Our Art, Our Place, Our Way
Sustainable Practice: Life-long and Life-wide learning at Keringke Arts and the challenge of matching arts centre business and cultures to Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract. This paper attempts to provide a realistic summary of influences and impacts that holistically affect Keringke Arts Aboriginal Corporation, and the ways these shape and define the art centre and its core business. The authoring of the paper combines the voices of arts workers, artists and managers. Sometimes it directly quotes conversations from arts workers, and these paragraphs are in bold text. When we reflect on changes introduced in 2007, the narrative is collective, as these are things discussed and talked over many times at Keringke. The collective voice represents my perspective, as program manager and also comes directly from my co-workers. I’ve tried to retain the separate voices because it would be a disservice to pretend that the story of the art centre, or the outcomes of programs, resources and projects belong to any one voice. One art centre, many voices!

Socio-political environment

Sustainability is now one of the big issues in life on central Australian communities. In the past three years the Ltyentye Apurte community, Santa Teresa, has gone from unsteady equilibrium and exceptionally low expectations, to veritable martial law under the initial Federal Government Emergency Response, to complete chaos and an awesome breakdown of essential services through Northern Territory local government / shire amalgamations, and back to a tenuous equilibrium.

If this is the typical Aboriginal community experience of community development towards long term sustainability, how do art centres on
communities promote adult learning? How can we engage in positive experiences which provide practical support for art centre businesses and the individuals and families reliant on the arts industry income, while participating in Vocational Education and Training (VET) remote delivery?

Art centres often do provide the chance for individuals to shape realistic expectations, or grow their personal, family and community resilience towards creating sustainability. How can their huge potential be met given the existing frameworks, and historical inheritance; and how might VET education support workplace training in a Central Australian Aboriginal Art Centre?

PHOTO

Kathleen Kemarre Wallace is a custodian of Keringke Rockhole and Keringke Arts, where she’s worked since 1989.

Brief History of Art Centres

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Community Art Centres have been established mainly in remote area communities to foster aboriginal art business. In doing this they alleviate some of the negative reality of sedentary communal life styles, and more recently engage with welfare-to-work requirements across an ever expanding series of government programs. The range and hybrid nature of these art centres is highly varied; a few are run as Aboriginal businesses fully independent of government funds but the vast majority are reliant on annual Government funds to pay the wages of an art advisor, whose key role had been to facilitate art centre business. Recently, since the NTER in 2007, the role of the arts advisor, or manager, at Keringke Arts has changed somewhat in response to new policy that provides wages for arts workers, which along with their training, is now also under the jurisdiction and administration of the arts centre manager and a program manager.

The expansion and consolidation of the art centre movement began in the 1980s, when many Aboriginal organisations were first incorporated. At this time art centres set up independent of women’s centres and other organisations, during post-land rights government spending, which combined a pro-active arts budget with strong ATSI direction and vision. This is the policy era known as self-determination.

The Aboriginal Arts Board has played a vital role. In the 1970s the arts board nurtured the struggling Papunya Tula Company by the purchase of their artwork, and applying long term, strategic market development. In the 1980s the Arts Board, later becoming the Australia Council for the Arts, Aboriginal Arts Board, made strategic donations from their ‘collection’ to museums and public art galleries across the world. This effectively stimulated a new market and set the precedent for re-evaluation of ATSI art as serious, contemporary, collectible, and investment worthy art. Papunya Tula has gone on to become a unique brand name, well ahead of its peers.
Meanwhile, other community art centres developed around a hybrid funding model still in place today and continue to provide a range of vital business services, cultural, social and educational roles in their communities. Art centres are often the only point of access to free trade, one of, or the only, aboriginal owned and controlled organisation on the community, and provide a point of access for all members of the community to a range of education and training opportunities, technologies, cultural maintenance activities, artwork related travel and professional development opportunities. Additionally they can foster capacity and investment among community members through governance, direction and community integration of their art centre. Keringke Arts was Incorporated in 1987, and the existing art centre building was built in 1989.

