespread assumption in both popular European culture and academic social sciences where indigenous people's origin stories have been termed 'etiological myths', i.e. of 'original causes'. We argue here that this is a misconception that derives from profound differences in the ways that indigenous cultures such as Aboriginal Australia and the dominant culture of modern Europe apprehend the natural world. We first briefly compare the material bases of Australian and European worldviews, and then explore the functions of one Dreaming story in some detail.

As is well known, Aboriginal Australian peoples consider that they have occupied their lands since the beginning of time in the Dreaming. 'Dreaming' refers to the putative creation period in Australian religions when ancestral beings travelled across the land, initiating many of the practices of contemporary society, and leaving behind traces of their activities in various forms. However the Dreaming is not merely a distant temporal period, but a continuous reality that lies behind the appearances of contemporary life and can be cyclically re-manifested through religious observance (Stanner 1966). Dreaming stories recount the activities of the ancestors, that is their original activities are realised in the stories, and the associated songs and rituals that re-enact them. But they are also manifested in features of the land, of its animals and plants, and of human social practices, very much as tracks on the ground are, for a hunting-gathering people, present manifestations of past human and animal activity. As Durkheim found on comparing Australian and European religions and science, a society's cosmology is a projection, writ large, of its social practices and relations, 'collective representations which express collective realities' (1912: 10).

This is the religion of a people whose ties to the land on which they live are immensely ancient. In contrast the dominant European culture, that is the culture of the contemporary elites of Europe and its colonies in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Pacific, is above all a culture founded on colonisation. Europe's modern colonial expansion, exploitation and decimation of indigenous peoples and their lands over the past half millennium, replays a continuous pattern in

European history, through medieval waves of expansions of Germanic tribes, the Greek and Roman empires, originating perhaps with conquests of farming cultures by warrior nomads from the Eurasian steppe (Gimbutas 1990). In its pre-industrial phases, religious mythology recorded and legitimated this culture of expansionism, epitomized by the many pre-Christian myths of heroic serpent killers – such as Apollo killing the Python of Delphi, Beowulf the ‘great worm’ Grendel, or St George the dragon of Libya - representing conquests of serpent-worshipping agrarian societies (Dumezil 1968), and the Judaeo-Christian myths of original sin and salvation that legitimated the conquest and enslavement of indigenous peoples on the grounds of conversion.

Like Dreaming stories, these European myths construct generalised principles, Durkheim’s *representations collectives*, by means of analogy with specific personalised beings and activities. But as colonisation becomes consolidated into empire, control and exploitation comes to be rationalised by means of observation and explanation (Weber 1930). Such explanations must be general and global, applicable to repeated instances of the same type of natural or social resource, facilitating its efficient, replicable control and exploitation in any location. The colonists’ view of the natural and social worlds comes to be depersonalised, explained as generalised classes of phenomena related by cause and effect. It finds its apotheosis in scientific reports and explanations based on empirical investigation such as text 4. Thus empirical explanations appear with the imperial, technological era of ancient Greece (Halliday 1993), and their renaissance with the expansion and industrialisation of modern Europe (Halliday & Martin 1993).

In contrast, indigenous peoples do not require causal explanations of natural and social phenomena in their realm, as they already know how each significant element works, and how to exploit, sustain and reproduce it into future generations. This knowledge derives not from empirical observation but from accumulated experience of ancestral generations exploiting and reproducing the same resources in the same localities. It is not taught by means of causal explanations, but acquired tacitly by modelling and practice in context. The Dreaming stories are thus not required to explain contemporary phenomena, rather the latter are manifestations of the ancestral activities, material evidence of their passing; the stories are inscribed in the landscape, as the story of the *Orphan Child* is inscribed in the rocks at Kabarri. Such construals are quite different from, but as functional in their own contexts, as empirical explanations are in theirs, as Durkheim demurs, “the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be purely illusory...we admit that those religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that of scientific experiments, though different from them” (1912: 417).

So if Dreaming stories do not explain natural phenomena, what is their social function? A very general answer is that Dreaming stories carry messages from the past into the future, that is ‘messages from the ancestors’ in Lévi-Strauss’ words (1972), to current and future generations. The messages are abstract principles of natural and social order, elaborated meanings in Bernstein’s terms, that “go beyond local space, time, context and embed and relate the latter to a transcendental space, time and context” (1990:182). Together the principles encoded in a culture’s corpus of Dreaming stories constitute a unified theory of the natural and social worlds, that forms a necessary foundation for its reproduction across deep time. Each story may involve multiple messages, with one standing out as most significant. These are rarely stated explicitly, but are realised implicitly by the co-articulation of various semantic elements, in the manner of parables, and so are apprehended tacitly by the listener (although their meaning may sometimes be deliberately revealed to initiates). Some Dreaming stories can only be told to adults initiated into particular religious ceremonies, and then only by particular custodians of the story, often only



in the particular place where the events occurred. Others can be told openly to the non-initiated, and many stories have elements that can be told openly, and elements that can only be revealed to the initiated. Access to an ancestral message thus depends on age (and gender) ranking in the community, through hearing either the story or its exegesis. So what is reproduced by the stories is not only the social theory they encode, but a hierarchy of social authority enacted by their telling.

