CHAPTER 2

THE LEARNING SPACES
In this chapter we introduce the research sites by elaborating on two concepts we consider elemental in our research. First, we consider the idea of *learning spaces*, and second, the nature of the ‘productive learning’ that these spaces generate.

In Australia today, public and policy discourse promotes schooling and vocational training as the primary pathway to realising successful futures for remote Indigenous youth. However this ideal model appears to have little resonance in many communities where there are few job opportunities and a considerable number of young people are voting with their feet by walking away from institutional learning. This is distressing not only to educators and politicians, but also to many Indigenous families who are continually told, and firmly believe, that ‘school’ should provide the knowledge and tools—including English literacy and numeracy—necessary for economic participation and success and the transition to adult life. To understand why Indigenous youth disengage from education it is important to explore the degree to which their schooling experience has relevance to the social and cultural realities of their lives.

Some of what is seen as the withdrawal of Indigenous youth from formal education and training may in fact be the agency of youth in expressions of resistance and identity (Bottrell 2007) or ‘self-sabotage’ resulting from the experience of discrimination and racism (Andrews et al. 2008). Together these may account for much of what might be observed not so much as ‘failure’ but rather as a ‘retreat from aspiration’ among young people (Bottrell 2007: 610). At the same time it is important to acknowledge that in remote Indigenous contexts, mainstream credentialing is not necessarily perceived as a prerequisite for a fulfilling life. In fact, in the communities we worked with, other socio-cultural schemas continue to firmly underpin the practice of everyday life and the construction of social identity. The obligations to culture, country and kin remain primary while formal education and its promised rewards of employment are secondary. Given the relatively small amount of time that even the most dedicated Indigenous young people spend in formal learning on any one day and across the life span (Schwab 1999), it is unrealistic to expect schooling alone to deliver the positive identity formation experiences, oral and written communication skills, technological know-how, and the social and organisational learning required to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Schools in remote Aboriginal communities (or elsewhere) cannot by themselves ‘create’ engaged workers and active participants in local and national spheres, especially in locations where families and communities are fragmented.
and struggling to maintain effective socialisation and learning frameworks.¹

Our experience and observations in a number of remote communities over decades suggest that there is now not simply a lack of engagement with school but also a learning engagement gap in the out-of-school and post-school years. This is exemplified in one of the research sites where the linkages between school, training and employment are weak and the community has had little social cohesion. An observer describes how many community members had lost hope: ‘Young people are often from fragmented families and are struggling to find an identity and a sense of purpose’. As is common in many remote communities, few youth-oriented community resources had been provided: no youth centre, and no sport and recreation centre. In this location the establishment of an effective youth program working with youth at risk and the opening of a community owned cultural centre injected a new sense of optimism and purpose into the community.²

Importantly, our research indicates that this learning engagement gap can be filled with productive activity that builds on school learning—or makes up for what was not learned at school—and develops the kind of communication, technological and organisational learning skills required for successful futures for Indigenous youth in the twenty first century. We have characterised these activities as examples of productive learning which are facilitated within the learning spaces found in arts projects, youth centres and media organisations. Here participation is not contingent upon prior school competencies or qualification and participants are not compelled by any authority to engage. Rather, participation is voluntary. In these learning spaces young people are choosing to engage in modes of learning that give them the creative freedom to explore and express who they are and what they want to be. Although some communities have sport and recreation activities and even a youth centre, many of these were established to provide diversionary activities to keep youngsters away from substance abuse, drinking or delinquent activity. While some of the programs observed were diversionary, others have emerged and grown out of recognition of the potential of Indigenous young people and their interest in and commitment to music, film, culture, language, community and enterprise.

Internationally, ethnographic research has focused on the potential that youth-focused programs and organisations have to support and stimulate sustained learning, and language and literacy development, especially for marginalised youth (Cushman and Emmons 2002; Eidman-
Aadahl 2002; Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Heath and Smyth 1999; Hull 2003; McLaughlin et al. 1994). In this research literature community-based youth groups and their various activities are seen to offer the ‘freedoms of time, space, activity and authority that schools as institutions seldom provide’ (Heath and Street 2008: 5). They enable long-term, meaningful engagement with experts or mentors in community-based organisations where ‘learning is associated with observation and a real (as distinct from realistic) sense of participation with regard to the intensity of observation, willingness to make efforts, and openness to failure’ (Heath and Street 2008: 75–76). Importantly, such research suggests that arts-based projects and organisations in particular, offer the opportunity for building information, honing skills, performing in risk laden tasks, expressing a sense of self, and also linking with literacy and language development. Heath describes such programs and projects as ‘re-generative learning environments’, a concept we will return to later (Heath 2007: 5).

This research has direct relevance in remote Indigenous contexts where many adolescents are bypassing institutional learning. In many such communities there is rarely anything meaningful for youth to do in the after-school hours, on weekends and throughout the long school holidays and there is minimal home access to creative tools such as cameras, computers or recording technologies, and sometimes even pens and paper.