Today, income from the sale and resale of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts is thought to be upwards of $450 million dollars. Western Australia and the Northern Territory have the highest number of ATSI community art centres. Much of this income is a return to the secondary and tertiary market investors, not the Aboriginal producers.

PHOTO

Josette Young is a founding artist, working at Keringke Arts since 1989, teaches many younger artists.

Keringke Arts Intergenerational Profile

Keringke Arts has enjoyed excellent continuity of community governance and leadership by elders who include esteemed Arrernte teacher and custodian, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, senior women and founding artists Josette Young and June Smith. Now this tradition of leadership has been picked up by younger women who are showing equally strong and focused capacity to provide guidance and take responsibility for their community’s art centre. Their elders are still working at the art centre, fostering and guiding the art and cultural maintenance of the community, and their own careers. These are strengths however rarely acknowledged or built on through VET sector practices.

The area of greatest uptake between VET delivery and Art centres has traditionally been and even now remains in the practical arts. In an art centre 20 years old, practical art skills are not in deficit; these skills are absorbed through generational and intergenerational activities occurring in daily life. Young people now come to the art centre already using both traditional design and cultural knowledge with contemporary art materials.

The skills deficit at Keringke Arts now exists in areas of office administration, workplace communication, occupational health and safety, customer services and organisational governance. Areas that younger people are willing to move into but that require significant organisational change as well as carefully designed and delivered training and mentoring. Such training may need to be sourced from outside the art centre and the community.

PHOTO
June Smith, founding artist at Keringke Arts since 1989. June has a strong record in design for commercial projects.

A shared philosophy about education and training
Starting work at Keringke in 2003, I found that what we commonly shared is a conviction that learning really matters. That learning essentially shapes the expectations and capacity of people to achieve some control over their lives. Learning in all its multifaceted, bilingual, traditional, intercultural, cross-cultural, Arrernte and English ways. Learning across the ages and for the duration of lives. There is a resonance about learning, held by the artists and arts workers, their cultural leaders and knowledge systems, and by some mainstream practitioners of continuing education.

Community art centres make the space, provide the tools and materials for the practical application of skills and knowledge, and they create opportunities for others to engage, respond and learn. Contemporary Arrernte life engages rich, experiential methods of teaching and learning, undertaking activities with practical and hands on approaches. These methods have always underpinned traditional learning and are still extremely effective with the younger, community born generations. The art centre movement has been one important innovation for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities because the model does support both traditional knowledge and related activities, but also provides access to inter-cultural and contemporary input. Community art centres foster and promote healthy activity in socially and emotionally safe work places; and they provide continuation of access to intergenerational exchange and transmission of knowledge, culture, life skills through positive shared activities.

Although resonance in education between cultural domains is strong, this seems often overlooked or under-rated by many policy developers and administrators. This gap between real opportunities on the ground and the ideas of policymakers and administrators creates a challenging environment in which to deliver meaningful programs or projects, or develop skills within enterprises that will be capable of long term sustainability at remote community art centres. Every change of the rules brings new requirements, whether the organisation is ‘change-ready’ or not. This takes a toll on all staff and interrupts long term planning and goal setting.

In the current environment we continue the struggle to facilitate opportunities for long term development, to run programs, projects or blocks of training over realistic time spans, in an environment awash with a plethora of good, better, or best ‘new’ models of educational delivery and management. Often new directions seem to be developed via the assumption that everyone is ready to interact with working life according to the latest ideas, in a linear progression of time; we find however that it’s usually fundamental and old issues which most affect art centre staff in their capacity to extend their workplace skills. Fundamental issues of community housing and health continually put training and work aspirations to one side. In an environment of such fundamental uncertainty the idea of investing ones time and efforts in formal training are unattractive or even ludicrous: When change outside one’s control can hit at any
time, unforeseen, and dramatically affect one's life, then the capacity to engage in longer term goals is diminished. When a holistic sense of life is subsumed by administrative sectors which are offered up as though unrelated and independent from one another then confidence, skills and autonomy are diminished.