By way of illustration, the following story [5], from the *Anangu* people of Australia's Western Desert, is of the open type with restricted elements (not revealed here). Its subject matter at one level recounts how the people first obtained domestic fire, but the name of the story is *Kipara*, after the principal protagonist, the plains bustard. It was told by a senior woman Nganyintja, in the Western Desert dialect Pitjantjatjara, translated here by David who had Nganyintja's permission to discuss it.<sup>v</sup> To situate the story initially in its cultural context, please imagine Nganyintja telling it to a group of children of various ages, sitting around the family campfire, after the evening meal.

[5] *Kipara*

This is a Dreaming story (*tjukurpa*), it is said. The people were living in this land. In all the land, it's said, lived the people.

And those people had useless fire, with black firesticks (i.e. useless for igniting a fire). With black firesticks it's said they were living. Look, they were unable it's said to obtain fire. It was like perpetual night, like living in darkness, in the dark night, and those people were living in ignorance.

And it's said one man, *Kipara* (plains bustard), was living with fire with good firesticks. So in numerous places men were thinking of this one man, of getting that fire from him. And they were unable to get it, as they followed him and followed him continuously, snatching at the fire. All those men were unable to snatch the fire from him.

And this journey became the *tjilka* (the annual pilgrimage for male initiation ceremonies). It was the *tjilka* host itself that was carried along in this journey.

And they were unable to snatch it, as they followed him continuously, snatching at the fire. And he kept going continuously, travelling through yonder country, travelling and travelling across the land.

At another place, at the sea he arrived, at the great ocean, and those men also he carried along with him. Into the sea it's said *Kipara* submerged, into the ocean.

And *Warutjulyalpai*, the man, the bird *Warutjulyalpai* (black falcon, literally 'fire-snatches'), soared through the sky, as *Kipara* it's said submerged. Here on his head the fire was burning. And it's said *Warutjulyalpai*, flying swiftly, snatched the fire.

He brought it back this way. To *Watar* he brought it, and he cast out firesticks to various places. And *Watar* is now the place of 'fire burning', the sacred well of fire. The sacred well of fire is *Watar*, Mt Lindsay. And from there he cast out firesticks to many different places.

And those crows who lacked fire (i.e. the people) saw it and said, "Hey, fire is burning towards us!" and they snatched up firesticks. Then they jumped up and danced, singing "Waii!" Joyously, it's said, those crows who lacked fire, who had been crouching miserably, it's said, jumped up at that, and they saw "There is fire over there with firesticks." It was burning. And they danced with great joy. That's how it was.

And that is all the fire, the fire that we now have. It is ignited by rubbing sticks. And fire is a good thing. That's how it was.

For an analysis that does justice to the complexity of this story's social functions, we need to take four semiotic perspectives: its genre or global social purpose, its tenor - the social relations it enacts, its field - including its sequence of activities, and the people, things and places involved, and its mode - the role that language plays in realising its genre, field and tenor.

From the perspective of genre, text 5 is clearly a narrative. Following its geographic Orientation, the Complication builds tension through a series of worsening problems, from the people's lack of fire, to their inability to snatch it from *Kipara*'s head as he strode across the land, to his submergence in the sea, threatening to drown it forever. While some narratives have a distinct Evaluation stage, the problems here are evaluated as they unfold (another common pattern in

narratives), initially by reiterating the darkness and ignorance in which the people lived, then the frustration of their continual attempts to snatch the fire. The Resolution is then strongly signalled by reiteration of the hero's identity, '*Warutjulyalpai*, the man, the bird *Warutjulyalpai*', as he swooped from the sky to snatch the fire, and distribute it to the people from the summit of *Watar* mountain. This Resolution is iteratively evaluated by the people, joyously speaking, dancing and singing, and finally by the narrator in a Coda, commenting that fire is a good thing. At the level of genre then, the message is a generic one, that frustrating complications can be resolved by purposeful action. In this respect the message is consistent with narrative genres in any culture, carried not only by the sequence of complicating and resolving activities, but by surges of appraisal that evaluate them.