In the next section we describe the various youth-oriented community-based projects and organisations that informed our ethnographic research, many of which provide the opportunities described above. These projects facilitate a range of learning spaces. Here young learners have, in most cases, incomplete secondary educations and varying levels of literacy competence in both their Indigenous mother tongue (or vernacular) and English. Yet in these learning spaces young people are learning from Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors, older relatives and each other. They are also structuring their own learning in environments that encourage individual agency and peer learning. They are taking on meaningful roles and responsibilities and extending and expanding their oral and written communication modes and technological skills. What is transformative in the form of learning that we are talking about here, is that young people encounter adults who believe in them and they see themselves as competent and full of potential.

Importantly all of these sites have, in some way, tapped into digital media. The projects we focus on in this book are representative of the many similar projects that have flourished over recent years in remote Indigenous Australia. Some of these include: the *Deadly Mob* program (now complete) comprising an internet café and website at the Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs as well as media training for youth in bush communities with no internet access;
the Us Mob online video project;
the Warburton Youth Arts Project (now known as Wilurarra Creative);
the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council youth project in communities in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia;
Tangentyere youth programs including CAYLUS (Central Australian Youth Link Up Service) in Central Australian communities and Drum Atweme in Alice Springs;
the Irrkelantye Learning Centre in an Alice Springs town camp;
Music Outback at Ti Tree;
the Carclew Youth Arts program in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia;
the Mulka Project at Yirrkala, NT;
the Gelengu du Gelenguwurru new media intergenerational project at Warmun in Western Australia;
the Pelican Project Digital Stories, Hopevale, Qld; and
the Martu Media youth media project at Parngurr, Western Australia embracing youth involvement in the Yiwarra Kuju Canning Stock Route project and exhibition.

Those programs out in the community, I like to call them the invisible programs they are so precious for people out there...without having someone watching over them, it’s free to come and to share something...People should really look into it and then see the outcomes. Come out to these places and be part of that, you know and share with these young people, you know, and see the different kind of programs like Deadly Mob or Mt Theo, you know. Please, they should come out you know and just spend a week or three days is good enough so that you can get the whole picture of what is really happening. You know, you’ll see plenty of smiling faces, families, kids and the whole community. It will lighten up the atmosphere.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH MENTOR AND MUSICIAN
LAJAMANU, 2008

Young people have been doing it before we came. Dozens of movies had been made at Willowra media training. Always been a bit of a hub for this community...

KYLE JARVIE
YOUTH WORKER,
WILLOWRA YOUTH CENTRE, 2009

The proliferation of these approaches to youth practice is indicative of the change sweeping across remote Indigenous youth culture. See Appendix 1 with links to these and other models.

We will now turn to a description of each of the research sites we worked with before exploring more deeply the notion of productive learning.
THE PROJECT SITES

Djilpin Arts  Aboriginal Corporation at Beswick (Wugularr)

Djilpin Arts is a community-owned arts organisation in the community of Beswick, also known as Wugularr, some 90 kilometres from the town of Katherine in the Northern Territory. It produces the annual Walking with Spirits Festival, supports a youth and media training project, and operates an arts retail business at the Ghunmarn Culture Centre—a formerly derelict community house renovated and converted into a bright and attractive gallery and training space.

Djilpin Arts started as a loose collective for artists in the community who had never had the support of a local arts enterprise organisation and its associated infrastructure. The focus for the arts organisation is the maintenance of cultural knowledge systems that are useful to people in the contemporary world.

Djilpin Arts emphasises youth learning, employment and enterprise development as priority areas. There are two aspects to the enterprise venture. First, young women have been trained and are now employed to manage and operate the arts retail business at Ghunmarn Culture Centre. In addition, a café and beauty products enterprise (making soap, lip balm and candles out of natural bush medicines and plants) has been established.

Djilpin Arts has also integrated youth media into their various community arts projects. A non-formal digital learning project has been operating for a number of years for youth to engage with their cultural heritage and learn media skills. Young people are now employed to document community arts and cultural activities.³

We are all the young people working in media and working in the cultural centre. And we’ll keep going working here and keeping our community strong and keeping our culture strong.