Sometimes it gets too much, doing the jobs in the art centre, while some people don't seem to do anything. Sometimes it is hard because we want to have a break, but Alan really needs us to help with visitors or to run the art centre. It is a lot of responsibility. When we want a rest, we have to apply for holidays and take some time off. There are times when there are too many family things happening, or other problems come up and we can't work at all. Then we need to take leave or even take time off with no pay when we have no leave left.

PHOTO

Camilla Hayes photographs most artwork and catalogues it into the Arts Management System which records sales.

Recent External Influencers

We can identify three key political and policy events since 2007 that have brought a renewed emphasis to training in remote Central Australian communities, and therefore to art centres. Firstly, the recent changes to federal and local government legislation through the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and secondly, the Local Government amalgamation of the Northern Territory's small community councils into 19 mega-shires. These changes, coming directly on top of one another have in part fuelled disempowerment and uncertainty for the art centre workers, families, artists and community. The third outcome was the senate inquiry into the Aboriginal arts industry, which made a small number of recommendations about Education and Training in the Aboriginal arts industry.

In 2007 when the NTER was implemented things changed rapidly, without warning or participatory consent. We were all shocked and impacted upon. Recovering from and sorting out the aggressive, sweeping policy decisions took months. Clearly the legislation and roll-out was made without forethought about the negative impacts on positive activities and micro-economies.

When the intervention first came to our community, we were told all our jobs in the art centre would be gone. We were told we had to do something worthwhile in the community, like pick up the rubbish. We told them that our art centre was worthwhile. If we had not spent all these years painting, we would have nothing to sell.

PHOTOS

Above: Ceramic stock for wholesale and direct sale. Right: Full sized mannequin hand-painted by 6 artists
In response to the Commonwealth intervention demands on the art centre we made a short video clip and placed it on YouTube. It recorded the artists explaining that the art centre, as the only business on the community with enterprise links to the wider world, is an essential service. We expanded this argument through a letter which we sent to a wide audience, and we joined other art centre voices to get the interventionists to re-think the importance of the art centre to its community.

CDEP is going to be cut off soon. The work of the art centre is not recognised by the government. We work to make our business strong. We already got a business plan and we already employ two artists to keep the art centre running. We want to keep the art centre because we want our children to work here. What we do is a highly skilled job and we want to teach our young ones like our elders taught us. We don’t want to be unemployed. ii

We received a CDEP reprieve, then a transitional program arrangement and now a three year wages package. Other people on the community did not fare so well, and that affects everyone, as families struggle.

PHOTO

Rosina Ryder, Rosalie Hayes, Patricia Ellis and Belinda Hayes making a YouTube video about the impact of the NTER in 2007

Re-inventing ourselves post CDEP

We are arts workers at Keringke who share responsibility for office work, sales, visitors’ enquiries, opening and closing the art centre and managing the studio area. We are able to earn wages up to fulltime, but usually we do less; we do as much as we can manage each week. This is a new way of working at the art centre; before it was with Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). This way we are getting superannuation, holiday pay and other things and we can get paid for more working hours.

PHOTOS

Above, Serena Hayes working in the studio. Right, Rosina Ryder and Belinda Hayes packing stock for wholesale. Serena and Rosina have worked at the art centre on and off since the mid-1990s. Belinda has started recently.

After any crisis, change occurs....In 2009 Keringke became one of three art centres in the Northern Territory to achieve triennial funding, offered for the first time to art centres under the Department of Environment Water Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA), National Arts and Craft Industry Support Program (NACISP). This is the only funding program dedicated to arts centre programs. Along with this triennial funding for manager’s wages, the art centre received 13 employment positions for arts workers, 11 part-time and two full-time, with an intention to provide this funding also for a minimum of three years.
We believe this outcome was influenced by the art centre's business and marketing planning undertaken in 2006, in which we included a jobs audit and skills assessment of our 15 most active artists. We were able to refer to the art centre's comprehensive training and mentoring plans, contrasting with the chaotic, unreflective policy changes implemented hurriedly during the NTER in 2007.