With regard to tenor, the story is told by an authoritative elder to novice juniors. However a conspicuous feature is continual reiteration of the reportative 'it's said', expressed in Pitjantjatjara by the adjunct *kunyu*. By this means Nganyintja repeatedly displaces responsibility for the story to others, implicitly the elders who told it to her and ultimately to the ancestral protagonists in the story. But there is also a second order tenor enacted by these protagonists. As *Kipara* alone possesses the fire and withholds it from the people, he clearly has greater power. On the other hand *Warutjulyalpai*'s power is at least the equal of *Kipara*, and greater than the people to whom he distributes the fire, but the act of distributing creates solidarity with them. Where *Warutjulyalpai*'s status is legitimated by his generosity, reacted to joyously by the people, *Kipara*'s status is delegitimated by his miserliness, that leaves the people in darkness, ignorance and frustration. The strongly evaluated message here is that social power and solidarity are acquired through giving, not by hoarding.

In terms of field, message encoding events include *Kipara* travelling all the way to the sea to submerge the fire (over 1000kms from the the story's beginning and end in central Australia), this journey 'becoming the *tjilka*', the firestick burning on *Kipara*'s head, *Watar* becoming 'the sacred well of fire', and the coda 'that is all the fire, the fire that we now have'. There are several transformations here. Perhaps the simplest is the firestick burning on *Kipara*'s head, which has left its contemporary trace as a black crest of feathers atop the bustard's white head. This is the kind of outcome seized on by just-so retellings of myths ('how the bustard got his crest'), but the function of the story is not to explain the black feathers, rather the feathers inscribe the event in the bird's physiology. Secondly, the coda implies that the fire we have today descends from the fire distributed by *Warutjulyalpai*. Again it would be inaccurate to interpret the story as explaining the 'origin of fire', since the children listening to it require no such explanation, rather the fire around which they hear the story becomes a token for its enthralling events. Similarly, the cultural significance of *Watar* also derives from the actions of the ancestor *Warutjulyalpai*, which made it the 'sacred well of fire' (*waru piti*, literally 'fire well'). Its sacredness is an essence left behind by the Dreaming activities, making it a node in the vast network of sacred sites distributed across the Australian continent, each one the location of an ancestral activity, and embodying an essence associated with that activity. Transformations such as these are not construed in Australian languages as cause-&-effect, but implicitly or explicitly as one thing becoming another, as everyone in the *Orphan Child* story 'turned into rock forms' (see Rose 1993, for a comparison of causal motifs in the grammars of Pitjantjatjara and English).

Finally, the journey becoming the *tjilka* pilgrimage is the most obscure but most significant transformation. Only when boys are nearing their initiation into manhood in the *tjilka* do they discover that the *Kipara* story is not primarily about the source of domestic fire, but of cultural fire. The men chasing *Kipara*, unable to obtain the fire, are actually the *tjilka* initiates unable to

attain the secret sacred knowledge that is revealed only after initiation. The hero *Warutjulyalpai* is actually the elders, and the fire he casts out is the secret sacred hymns sung by elders in the *tjilka* ceremonies, that can only be heard by initiated men. The people joyously picking up the firesticks, singing and dancing are the initiates themselves who hear the songs for the first time and learn the sacred dances associated with each song cycle. The distribution of this secret sacred knowledge by the elders to the initiates creates a status difference which is crucial for the reproduction of the culture. Myers (1986) elaborates:

A man's status relates directly to his capacity to take part in reciprocal exchange. The ability to exchange in parity with men, to be 'level', depends on a social entitlement that differentiates adults from their juniors. Not surprisingly initiation and socialisation focus on increasing this capacity...The resulting identity such transactions create between a senior and a junior show these kind of exchanges to be a way of regenerating cultural value through time.

Dreaming stories are key threads in this system of cultural reproduction, which may be compared with any system in which the distribution of highly valued knowledge increases the status of the provider, such as academic linguistics or anthropology. This status is always legitimated by ancestral authority; examples are Nganyintja's continual reportative *kunyu* 'it's said', or our continual references to leading authors in social sciences and linguistics.

So why did *Kipara* travel all the way to the sea? For an answer it is helpful to look beyond the desert to 'origin-of-fire' myths in other regions of Australia and the world, where a surprisingly widespread configuration of elements includes its theft or withholding from people, submerging in water, and recovery by a hero who distributes it to the people (Frazer 1930, Maddock 1970).<sup>vi</sup> The fire-in-the-water motif is a potent symbol for sacred authority across all these myths, both in the sense of knowledge and of social power, and its rescue a potent symbol for acquisition and distribution of this knowledge conferring authority on the hero. *Kipara* must travel from the desert to the sea to submerge the fire in the water, to be rescued by an avian hero. This is the metaphor that carries the story's central message from the ancestors, not only of *Anangu* but conceivably of many other peoples, a powerful token for a significant message indeed.