REVONNA URBAN
BESWICK COMMUNITY, 2009
The Ngapartji Ngapartji intergenerational language and arts project is one of a number of national arts projects undertaken by BIG hART Australia’s leading arts and social change company. Based in a temporary demountable building in Alice Springs, the Ngapartji Ngapartji project (now complete) began in 2004 and involved community members of all ages in a professional national touring theatre performance (Ngapartji Ngapartji) and an online Pitjantjatjara language teaching and preservation project. Underpinning the Ngapartji Ngapartji project was a commitment to language and culture maintenance and the facilitation of youth learning. This included the provision of literacy and learning support for youth participants. Ngapartji Ngapartji explored alternative approaches to meet the aspirations and literacy needs of Indigenous young adults. The project sought to align learning and arts activity with participants’ values, languages, aspirations, and social and cultural practice, while also developing skills and sharing experiences that allowed both participants, and the wider community, to navigate across both cultures (Leonard 2008). The emphasis on multimedia was integral to youth engagement in the project. A variety of media and music workshops and projects were conducted in Alice Springs and in Pitjantjatjara-speaking bush communities. Films were produced for the project website and music CDs were produced for sale.
Libraries and Knowledge Centres at Lajamanu and Ti Tree

The Northern Territory Library (NTL) supports twenty two remote community Libraries and Knowledge Centres (LKC) across the Northern Territory. The LKCs combine traditional library services with electronic resources and new media tools. A focal point of this initiative is the *Aga Irititja* digital archiving software, also found in public access locations in the Pitjantjatjara and some Ngaanyatjarra communities (Hughes and Dallwitz 2007), and now rebranded by NTL as the *Our Story* database (Gibson et al. 2011). Working with the LKCs, young people with computer and media skills take responsibility for archiving and documenting community knowledge in databases of heritage materials. In the database repatriated items are enriched with annotations in English or the local vernacular and new material is included through the use of digital media technologies (Gibson 2007).

The involvement of young people in the various LKCs is diverse. At Lajamanu young people (who have developed media skills through ‘PAW Media and Communications’ based at Yuendumu) worked with NTL to set up the Lajamanu *Nganju Our Story* archival database in the local LKC. Acting with little institutional support, these young people have independently harnessed resources to acquire media skills and produce innovative work linked directly to a broader community commitment to language and culture maintenance.

Throughout 2008 and 2009, a group of Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) students worked on an oral history project with Margaret Carew in the Own Language Work course at Ti Tree. Young women documented accounts of life on cattle stations establishing this history as an important part of local Anmatyerr identity. A collaboration with NTL through the Ti Tree LKC ensures that the oral histories are archived in the *Anmatyerr Angkety* (Anmatyerr Stories) *Our Story* database.

I want to learn to read and write for language, culture, so I can teach my kids. It’s important so my kids can be strong to speak Anmatyerr when they start working for Anmatyerr culture. English is important too so that they can be teacher.

**LANA CAMPBELL**
**TI TREE COMMUNITY, 2008**

I want to do it for my people, especially for Anmatyerr people. Yeah, because they want more young people to work on this. So we can translate it into English, do it in Anmatyerr and translate it into English. It’s important.

**GAYLE CAMPBELL**
**TI TREE COMMUNITY, 2008**
Youth Programs at Yuendumu, Nyirripi, Willowra and Lajamanu

Youth programs in the four Warlpiri communities (Yuendumu, Nyirripi, Willowra and Lajamanu) are supported by the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation, Mt Theo – Yuendumu Substance Misuse Aboriginal Corporation, and the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT).

In addition to sport and recreation and other programs, the youth programs provide regular access to computers so young people can use iTunes, download digital photos, and write texts. The Mt Theo program includes the Jaru Pirrjirdi (Strong Voices) Project. Jaru Pirrjirdi supports the development of young adults aged 17-30 years of age by providing a challenging and progressive framework through which young people can move forward. It achieves this by providing a range of programs and a community service structure through which youth can engage in meaningful and productive community activity.

In July 2008 WETT, in collaboration with the Mt Theo youth program and PAW Media and Communications, implemented a youth and media program for 12 weeks a year for youth in all four Warlpiri communities. The youth program identifies young people who are engaging with the program and those that want to learn more about media production with the idea that they may move onto employment with PAW Media or elsewhere. In this way the youth program is creating training and employment opportunities for youth in remote communities through a media pathway. The program is expanding to include new types of media training to support youth to re-engage with education, enrol in media and other courses (e.g. Batchelor Institute or Charles Darwin University in the NT), or to get a job in their own community. In November 2009 PAW Media commenced a ‘train the trainer’ program focused on animation and digital storytelling providing youth workers and local trainees with skills to continue activities and training other young people in the Warlpiri communities (WETT 2010).

The Youth Centre itself is an old house that was actually condemned. The community went round and collected raw materials and rebuilt it from scratch. There is a sense of ownership, they built that building, they own it. It’s a place where everyone can go. Even when there’s conflict in the community the Youth Centre is known as a completely neutral space.

KYLE JARVIE
YOUTH WORKER
WILLOWRA YOUTH CENTRE, 2009
Ngaanyatjarra Media is located at Wingellina in Western Australia, some 700 kilometers from Alice Springs. Since 1992 Ngaanyatjarra Media has been responsible for radio, film, and music production, broadcasting and training, as well as the promotion of language and culture maintenance in the three languages of the region: Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi.