**Keringke, VET and employment**

However the challenge to integrate accredited VET training remains. Although our funding is not tied to comprehensive VET outcomes, we recognise the rights of all people, no matter how remote to be able to access education that meets Australian standards. In some part this vexed issue is highlighted by the employability skill sets assumed by VET certificate courses. This issue is too complex to be adequately expanded in this paper, but Brian Day (2009)\[iii\], from Centre of Appropriate Technology has created a valuable presentation, broadly relevant to that issue. Add to it the culture of the art centre as an active enterprise where the arts workers are, rightly and primarily, concerned with generating and maintaining a successful, viable business, rather than compliance across VET courses. It's a complex mix.

It was through the art centre's intersection with the VET networks that we found an axiological position, a system of values, from which to present our argument for employment and training and for arts workers to be classified as essential employees. Our dilemma now is how we can describe ourselves in industry terms, while maintaining cultural and educational traditions that that define ATSI learning. How do we nurture practical outcomes from the potential of the VET sector, and is it important to do so?

**Before, with CDEP we just wrote down our times on the paper, and then we got paid for 16 hours. Now, we use a clock on and off machine to keep our work times, and there are two full time jobs, one man and one woman, and eleven part-time jobs at Keringke. We are expected to earn these wages now by doing a lot of different work at the art centre, and using our own time to paint our canvases and fine art. Sometimes we work more hours and we get paid for those as well.**

Through the abolition of CDEP and the resultant introduction of an employment and training program the art centre culture has had to change. The art centre now administers an employment program with the responsibility for relevant and quality training. This new load is picked up in part by the art centre manager Alan Tyley and in part by a new position called program manager. I am in that position and it includes hands on training, developing individual training pathways, bringing in projects and funds for those, and tying these things together in ways that support core art centre art business.

**PHOTO**

*Arts workers are interviewing Project staff and Mangers at the Alice Springs Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC). This is for training that*
involved interviewing representatives of a range of businesses and agencies that Keringke Arts must interact with in order to do good business. We called this training unit *Important Business Relationships*.

We argue that education and training is already an inherent part of the culture and experience of the arts workers; that the generational handing over from the original founding members to the younger ones, as symbolised by the appointment of Deanna Williams, at a young age, to the position of Chair on the Board of Management, was evidence of successful intergenerational skills and knowledge transmission.

We knew that things might change with government funding, they always do. We wanted to take up more control at the art centre anyway. It is our job to understand how all of it works. That isn't easy; in fact some of it seems too confusing. But slowly we can learn. Not always in training sessions, but just all the time, any time, when we are at work. That's important. When the intervention came in here, it was just the opposite. They told us we got no control over our art centre. That was wrong. They made a mistake.

Keringke Arts wants to develop the capacity for arts workers to use their strengths and follow their individual interests. This philosophy supports the business as well as the Arrernte life world. At this point the arts workers meet the wider world of educational paradigms, such as life-long and life-wide models of learning, intergenerational learning and sustainable intercultural and action learning. At Keringke, we want recognition of the skills inherent in the workplace practices already activated in the art centre, and we wanted to maintain the knowledge and transmission systems of the elders, while fostering the contemporary strengths of the younger artists. We want to create pathways for young people from school into the art centre. All of these goals fit into the framework of the VET sector. Why so hard to achieve?

**PHOTO**

Rosina Ryder is full-time coordinator, She is constantly using organisational, team leading and computer skills, as well as producing fine art.

**Issues with delivery of VET in remote communities**

As mentioned earlier, the existing VET framework for training delivery has not been widely accessible to remote art centres for a number of reasons. Some of these are practical and literal:

- The distance to travel to training often limits delivery to block training in town or on the community. When we applied via the Flexible Response Funding program the RTO got extra funding and some of this went towards the set-up of equipment that remained on the
community. There are a number of ways that the RTO might choose to use the extra FRF funds.