In sum, Dreaming stories involve multiple intersecting symbolic relationships, in which tokens symbolise/represent/manifest more abstract values: material tokens such as landscape features stand for semiotic entities – the events of the Dreaming, and the activities and relationships in the stories stand for principles of social and natural order. Just-so readings misconstrue such token-value couplings as mechanistic relations of cause-&-effect, with the story as cause and physical features as effect. At best they may recognise a simple token-value relation between the story and a moral message, which they interpret as a coda in the manner of Aesop's fables.

From the perspective of mode, the *Kipara* story is an oral monologue that creates its own field as it unfolds, i.e. it is not dependent on the context of speaking. This is an elaborate semiotic achievement involving complex interplays between multiple discourse semantic systems, including 1) semantic relations between lexical items in succeeding clauses, 2) conjunctions construing logical connections between events, 3) chains of reference items that keep track of people, things and places, and 4) waves of textual prominence that continually foreground and background information (see Martin & Rose 2003 for these systems).

Lexical relations construct the story's field through repetition of elements such as people, fire,

*Kipara*, firesticks; similarities between elements such as black-dark-night-ignorance; contrasts such as crouching, jumping up and dancing; and class membership such as bustard, falcon and crow. Logical relations between events here are primarily additive, as they commonly are in oral stories across languages; the expected logic in a story is succession in time, so ‘and’ suffices to construct the sequence. However in the Western Desert language, the conjunction ‘and’ also has a second function, to identify the core participant of the clause as the same or different from the preceding clause (so-called ‘switch reference’), so it has a role in tracking identities through the story. A similar function is achieved in English by comparative reference (same/another). Other tracking devices include personal pronouns ‘he, him, it, they, them’, and demonstratives ‘this, that, those, the, here, there, yonder’. These reference resources interact with lexical relations to construct the story’s field, as people, things and places are introduced and tracked through the events. Finally the listener’s attention to elements of information is managed primarily by sequence and tonic focus, as it also is in English. For this reason, each sentence in the story above has been translated with the same sequence of word groups as far as possible, for example:

anangu tjuta person PLURAL <i>People</i>	nyina-ngi sit-CONTIN <i>were living</i>	manta nyanga-ngka land this-LOC <i>in this land.</i>	
manta wingki-ngka lands all-LOC <i>In all the land,</i>	kunyu REPORT <i>it’s said,</i>	nyina-ngi sit-CONTIN <i>lived</i>	anangu tjuta person PLURAL <i>the people.</i>

The starting point or Theme of the first clause is the people *anangu tjuta*, and the end point of the clause, its New information, is their location *manta nyanga-ngka*. The location then becomes the starting point for the second clause *manta wingki-ngka*. As this is an atypical position for locations, it is more prominent as a marked Theme, and was also spoken with tonic focus, i.e. not just ‘in the land’ but contrastively ‘in all the land’. The identity of the people is then iterated at the end. By these means the central identify (people) and location (land) are made prominent as both Theme and New at the start of the story, its setting or point of departure, the macroTheme for the story as a whole. These waves of information within each clause then become elements within larger waves that present each episode of the story, expressed as paragraphs in text 5 above, and these in turn make up the text level waves of Orientation, Complication, Resolution and Coda (for a full description of these patterns see Rose 2001:168-206).

It is remarkable to us that so many language patterns are directly translatable between Australian languages like Pitjantjatjara and English, including lexical items and grammatical functions at the ranks of word, word group and clause, as well as the discourse semantic patterns of lexical relations, conjunction, reference and information waves outlined here. All these discourse and grammatical commonalities resonate with those we have seen at the levels of genre and field, such as the familiar stages of recounts and narratives, or the heroic rescue of fire from the water as a symbol of cultural reproduction. The same range of oral story genres described by Martin & Plum 1997, including recount, narrative, anecdote and expemplum, are found in Australian cultures, whether their field is sacred or profane, and can also be found in stories across language families (Rose 2005a).<sup>vii</sup>

It is commonalities such as these that make the languages not only mutually translatable, but learnable. This is strikingly apparent in early years classrooms in Aboriginal community schools in Australia, where monolingual English speaking teachers are able to engage young children with very little English experience, in stories written for English speaking children, so that they learn to

understand each story and say most of its words in a few hours of practice. What these teachers are doing, more or less unconsciously, is taking advantage of the children's existing experience in their mother tongues, of comparable language patterns at the levels of genre (stories), field (events, people, things, places), tenor (the parental relation between adult storyteller and children), discourse semantics, and grammar. However, many of the commonalities we have illustrated between Australian and European languages hold only for the spoken mode, and for genres that have evolved in oral cultures. The written mode that has evolved very recently in certain cultures makes meaning in very different ways from the spoken mode that is common to all cultures.<sup>viii</sup> Aboriginal children with little experience of written texts therefore require explicit teaching of these unfamiliar ways of meaning. Such an explicit pedagogy in turn requires teachers to be familiar with the language patterns of the texts they work with. It is to this domain of knowledge about language that we now turn.