Around 2003 Ngaanyatjarra Media established a ‘telecentre’ in Wingellina followed in 2005–06 by online ‘media centres’ in other Ngaanyatjarra communities (Featherstone 2011). These sites provide public access computers containing information and applications that are meaningful to local people. Now people have access to computers to view and create their own photos, music and media content. They also use the internet to search online for cars and musical instruments, download songs from iTunes, do internet banking and communicate with an ever-widening network of friends on Facebook. In the media centre at Wingellina, computer engagement incorporates the Aja Iritijja archival database of digitised heritage materials.

In December 2006 informal training workshops in GarageBand (free software available within the multimedia iLife suite on Apple Mac computers) were held for local young musicians in five Ngaanyatjarra communities. After only a few days training, young musicians had developed sufficient skill to start recording, producing and teaching others. The potential enterprise pathway of this nascent music industry is being explored by Ngaanyatjarra Media through a three-year regional music development program. Locally produced CDs are advertised on the internet and distributed for sale in Aboriginal music retail outlets. The distribution potential in the international world music market remains, as yet, untapped.

In addition to GarageBand and iPhoto, the Aja Iritijja computer is just the best media application I’ve seen out here...and the best way to engage people with computers without actually identifying it as a computer.

DANIEL FEATHERSTONE
CO-ORDINATOR
NGAANYATJARRA MEDIA, 2008
The Alice Springs Public Library provides an Indigenous-friendly environment where Aboriginal people of all ages can access digital and textual resources. In particular it is a space where young people can access computers, the internet, wireless TV and music systems, videos and DVDs, as well as books, magazines, pencils and paper. The Akaltye Antheme section has Indigenous-oriented books, magazines and the ‘Indigi-links’ computer network. In the databases of historical photos people can find photos of themselves and their relatives. In this way Indigenous language and culture is affirmed in the public space. There are few other public locations in Alice Springs where Aboriginal people can feel as comfortably and confidently located.

While observations were carried out at Alice Springs Public Library, there were no youth participants from this site involved in the research project.

Old way of schooling not working, we need a new way for these kids. These kids are not going to school anyway, but in the library doing activities that are making them proud, giving self-esteem and saying “I can do this”. We don’t tell ‘em it’s a learning environment, we just do it...when they have access to resources they write things.

INDIGENOUS LIBRARY WORKER
ALICE SPRINGS, 2008
LEARNING SPACES AND PRODUCTIVE LEARNING

Before expanding on the forms of productive learning that became apparent in the research we wish take one step back and situate this discussion within the context of the shifting nature of cultural production in the remote Indigenous context.

NEW FORMS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Indigenous youth are now encountering a greater range of lifestyle options and future choices than ever before. They are exploring and internalising new and diverse ‘intercultural arenas of social practice’ to forge an emerging identity based on a multiple influences (Merlan 1998: 145). They are negotiating and traversing new pathways towards the meaningful practice of everyday life that differs markedly from that of previous generations. Although the socialisation practices and the acquisition of the skills and cultural competencies required for adult life have altered, the values, norms and dispositions transmitted across the generations remain linked to the Aboriginal worldview.

As in many Indigenous cultures around the world the old modes of cultural production, including the chores and tasks that previously filled up everyday life, are no longer perceived as ‘work’ in contemporary life (Katz 2004). Although many in the older generation in remote communities may still participate in traditional modes of cultural production—hunting, gathering, artefact making and so forth—on a regular basis, this is no longer essential for survival. By contrast, the everyday activities of the youth generation have diverged from cultural norms, and this has led to a tension associated with how time should be spent and the kind of activities that give life meaning and purpose in the everyday and across the lifespan. Where in the past young people were enculturated into skills and practices that made sense in the traditional cultural context, in today’s world the Western ‘school to work transition’ model is pervasive. Yet, often it does not match the social, cultural or economic reality of community life (Fogarty 2010; Kral 2010a; Schwab 2001). Some anthropologists

First of all you must never forget who you are, yapa, Warlpiri man or woman, then have your feet planted in two worlds, whitefella way and our way. Computer skills are very important. But don’t forget who you are, always think you are a yapa first, follow two roads, if you don’t know one from the other, well you won’t be a good leader. If you know both worlds you’ll be able to be the bridge between two cultures.

GEOFFREY BARNES
WARLPIRI LEADER
LAJAMANU, 2008
have addressed this issue by claiming that ‘many Aboriginal people don’t especially like participating in Western institutions’, especially the institutions of education and employment (Burbank 2006; see also Austin-Broos 2003 and Tonkinson 2007). While this may be true, we argue that there is value in exploring the nature of productive learning and the multiple pathways to employment and enterprise generation they often entail. In fact as our study indicates, many young people are already leading the way. They have deeply immersed themselves in various forms of productive learning that are meaningful in the remote context and are attractive to young people.