- Participant numbers needed to broker training dollars usually limited block training to a minimum of 10 participants although this minimum could be reduced if RTOs chose to use the extra funds provided in the Flexible Response Funding program for this purpose.
- Remote community working conditions are prohibitive; they include chronic shortage of accommodation, training facilities and IT equipment.
- Reluctance by RTOs to deliver training in first languages to Aboriginal students, despite no formal requirement for English language delivery in many arts business related activities. There is no language speaking trainer/assessor currently qualified.
- Linguistics, bi-lingual trainers - or the lack of; translators, or the lack of.
- Australian National Training Standards delivery model benchmarks are sometimes interpreted in ways that create a miss-match to the practical requirements of the art centre business and the training participants.
- An historical emphasis on practical arts training to art centres, but little available for training in office administrative, marketing or management activities.
- Repetition of training delivery modules over many years, seeing people repeating certificate two for decades. Trainers may be sent out with little background information about past training. The RTOs may not maintain records of past students doing training funded via FRF. NT funding agencies may not cross-check for repeat students.

Most significantly engaging with RTOs means delivering formal training contracts. This has been very difficult unless the object is a block of practical arts training. Keringke Arts is 20 years old and the art form which has developed though the ongoing application of local artists is established. It is only now, with the release of funding directly to some art centres for employment and training, and the instigation of the Desart® and other art centre peak organisations, through various Arts Workers Training Programs that we may be able to generate a culture of useful training and tangible outcomes for remote Aboriginal arts workers. Perhaps then the links will finally be able to be made back to VET for accreditation, possibly through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), with skills gap training delivery®.

There is a dearth of RTO training options with delivery through projects that are integrated into and supporting the business of the art centre. However many art centres work on projects. Until there are qualified Eastern Arrernte training assessors in our region or on the community I believe pathways may not survive. We need those who have the linguistic and cultural capacities to foster the compliance and the balance of knowledges necessary for extended training to return employment and economic outcomes.
**Arts Workers Training Program**

The workplace reality is that Keringke artists are not seeking practical arts training, rather they need training which supports them to undertake more administrative or organisational jobs, provides opportunities to present their work to other people, and lots of interaction in real situations. This 'new generation' range of job skills includes varying degrees of computer technology, literacy and numeracy which are equivalent to certificate two to three in administration and business competencies.

There are areas of work in administration, sales, customer service, governance and management which elder artists did not historically undertake, but which the more recent generation are stepping up to undertake. In my assessment individual levels of English literacy and numeracy maybe less for some than in their parents' generation, as may employability skills, but this generation are showing themselves to be better equipped in their understanding of the complexity of their situation; their business, and its governance.

**Before, visitors were not allowed to come to the art centre unless the community council said so, and we didn't get many people coming out there to buy things. So, we asked the council to let us do that organising ourselves, to let us have visitors coming to the art centre. They agreed, and then we began to get more visitors. Now many people come out to buy things and to see the art centre and a little bit of the community, like the paintings in the church. We had to do customer and sales training, so we can look after the visitors, answer all their questions and sell things to them. The most common questions the visitors ask are: How long does it take to make a painting? And, Who owns the art centre?**

**PHOTO**

Visitors join arts workers outside, while plant medicine is being made.