### 3. Deploying genre

In section 1 we critiqued dubious recontextualisations of Indigenous culture as just-so story genres. What about alternatives? How might non-Indigenous children be more appropriately introduced to Indigenous people and culture? And equally important, how do we go about introducing non-Indigenous people and culture to Indigenous children? We'll restrict our discussion here to questions bearing on literacy teaching in primary school, taking a developmental perspective from the early years up. To achieve such complex educational goals, teachers need to have a clear understanding of what it is they are teaching, that is the relation between the texts they are using, the cultural contexts of these texts, and the language in which they are realised. Essential starting points for this understanding lie with genre, field, tenor and mode.

For educational purposes a key distinction must be made between stories and other genres. In the preceding sections we showed that recount and narrative story genres can be found in both European and Australian cultures; it is in their field and tenor that major differences lie. Story genres are common across cultures because they perform social functions that are shared by all societies – exchanging experiences between individuals, enacting community cohesion through entertaining, gossiping and sharing feelings, and reproducing highly valued messages in religious myths (Rose 2006). In contrast, many of the genres that students are expected to read and write for success in school education have evolved very recently in human history, in the institutional contexts of science and social administration, and in the written mode. By Year 3 of school, Conal had already begun to master this range of written genres, an age when many Indigenous children are only beginning to read and write independently (Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999).

For young children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, stories can provide a way in to school literacy, as their experience of oral and written stories in the home provides the foundation for teachers to engage them in story reading in school. More often than not the field of stories written for children is well outside their experience, necessarily we believe, as it obliges the parent or teacher to orient children to the field and read the story together. In other words the tenor relation between parent/teacher and children is the key to them learning to engage with the written mode. Just-so recontextualisations of Dreaming stories are introduced to young children in this mix of exotic themes, amongst fairy tales, monster stories, anthropomorphic tales of animals and machines, and so on. They should be considered as nothing more, not as a sufficient medium for introducing Indigenous culture, and certainly not as appropriate models for children's story writing. If Dreaming stories are to be part of the primary school curriculum, we need to consider

mode and tenor as well as genre and field - children should hear them in the spoken mode, told by Indigenous speakers and interpreted by them. Indigenous story tellers are available to schools in all regions of Australia. Crucially the stories they tell will tend to be relevant to the particular region, educating children about their local Indigenous history and culture, in contrast to published stories that are decontextualised from both place and social relationships; and we know from the messages provided by the *Kipara* story, that the social relations enacted by the telling of Dreaming stories are at least as important as the story itself.

When it comes to learning the written mode, the ideal starting point is with stories used in shared reading activities in the classroom, which may be about any field that children enjoy. As we said earlier, Indigenous children engage with these stories as much as non-Indigenous children, but they often do not learn to independently read as quickly. The problem our research has identified is that children with extensive experience of story reading in the home understand the relation between the words they can say in the story and the written words their teacher is pointing at in the reading book, but children without this experience cannot make this connection. The very simple solution is to teach these children written word recognition using sentences they are very familiar with from the shared reading books, and then to write these words and sentences. We currently train Indigenous teachers and assistants in these strategies, who can then teach children to start reading and writing within an hour, after failing to read for three or more years of primary school (Rose 2005b).

One obvious alternative to deploying just-so stories for interpreting Indigenous culture is to turn to history, and use historical genres to gaze upon the other. The factual story genres historical recount and autobiographical recount are very much part of Indigenous oral traditions (illustrated in Rose 2001 with an historical recount about the Pitjantjatjara land rights struggle, by Ivan Baker), so they are a natural starting point for reading and writing beyond stories.

From the early years on, children can be introduced to Indigenous history and culture through books written by Indigenous people about their lives and communities. An excellent example is Elaine Russell's picture book *The Shack that Dad Built* (2004), which deploys a range of story genres with paintings, alongside biography and historical recount, to portray the life of a young Indigenous girl growing up in La Perouse in southern Sydney (see Martin & Rose 2007 for discussion). In a similar vein is the autobiographical *When I Was Little, Like You* by Mary Malbunka (2003) published by Allen & Unwin. Malbunka uses paintings of life in the bush and desert art to illustrate her life story; her text also includes many Indigenous words, in Luritja, which are glossed when introduced and supported by a glossary at the end of the book. In both respects Aboriginal culture is strongly projected in support of her detailed account of traditional life in the bush.