As mentioned above, digital technologies are transforming the nature of communication, leisure, learning and employment worldwide. Indigenous youth are connected to this globalised media world where new technologies are enabling innovations in multimodal communications, cultural production and enterprise development. This is having a profound impact on the kind of productive learning we are describing here. In the learning spaces we describe below, access to resources is enabling the generation of new modes of cultural production that often incorporate and celebrate Aboriginal language and culture. The individuals we portray are determining the areas of specialisation within media production that most interest them, while simultaneously drawing ideas regarding content, quality and expertise from local sources and global youth culture. These new forms of cultural production are legitimate activities that mirror contemporary circumstances. That is, the skills and competencies they are developing incorporate the technological learning required for altered recreational and employment futures.

Internationally, researchers have noted the shifting role of formal education and the heightened importance of informal apprenticeships in people’s everyday lives (Barron 2006; Buckingham 2008a; Coy 1989; Greenfield 2009; Lave 2011; Seely Brown 1999; Summerson Carr 2010). Importantly, these informal apprenticeships typically arise in community-based learning spaces where young learners are ‘voluntarily developing expertise’ (Heath 2010: 8). With access to learning spaces and control over various media, young people around the world are experiencing what it is to participate in non-directed learning, to practice that learning and through internal monitoring and self-evaluation to produce meaningful cultural artefacts. The kind of learning illustrated in this volume reflects the patterns of informal learning, apprenticeship and voluntary specialisation development that will increasingly prevail in communities and workplaces around the globe.
New spaces for productive learning
As researchers we approached the project sites outlined above as contexts for understanding learning in community-based or informal learning contexts. Gradually we started to view these sites as *learning spaces*, as sites of situated learning and productive activity. The learning spaces we identified in this project appeared in:

- Community arts projects
- Libraries
- Youth Centres
- Media Centres
- Digital networks
- The spaces beyond

While each of the first four of these has an identifiable base or building or physical space in which young people participated in learning, we observed an important non-physical space that was equally and sometimes more important: Digital networks. Digital networks are a virtual rather than geographically anchored space accessible through electronic networks of various new media. These non-physical spaces can be accessed through computers, the internet and mobile phones. They are just as significant as sites of learning and creative production as are the physically bounded sites. Indeed for many young people they are increasingly and sometimes more important. Finally, we also observed productive learning in what we characterize as ‘the spaces beyond’—community learning spaces beyond the buildings and the confines of a ‘nine to three’ school day or a ‘nine to five’ training and employment routine.

Indigenous youth are moving swiftly and continually through these ‘spaces beyond’ as they orbit between the learning spaces of home, the bush, the ceremonial ground, the sports ground and so forth integrating these fields into new modes of learning via digital media production and sharing.

The tools and contexts of productive learning
Within each of these learning spaces, and over extended periods of observation, we saw Indigenous young people engaged in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) where productive learning took place. We documented the many ways in which youth are participating in new arenas of learning and production: language and cultural knowledge recording; film making; music production; theatre performance; and enterprise development and organisational learning. Important, what we discovered was that youth in remote regions are learning how to use and manipulate new digital technologies at an astounding rate. This remarkable change in socio-cultural practice is also impacting on the way that young people are using multimodal literacies in new and innovative ways. In the learning spaces we observed, individuals collaborated, experimented, acquired and shared skills, knowledge and expertise, gained confidence, assumed new roles and responsibilities, reconfigured their identities and created new knowledge, art and commercial products. Based on our observations we will now discuss the productive learning that emerged from the various learning spaces.
Many of the learning spaces we observed provided a locus for communal after-school and night-time activity. In particular, media organisations, youth programs, and arts and community development projects have tapped into digital media as a way of engaging young people in meaningful productive activity in the out-of-school hours. Activities are typically unstructured and participants choose what to do and when, and they can leave and return as many times as they like, depending on what else is happening in the community. In such locations young people have been introduced to computers through the multimedia Apple Mac iMovie and iPhoto applications and computer games. Multimodal practices are learned in digital film-making and music workshops. Competence is gained informally through observation, peer learning, trial and error, repetition and interactions with non-Aboriginal mentors. In some locations young people are engaging in video-making using cameras and complex computer editing programs and producing and distributing DVDs of their work. In others they are composing, writing and recording songs using the GarageBand software on Apple Mac computers and producing CDs and music videos.