**Discussion**

*The Story of Resource Development and Learning: Our Art, Our Place, Our Way*

We relate this following story, which began in 2005, because it describes a ground-driven response to the frustrations of seeking training to support those working at Keringke arts. This process brought the dawning reality that there was no-place to turn for realistic training approaches that work from where the remote art centre artist is, where they are wanting to go and what their business needs are. Nothing to build capacity by recognising strengths of individuals in ways that link meaningfully to both their lives and livelihoods, something relevant enough to them in their art centre work for it to be captivating and useful after the training was over.
In 2006, while involved in a professional practice group, we identified that there was a significant gap in resources appropriate for aboriginal arts workers to use. Nothing was available that provided links to the potential within training packages to help develop art centre business capacity. The Aboriginal arts industry is a competitive place, where many organisations and companies depend on ‘gaps’ to create profitable niche markets for themselves. Confidence, skills, ownership and understanding build capacity which can result in greater control over the art centre businesses by the artist members themselves. Over time, this could translate to greater Aboriginal input in the lucrative secondary and tertiary market sectors and wider input across the whole industry.

This intersection is where the arts worker resource Our Art, Our Place, Our Way was conceived. It started life in 2006 as a Workplace English Language and Literacy project, auspice by CHARRTES Training Advisory Committee in Darwin, and was largely a practical response by the then Executive Officer of CHARRTES, Cath Curry, to what she understood from listening to us, to be a significant gap between industry and training. A team was pulled together to provide expertise in literacy and numeracy, in art centre work and those with ‘VET Vision’ - people alert to the potential of the training package. This included many Aboriginal artists and their arts centre managers. The first edition of the resource proved there was a lot further to take this idea, and also that standing alone, a resource will always have limitations. It needs to be linked to a system of delivery even when produced with great attention to visual intelligence. The first edition demonstrated enough potential that a second edition was produced in 2008.

It was through creating this resource that that the qualification Certificate III in Arts Administration was first identified as most relevant for art centres, since it has wide application and flexibility. It is this flexibility which has proved challenging for remote delivery by RTOs as the certificate caters to being applied to individuals, picking their own areas of interest and strengths, and balancing out the skills sets across the whole business. The Arts Administration certificate combines practical arts with units from business. Further units may come from a wide range of certificate III courses including disciplines such as cultural maintenance and interpretation, governance, tour guiding, museum and curatorial, maintenance and safety and IT.

The resource is available free of charge to anyone who wants it. It is housed on a CD and is also available on a website: www.artcentreway.com. A small number of hard copies were strategically disseminated. The second edition was funded by DEEWR, through EIEI as part of the Australian Government response to Aboriginal artist’s training needs, as drawn from the Senate Enquiry recommendations (2007). There is no current ‘ownership’ or agency managing the resource. It remains unaligned and independent, available to have relevant and helpful material added at any time.

At present it receives steady internet access and is being used by some art centres, schools and RTOs. The resource should be useful to VETi's in remote schools, especially those working with the Aboriginal community sector, where
Youth may be able to access arts management training as a bridge into their community art centre, a place of future employment.

Keringke artists demonstrated some of the skills in the Our Art, Our Place, Our Way resource.

We were able to show how we use the arts management system on the computer; it’s where we do the sales invoices and receipts. Most of the tasks demonstrated in the resource are things that we have learnt already from the staff; from Alan, Judy and Nicole.

We wanted to help make the resource because it is good for younger ones to have a chance to understand how to do some of these jobs, and it is there if we need to remind ourselves of how to do something.

Respecting knowledge, learning in many ways: reflecting on constructive learning

If people at the Keringke Arts Centre, Lyentye Apurte Community and others from the Eastern Arrernte community had not shared their cultural knowledge and understanding, we would never have had the inspiration to further develop the Our Art, Our Place, Our Way training.

I recently read a text about hope resulting in ethical action, by researcher Deborah Bird Rose (2004). She writes about the learning, and the experience of learning so much, from her Aboriginal co-workers. Inevitably, in contemporary Central Australian Aboriginal communities cross-cultural workers...
will ask the question: Do we have the capacity to keep on going, keep on trying for successful relationships with a dominant culture that lacks cultural insight or linguistic skills with which to communicate with us? Bird Rose reflects that Aboriginal people need to keep retelling the rest of us stories of the past, even of misfortune and injustice, because there is hope that someone, somewhere will realise the inequity or injustice and they will address it morally and ethically.