Moving from biography into history, Malbunka also worked on the *School Book of Country and History* (2001), with Nadia Wheatley and Ken Searle, also published by Allen & Unwin. This history of the school also features paintings of life in and around the school and desert art, alongside the photographs, maps, reports and time lines we would expect from a history book, and several quotations from Indigenous people are also included. This history is an outstanding example of historical recount deployed by Indigenous people to tell their history from their point of view.

The potential for bridging into more written history is also well exemplified by two picture books dealing with children of the Stolen Generations - the autobiographical *Lowitja* (O'Donoghue 2003) and the historical recount *They Took the Children* (Hollinsworth 2003), both published by Working Title Press. In *Lowitja* a national Indigenous leader who was one of the stolen generations

recounts her life (as told to Joan Cunningham and Karen Jennings). O'Donoghue is a cousin of Nganyintja but was removed as a child from her *Anangu* family for no other reason than her lighter skin. Her story is also annotated with short reports explaining important concepts and issues (Dreaming, Stolen Generations, Racism, Language, ATSIC, the United Nations, Reconciliation, Memorial, Awards, Refugees), and includes photographs documenting various stages of her life. *They Took the Children* is also a multimodal text, featuring various primary source materials (map, photograph, drawing, political cartoon, government document, letter, book cover, banner, and quotations from Indigenous people); it also includes as marginalia short reports explaining key concepts and quoted material from members of the stolen generations; and it culminates with a Time Line outlining key events. Both books are excellent models of autobiography and historical recount, and in addition excellent models of the relationship between primary source materials and secondary interpretation in the practice of writing history. These are just two examples of the many texts about Indigenous people and history available as books or online, that will interest all students as well as introduce them to the genres. For example, a wide range of short illustrated biographies are provided in books about Indigenous people in sport (eg, Tatz 2000), art (Brody 1997) and music (Walker 2000), that are appropriate for schools.

Beyond stories, biography and historical recounts, a range of genres are deployed in and out of school to describe, explain and argue about Indigenous culture, history and politics, all of which Indigenous and non-Indigenous children can be supported to read and write using genre-based literacy pedagogies. A good example, aimed at upper primary years, is *Windradyne - a Wiradjuri Koorie* by Mary Coe (1986), which includes causal explanation, exposition and reports about the *Wiradjuri* people of NSW, along with biography and historical recount, and is well illustrated with historical engravings. A brief extract is presented as text 6.

[6] *Windradyne - a Wiradjuri Koorie*

This is a true story of a warrior named Windradyne and the Wiradjuri people, who lived within an area known as the Wiradjuri nation. This is the land of the Three Rivers, the *Wambool* later known as the Macquarie, the *Kalare*, later known as the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee (*Murrumbidjeri*). The Murray River formed the Wiradjuri's southern boundary, the change from woodland to open grassland formed their western boundary and the high mountainous ranges formed their eastern boundary. An estimated population of 12,000 people all spoke the Wiradjuri language, making it the largest tribe in New South Wales.

The story begins with the Koories who lived in the eastern area of the Wiradjuri nation, where the landscape changed from mountainous ranges to undulating hills and wide, rich valleys and winding rivers. This area supported Koories. They were semi-nomadic people who moved their camps to food supplies: this well watered area had a good supply of fish, duck, kangaroo, emus and various plants, so there was little need for movement away from here.

This report goes on to describe the Wiradjuri residence patterns, techniques for hunting and gathering, social organisation and religious practices, before the European invasion of western NSW. As well as introducing knowledge about Indigenous fields, it also provides an excellent model for writing reports in the social sciences. Texts like these can be found for Indigenous groups in many areas of Australia, and used to integrate literacy with Indigenous perspectives in the school syllabus. In the teacher training program *Reading to Learn* (Rose 2005b, Rose & Acevedo 2006), we endeavour to introduce such texts to teachers, that are appropriate to the particular region in which they work. This is a crucial principle, as Indigenous culture is fundamentally grounded in specific places, but is too often presented as an undifferentiated amalgam. The Indigenous history of each region needs to become part of the identity of all children in the region, along with the local history of European settlement. Schools are in an ideal position to foster the development of a local identity for their students, that includes Indigenous

and non-Indigenous perspectives. Once students are experienced in reading and writing biography and history, they can apply these skills to researching local people and histories, using interviews and library research, building tangible relations between school and community at the same time as expanding their own local knowledge and research skills.