In what follows we describe the practices, process and outcomes of productive learning in the various learning spaces. We do not, however, attempt to define the specific features or characteristics of, for example, the media centre as learning space. The physical setting is not so important as the productive learning the space facilitates. We have both observed media centres in communities that are well stocked with high technology equipment yet no productive learning takes place there. In many important ways the physical setting is necessary but not sufficient to engender productive learning. In the remainder of this chapter we explore some of the productive learning that emerged from the various learning spaces we identified. Specifically we introduce the productive learning being generated as a means for engagement with the outside world, visual storytelling and cultural work and music and media creation.
New technologies and engagement with the world

Digital technology is now firmly part of everyday practice: Indigenous youth don’t need to be taught it, they are just doing it. Even in communities with no mobile phone coverage young people walk around with mobile phones viewing photos or videos and listening to music. With increased personal ownership of small mobile media technologies and greater access to resources in the sites described above, young people are producing and controlling new and unique art and information. Music and video recordings, packaged with artwork and lyrics for sale and/or uploaded to the internet, have been common to most of the projects. The character and shape of these creative, cultural productions are particular to each locale. In all the sites learning is not based on a programmatic curriculum, but is integrated into and contextualised around real life. Through a process of iterative engagement young people are showing that they are fearless of technology. Importantly young people are walking in the door and choosing to participate because these cultural production roles are in the domains of knowledge that matter to them—culture, arts, country, and new technologies, within a framework of social relatedness. Importantly, these small technologies—and their linkages through the internet and social media like Facebook and YouTube—also enable engagement with the outside world, with young people and other cultures far outside the home community.

In these learning spaces young people are typically introduced to digital technologies through ‘mucking around’ with iTunes and digital photos, often on old personal computers. Initially this learning does not require high levels of technological competence as learners can employ visual, spatial and motor skills for clicking, dragging, cutting and pasting images, text or sound. Skills are initially acquired through observation and imitation of those more skilled. Then individuals practice. This is an important first step in young people gaining independent, non-directed computer experience and problem-solving confidence. Embedded also is a high degree of regular reading and writing of song titles, playlists and music genres, often through copying, cutting and pasting and determining song repeats and multiple copies. In some locations young musicians were observed repeatedly listening to songs in the iTunes playlist to determine how songs are constructed and to

People became less fearful of the technology and through that process of engaging with it learnt more so that sense of knowing how to use and manipulate technology, for your own gains for your own means, it became much more user friendly.

Anna Cadden
Wett Media Trainer, 2009
mimic the drum beats. In others, young people listened to and transcribed songs from *iTunes* then typed and printed good copies.

Later, and in collaboration with mentor experts in short-term workshops or project-based learning activities, young people acquired a higher level of technological competence in video production, computer editing and music recording using software such as *iMovie* and *GarageBand*. Early productions included digital storytelling and non-narrative *iMovie* compilations with multimodal layering of image, text, song and gesture. Eventually, individual specialisations started to emerge and innovations occurred as young people experimented with digital technologies. In their determination to perfect their newly acquired expertise young people spent hours in recording studios, arts centres and old radio broadcasting rooms.

Some participants have had little or no schooling, and a history of petrol sniffing or getting into trouble. Through youth media projects they develop personal strengths and new technical skills and literacies. As young people’s skills expand some are called on to participate in community projects as camera operators and editors or to compile CDs of their songs for distribution beyond the local community. Meanwhile others have expanded their networks through presentations at conferences and symposia in urban centres. Importantly, in many cases young people have continued on to formal training in media work or language interpreting courses at BIITE and have found work in their areas of specialisation. Others are participating in enterprise generating projects or have moved into full-time employment and community leadership positions.

It’s really important that people have access and there’s amazing ways of learning, problem solving, creative thinking. One of the most special outcomes of media work is that people can adapt that thinking and problem-solving to everyday stuff outside. I see those guys grab a video camera, they co-ordinate it, they’re talking to each other, they’re directing it as well as filming it and editing it. There’s a lot of strong communication skills coming out of that. Strong leadership skills. Technological side, using computers. Computer is just a tool to get that idea in your head, that movie happening. A new tool, a new form, a way to share your vision.

MICAH WENITONG
YOUTH WORKER
YUENDUMU, 2009

I found computers easy for me, like to type and do everything on the computer, everything like doing internet banking and helping other people in how to use the computer in the Telecentre. I do some works for the Telecentre and for the Media, sometimes when I’m bored I come to the Telecentre, sit down, play around looking there, do good things, then learn more good things. I like checking my emails, Yahoo, and I like to do some photo decoration on the computer, on the Publisher, scanning photos.

NATALIE O’TOOLE
WINGELLINA COMMUNITY, 2008
Visual storytelling and cultural work
In Lajamanu, youth media workers Shane White, Maxwell Tasman and others have acquired media skills through non-formal training with Warlpiri Media (now known as PAW Media and Communications), as well as observational learning and participating in a range of community media projects. Shane and Maxwell have made films with old people on country, and worked on documentaries for Aboriginal organisations, media organisations and the LKC. In the LKC Shane and Maxwell have learned how to import media items, understand file formats and add metadata and they work with elders to record, transcribe and translate texts:

We’ve got to learn from the old people, but we have to learn how to put it into the database for Warlpiri people and everybody really.

Recently they have been employed through the Central Land Council to film two DVDs documenting the WETT-funded community development activities.