Somewhere someone will listen and hear, and then actions will be implemented which change things. I spoke to some Eastern Arrenre friends about my understanding of Bird Rose’s assessment and for them it certainly resonated: Otherwise, they asked me, why would we bother trying to explain the lived reality of contemporary Central Australian Aboriginal community life over and over again to all those people who come asking us the same questions?

PHOTO

**Arts workers and their families host a cross-cultural exchange program at a local billabong after good rain.**

**Impact of a wider environment:**

There is no resource available to counter the chaotic and exhausting effects of debilitating situations in health and housing. Undeniably infrastructure, health and education are worse in many Central Australian communities and certainly in our regional centres, than they were during the 70s and 80s. Certainly one of the most destructive aspects since then has been gradual incapacitation of community members through lack of control over, and application of, the skills learned and fostered in earlier times when local people were employed in building homes, maintaining their roads and delivering essential services at a higher level than they are now permitted to perform. At the same time there is an increasing demand on existing services and a break down in delivery, responsibility and management across the tiers of Government. What can pull communities together in such a climate?

**Projects: A place where ideas become?**

We recently completed *Listen deeply, let these stories in*. It’s bi-lingual, and contains an audio CD of Mrs Wallace telling seven of the stories in the book. It is a book whose designer really understood the elements being drawn together, and who was able to respond to the artwork being reproduced. After seeing this book, the Keringke artists felt confident to envision their new art centre book as an Artist’s Book - something which will look like an object you might find for sale on the art centre shelves. This then, is the next step for the publication project; to bring into life a book that tells the story of Keringke, the art centre, not in relation to the mission, or to the managers who worked there, but through the visual art and visual intelligence of the Eastern Arrernte artists; a book of art, in the style of Eastern Arrernte culture.
A little while ago we had a big celebration at the community for the 20 year birthday party for Keringke Arts. At the same time we had a book launch. We had to organise this event and get everything ready for it. We had a few hundred people turn up and it was a really good party. Three traditional dance groups performed and the school children made a giant birthday cake. Lots of the old artists came to the party. We had to host it and to run it. The elders were proud that day because we arts workers did the welcome to country, and read out the speeches. Some young people participated in dancing for the first time, and it was a long time since anyone danced like that for fun in the community. We put up a big display of photos showing the people, places and events from 20 years. Many people from all over the community came to the art centre, as well as family and friends from town. Everyone said it was so good to have a birthday party.

Patricia Ellis, above, and Camilla Hayes, right, welcome the large crowd and with Rosina Ryder, Belinda Hayes and Serena Hayes manage the public speaking at the event.

PHOTOS

Serena Hayes, above and Belinda Hayes, right, give the welcome to country to a large crowd that includes many of their elders, past and present Keringke artists and staff.

Visitors include the Hetti Perkins and Old Timers Hostel residents from Alice Springs. (Birthday party photos by Kerrie Bedson and Laurelle Halford)

The old photos that were used in the display had to be selected from photo albums, scanned, printed and laminated. Then they were hung in thematic groups; cultural activities, artist portraits, travel and exhibitions, and portraits of the arts managers. We began an audio recording project as well, to interview older arts workers, but time got in the way of completion for the party date.

The work done with these old images now flows into the development of the next Keringke Arts book\textsuperscript{*}. So far, using the writing of the new version Keringke book as focus, computer literacy skills have been assessed through asking arts workers to undertake research of publications and marketing on the internet, and encouraging people to write up their own biography. Seven of the core group of arts workers have written and typed up their biography for the book. Writing biography is a challenge to anyone, and selecting what information to put into the publication and what to omit needs additional contextualising for an arts publication. There needed to be an understanding of more than just one’s own story; we needed to decide about the design and also the market pitch of the publication itself. For the new book to be an effective marketing tool, then the style affects the selection of text and the tone of the writing. For the book to tell the Keringke Arts story in a new way, reflective of the centres own development and increased self direction, then the project must be invested in by the
contributing artists and it must tell their stories in voices they can call their own.