Of the books we have discussed here, only Russell's and Coe's are written independently by Indigenous authors. O'Donoghue's and Malbunka's books make use of non-Indigenous scribes and book designers to get their message across, while *They Took the Children* is wholly written by a non-Indigenous author (Hollinsworth). Mediated voicing of this kind, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, is further explored in Martin 2003, 2004. In order to move beyond mediation, Indigenous Australians have to take control of the semiotic resources they need to write and illustrate texts for themselves. Where Russell and Coe speak English as a first language, control of written genres by speakers of Indigenous languages is a much rarer phenomenon, rarer still we would argue with the demise of traditional school education in remote Indigenous communities, and its replacement with one form or another of progressive pedagogy (see Rose 1999 for discussion).

Martin 1990 makes some challenging observations about the kind of literacy needed by Indigenous Australians if they are to successfully negotiate their own future with non-Indigenous Australians. He argued that the foundation for a broad range of narrative and factual genres needed to be laid in primary school (something like the range in Conal's repertoire, as introduced above); and he argued that discourse semantic resources (grammatical metaphor in particular) for constructing mature forms of these genres and building disciplinary knowledge had to be introduced in some form of accessible secondary education.<sup>ix</sup> For better and worse, the *Getting Going with Genres* materials critiqued above formed a partial response to his suggestions.

Before closing we would like to briefly consider the implications of this discussion of written genres and how to teach them for Indigenous languages themselves. One of Martin's more controversial suggestions in his 1990 paper was that social purposes for writing in Indigenous languages needed to be engineered, possibly with a view to maintaining culture, and that Indigenous writing would need to complement writing in English if it were to prosper. Martin's main point here was that designing orthography for Indigenous languages when that orthography had no written genres to serve was a pointless exercise. As readers have occasionally pointed out to him over the years, these suggestions smack of cultural imperialism, based on their qualms about foisting western genres on Indigenous languages and culture. For many, the arguments engendered here are matters they would rather sweep aside.

But as Indigenous languages disappear in an ever accelerating curve, and interest in language maintenance and restoration struggles to keep pace, it is perhaps worth revisiting Martin's argument - especially in relation to the language archiving project of Australian descriptive linguistics. This project, as we know, places great emphasis on recording languages for posterity, concentrating on phonology, morphology and syntax and the vocabulary that arises in pursuing these analyses. Discourse analysis is by and large beyond the scope of these studies, and a genre profile of the cultures supported by these languages is not even a marginal concern of this research. This may mean, as languages are lost, that we have no proper record of discourse semantic patterns linking clauses together, and how these might be textured to comprise a genre. Grammars of this kind are not in a strong position to contribute to the genre engineering project Martin had in mind, nor to the needs of language restoration when Indigenous communities try to recover the linguistic meaning potential they have lost.





#### 4. Negotiating genre

We conclude by summarising our suggestions for how schools might negotiate the intricate problems of introducing Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and languages to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, at the same time as providing all children with the skills they need for educational success.

Firstly, we suggest that Dreaming stories need to be told by Indigenous storytellers, built into curriculum units about Indigenous studies in general, and local Indigenous culture and history in particular, ideally involving field trips such as local heritage sites to contextualise the stories. Published just-so recontextualisations of Dreaming stories will inevitably be used in the early years, as part of the mix of children's stories, but they are inappropriate as models for children writing, for all the reasons given in section 1. Hopefully the discussion here may also lead to some reconsideration of the ways in which Dreaming stories are currently recontextualised in the just-so genre, and misinterpreted as 'explaining' physical features. Second, ideal bridges into written genres are biography and historical recounts written by and about Indigenous people and communities. The multiple advantages of texts such as these include fields that are familiar for many Indigenous children, and interesting for all children, in the context of genres that are not too far from their experience outside the school, and can lead to researching their own communities. Thirdly, other written genres, including reports, explanations and arguments, can be introduced using texts written about Indigenous fields, that expand the knowledge of all children about their national and local culture and history from Indigenous perspectives, as well as their skills in reading and writing genres across the school curriculum.

Finally, in regard to maintaining Indigenous community languages, and developing vernacular literacy programs, we suggest that languages need to be taught by community members in their cultural contexts, supported by the schools and integrated with their curricula. The reason for this is given by Nganyintja in a comment she made after telling the *Kipara* story:

ka	tjukurpa	mama-nguntju-ngku	tjakultjungku-pai titutjara
and	story	father-mother-ACTOR	recount-HABITUAL continually

*And Dreaming stories used to be told by parents all the time,*

palu	kuwari	tjukurpa tjakultjungku-ntja	wiyari-ngu
but	now	story recount-NOMINAL	finish-PAST

*but now the telling of Dreaming stories has finished.*

Systems of cultural reproduction in remote Indigenous communities are under extreme pressure from corresponding systems in the colonising culture, in particular the school and electronic mass media. The daily instruction that children used to receive in more formal dimensions of traditional culture, including Dreaming stories, songs and dances, and cultural protocols, has virtually ceased, as Nganyintja says. Indigenous languages are embedded in cultural practices such as these, and without such distinct cultural contexts, distinct functions of languages cease to exist and they fall out of use. This has happened to scores of Indigenous languages across Australia and is now happening to the remainder.