Participating in these projects has given Shane and Maxwell a respected role as filmmakers. Simultaneously, they are acquiring cultural knowledge by working directly with elders. These young men are independently accessing film-making resources in the ‘old BRACS room’ in Lajamanu in order to edit music videos and cultural documentaries, often adding subtitles in Warlpiri or English. These contemporary digital artefacts are placed in the Our Story community database in the LKC. In their spare time they make films for fun so that they can learn more by ‘mucking around’ with camera techniques and editing using Final Cut Pro film editing software. As Shane says,

I do media work because I enjoy it and I love editing. We have open access to the BRACS room, we use the equipment anytime we want. I like making people laugh, do a bit of dance videos, music videos for the Library Knowledge Centres or put them on YouTube.

Shane and Maxwell have now commenced formal media training through BIITE and are employed by the Central Desert Shire.

At Djilpin Arts, young film-makers Amos Urban, Ricardo Weston and Revonna Urban have worked for a number of years with Julia Morris, a visiting non-Indigenous mentor film-maker. They have gained media skills through participating in community media projects. In these projects they are given responsible roles where they interact and communicate with Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors and film and edit professional standard films.
You can learn both ways, you can learn **kartiya** way, learn technologies, computer all that stuff with media, reading all the numbers, lights, reading books...And learning **yapa** side, even the birds, and plants, yeah even the season, looking at both ways.

It brings two ways together...And that's the best way to learn...We got all these things, like technology, we can record all these story, video, songline everything...when we go, as long as we leave something behind so all the kids can look after it and so they can pass it on...to the next generation...we knowing this technology like media, started knowing this, started use this thing in the right way because old people going away. From knowing this media I’m starting to know these old people and knowing what they got... and knowing all that stuff what you learn from both ways ... the time will come round that you start teaching and you start taking the responsibility.

**MAXWELL TASMAN**
YOUTH MEDIA WORKER
LAJAMANU, 2008

When you look at technology, which in a sense is all about communication in one form or another, I think what has been sorely missing is that communication between mainstream Australia and remote communities...Shane and Maxwell are perfect examples of tackling that head on in the sense that they are really clued in and think: “How can we tell stories which other people will understand?”, you know “How can we bridge this gap between the cultures that exist in Australia?”. They see technology and media as a way of doing that...They are after this connection and the connection is communication, bridging that gap and making life better for people in communities.

**ANNA CADDEN**
WETT MEDIA TRAINER, 2009

They [Shane and Maxwell] are learning really well from me and my father and all the old fellas. Maxwell’s someone who you thought “Oh he’s not gonna learn anything!”. But no, now he got this passion of learning and doing things the right way, he’s become a good example for people...He’s an example, like I said, he was someone who got no hope, yeah, hardly doesn’t take his own culture or anything seriously, **yuwayi**. But after he learned why all the **yapa** culture is all about connections. Oh he wants to prove himself that he can make a difference. And you know, he’s been doing it, he always going to teach young fellas too...Shane was a quiet one, but he was really good at computers. But he’s another one, didn’t take his culture seriously. But you know, in his own way, his body language and everything saying now “I’ve gotta start becoming more”...So Shane more quiet, but he wanna prove that he can make a difference as well because he believes in that sort of teaching... I want them to be anything you know, I want them to take advantage of all the opportunity, all that thing. I even like to see them go overseas and make a difference over there. But, one thing, they must come back and still tell me that they can sing that song for that bird or sing that song for that tree, **yuwayi**, that tell me that they still know who they are.

**STEVE JAMPIJINPA PATRICK**
WARLPIRI EDUCATOR AND LEADER
LAJAMANU, 2008

When you look at technology, which in a sense is all about communication in one form or another, I think what has been sorely missing is that communication between mainstream Australia and remote communities...Shane and Maxwell are perfect examples of tackling that head on in the sense that they are really clued in and think: “How can we tell stories which other people will understand?”, you know “How can we bridge this gap between the cultures that exist in Australia?”. They see technology and media as a way of doing that...They are after this connection and the connection is communication, bridging that gap and making life better for people in communities.
Projects are multiplying and young people are taking on new roles as film-makers, writers and directors and producing music videos for sale. Amos and Ricardo are now employed by Djilpin Arts to document the arts and cultural activities in the community, including producing broadcast quality music video clips. Amos has also been employed by other organisations to film cultural activities outside of the community. Recently, Revonna’s film *The Boss for his Country* was aired on ABC TV’s *Yarning Up* series of Indigenous films.

At Ngapartji Ngapartji, in addition to participating as performers in the theatre performance, young people like Belinda Abbott, Joanne Andrews, Julie Miller, Sadie Richards and Maureen Watson engaged in creative multimodal activities through non-formal media training workshops with Ben Foley from the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. Different work we have: media and festival. And I’m learning how to be a Manager, running the Arts Centre and making sure all the art workers, we all work together you know. I think it’s really important that we keep our culture strong. And my other job is working with Julia, doing the media with some of the younger people like me. We have four music video clips. I made one documentary about my grandfather. It’s called *Boss for his Country* which is for this place and I showed it at the Festival—*Walking with Spirits*—and I was so excited to see it!