**Complexity**

Not exactly a training brief though is it? At times like this I wish we were all moving through the post graduate system where project work is an acceptable method and core skills may be assumed, but are not the focus.

After all, at the end of the day, the Aboriginal art market in Australia in an enormous financial success while on Aboriginal communities in Central Australia we learn very quickly that most of the outcomes attached to nationally designed policies don’t deliver on the ground - they can’t - the frameworks and core assumptions are unrealistic: fundamentals such as health services and housing, or the lack thereof, are stunning examples, but education runs a very close second.

The very positive thing about the recent change to make training deliverable through the art centre is that formerly where training tended only be funded if it met the national standards and was delivered at an accredited certificate level, it can now be unaccredited, and delivered against identified gaps. This means there is scope to engage a wider industry knowledge base, and to budget the training money so that individuals can be given opportunities, such as attending this 5th National Indigenous Education Conference in Hobart to present and participate, which amount to capacity building through professional development. The training plans we’re developing are for individuals, meeting their skills and recognising existing knowledge. Perhaps after we get to the benchmark level of Certificate III in Arts Administration, we will feel confident to hand over the individual folios for assessment and recognition of prior learning.

**Not alone**

Keringke Arts enjoys good relationships with many individuals and organisations, and some of these share the training puzzle. We would like to mention the Desart Arts Workers Program and also the Central Australian Education and Training Network (CAETN) in a little more detail before we end this paper. The Arts Workers program is currently managed by Raewyn Kavanagh who, upon reading a draft of this paper, responded with the following insight:

> I think it’s important to have a flexible mix of accredited and non-accredited training delivered in a range of formats and locations, in whichever way works for individuals. That’s our biggest challenge, because of distance, and because what works for one person will be different to what someone else needs. Some (but not all) RTO’s are really good at flexible delivery of accredited programs, but I also agree there is a need for non-accredited training that is responsive to local needs so people can learn things that are directly relevant to their own situation. For funding to make all these
things happen, I agree that setting minimum numbers is too restrictive for this region.

Keringke arts workers have attended several of the Desart Arts Workers’ training initiatives, and have hosted other arts workers to Keringke. Having networks like this to support the art centre staff is critical to sustainability and long term outcomes for those people. This is so for the non-local arts managers too, and this is where CAETN has provided a point of industry contact, a way of contextualising the very day-to-day realities of trying to implement training in the art centre. Through CAETN forums it is possible to hear how others outside the arts industry are managing, and listen to the many practical and inspiring voices of experienced educators.

As we are discovering at Keringke Arts, where the younger generations are taking up the responsibilities of art centre business, in art centres set up by their elders, they are finding new ways to practice ownership and influence in these businesses. Capability and capacity cannot and should not be measured through English literacy and numeracy alone. Younger people are extending themselves in many ways and this is of great benefit to Central Australian communities.

This painting is about a scary monster, called Arrentye. There are a lot of these monsters in the stories that my Nana, Mrs Wallace tells me. This one is one I thought about, who comes and sneaks around at night. He has three big teeth and long scratchy finger nails too. The Arrentye is carrying a poison bag full of bad things. He is hunting someone who he will eat. The eagles are his friends and they will help by catching the man and carrying him away for the Arrentye.

Bart Doolan and his canvas My Arrentye Story, 2010
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ii Keringke Artists statement read by Patricia Ellis, about the changes to the CDEP program as a result of the NTER. 20th September 2007.

iii Day, B. Employability Skills, knowing what they are. Paper presented at the Central Australian Education and Training Network meeting

iv Desart in the member organisation representing art centres in the Central Australian region. It is a tri-state membership.

v Charles Darwin University has developed a booklet for RPL assessment of Certificate III in Arts Administration and has this certificate course on their scope


ix Veronica and Anthea Dobson in conversation with Judy Lovell, September 2009.

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