As the school has taken over as the primary institution of cultural reproduction in Indigenous communities, we suggest that its resources and organisation must be harnessed to teaching the formal dimensions of traditional culture and language, along two lines. Firstly the community itself can be resourced and organised to provide regular systematic instruction in these cultural

dimensions. For example, Indigenous teachers at Yipirinya community school in Alice Springs regularly take children 'out bush' to their family communities to study with their elders and record their stories and activities. The children's research then forms the basis of the term's work, writing in their family languages. Secondly the school can develop curricula, in consultation with the community, that teach children skills in ethnographic recording and interpretation of their cultural traditions. A model for this kind of curriculum is being developed at Yirrkala community school (Marika 2007). These approaches address the complementary goals of teaching cultural traditions, recording them for the future, and integrating both with the knowledge and skills that Indigenous children need for school and later life.

If they are to have a significant influence in maintaining and reviving Indigenous languages, school bilingual programs need to develop these kinds of community taught, ethnographically oriented language programs, moving beyond teaching orthographies using simple picture books. Descriptive linguistics can have a valuable role in designing curricula for Indigenous community schools, whether the curriculum goal is providing access to academic knowledge for Indigenous children, introducing Indigenous culture to non-Indigenous children, or maintaining culture and language for Indigenous communities. But to do so effectively we have to look beyond the clause, to describe the cultural contexts of communities and schools as semiotic systems, including their genres, fields, social relations and modes of meaning making.

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<sup>i</sup> It deserves more than a footnote but Jim would like to take this opportunity to thank Michael Walsh for his generous support over the years as far as Jim's work on literacy in Indigenous communities is concerned. Martin 1990, 2003, 2004a, b would not have been possible without his measured counsel. David would also like to thank Michael for his support in completing his doctoral thesis on the Western Desert language and culture, Rose 2001.

<sup>ii</sup> Conal's 'invented spelling' has been preserved here; this is a legacy of the progressive approaches to literacy teaching which dominated Australian primary education in the 80s under the rubric of 'process writing' and 'whole language' programs.

<sup>iii</sup> Nicholls is a former principal of Lajamanu school and is very well informed about Walpiri culture.

<sup>iv</sup> The materials were designed by the Aboriginal Schools Curriculum Project "to support better teaching of Northern Territory curricula in Aboriginal Schools" [Fong, 1983: iii.]

<sup>v</sup> Nganyintja is David's adopted mother and long time teacher. See her biography in Martin & Rose 2007a, Ch 3.

<sup>vi</sup> For example, in myths across northern Australia, it was stolen and submerged by a crocodile and rescued by a colourful bird who returned it to the people (Maddock 1970). In the Greek myths (Graves 1955), it is taken from men by Zeus, and rescued by Prometheus, who flies up to heaven to steal it back for the people. The fire-in-the-sea motif then reappears in the story of Minos throwing his gold ring into the sea, whence it was retrieved by Theseus, making him the new king of Crete. Beowulf similarly dives into an abysmal pool to kill Grendel's serpent mother and brings back a golden sword hilt from her firelit underwater lair. In Celtic Ireland to acquire the wisdom of the poets, the hero Finn must dive into the deep pool at the head of the river Boyne, and catch the brightly coloured salmon that eat nuts fallen from a sacred hazel tree (Arbois de Jubainville 1903). In each case retrieval of the fire/gold/salmon shining in the water confers authority both in the sense of wisdom and of social power. The fire-in-the-water symbol for sacred knowledge may also be associated with baptismal rituals.

<sup>vii</sup> With such a wealth of common patterns, it is difficult to see how RMW Dixon, a leading authority on Australian languages could justify his claim that "there is absolutely no evidence for a genetic connection between Australian languages and anything outside the continent; there is not even the remote 'possibility' that scholars could argue about" (1980: 238).

<sup>viii</sup> Many of the binary contrasts that are often drawn between Indigenous and European ways of meaning (or 'thought') are actually contrasts between spoken and written ways of meaning, since linguists' data tends to be spoken Indigenous clauses but written English sentences.

<sup>ix</sup> Walton 1996 explores these and related issues from a 'critical' perspective.