REVONNA URBAN
BESWICK COMMUNITY, 2009
(CAAMA) and by ‘mucking around’ by themselves on the computers at Ngapartji Ngapartji in Alice Springs or in video workshops with Suzy Bates in Pitjantjatjara-speaking bush communities like Ernabella and Docker River. Activities included making films for the Pitjantjatjara language learning website, producing slide shows and digital stories and recording music and producing CDs. The nature of these processes enabled participants with low literacy to express themselves in their own languages, with images and voice rather than the written word. The recent award winning feature film *Nothing Rhymes with Ngapartji* portrays the project and attests to the important role played by young people in this significant cultural production.

**Music production and new technologies**

Access to new digital technologies has led to an explosion of musical creativity and productivity across remote Indigenous Australia. Ngapartji Ngapartji rode the wave of this interest and music was an integral component of the critically acclaimed *Ngapartji Ngapartji* theatre performance. In addition, the arrival of powerful yet accessible computer-based recording technology underpinned song writing and music and film recording workshops in Pitjantjatjara speaking communities that led to the production of a number of CD compilations: *Ngurakutu Ara Desert Reggae* and *Wanti Watjilpa*. At Djilpin Arts, collaborations between traditional songmen and Western musicians provided a focus for the annual *Walking with Spirits Festival* and the production of innovative CDs and award winning traditional and contemporary dance and music videos. As noted above, at Lajamanu filmmakers...
Shane and Maxwell have been filming and editing dance and music videos with local musicians and producing DVDs; many of which have been uploaded to YouTube and then shared with the local community via mobile phones using Bluetooth technology. Collaborations with local musicians ‘The Lajamanu Teenage Band’ and Callum Scobie are enabling others to observe and join in the productive learning associated with multimedia cultural productions.

The adoption and use of GarageBand software in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands is emblematic of the ways in which Indigenous youth are rapidly gaining expertise in using and manipulating new technologies in community-based learning environments. After an initial introduction to the GarageBand music recording technology by John Gordon, an expert non-Indigenous trainer, young musicians quickly assumed control over the recording and subsequent production. These learners, many of whom have incomplete schooling and varying levels of literacy competence in English and Ngaanyatjarra, are setting high skill attainment levels for themselves that are not based on a programmatic system of institutional learning. Rather, they are learning by observation, trial and error experimentation, peer teaching and ongoing practice; this is possible because the technologies are accessible and the production challenges meaningful and relevant.

At Wingellina, musicians Nathan Brown and Chris Reid thrive on learning, but their learning process is hidden away in a makeshift ‘recording studio’—an empty room with an iMac computer, a mixer, a pair of speakers, an electric guitar or two and some old furniture. The nonchalant manner of these young musicians belies the fact that when writing, producing and recording their music they work intently toward perfection. Through hours of practice they hone their skill. In the studio they rework tracks over many hours and days of improvisation, experimentation and recording and rerecording until a song is considered finished. These young men are fearless of the...
technology and this fearlessness is allowing them to stretch the boundaries of what is possible and to find myriad innovative ways of achieving the oral/aural outcome they imagined before entering the recording studio. As Chris describes:

We can make different sounds now, like we learnt more. Now we can make our own sound. Like keyboard sound, we used to copy sound from other bands but we can make our own tune, our own style of music now. They heard the bass, that sound that we were doing and now other bands copy our style. They use our sound now.

Their band, the Alunytjuru Band, plays live in local festivals, but with GarageBand software they are now able to independently record and produce, distribute and sell their music and reach a much wider audience.

The use of music recording software like GarageBand requires not only a facility with computers, but also some level of alphabetic and digital literacy, problem-solving, decision-making, and acute listening skills. With GarageBand the visual interface on the screen uses a familiar symbol system and recognisable icons (mirroring those found on cassette players or video cassette recorders), enabling even those with limited English literacy skills to quickly get the hang of it. There is no such thing as a mistake as everything can be deleted and reworked. “It doesn’t matter”, Chris remarks, “we learn from making mistakes”. The symbolic conventions used in applications such as the spatially-oriented and icon-based structure of GarageBand are enabling users (who previously may have avoided text-only procedures) to interpret, read and manipulate technology. In doing so, young people are elaborating the spatial and symbolic dimensions of familiar communication modes and adapting them to new media activities. Recently, the construction of a new professional standard music recording studio at Ngaanyatjarra Media in Wingellina has enabled young musicians to move to the next level where they are now using ProTools, the industry standard audio recording software used by engineers and producers around the world.

In summary, the learning spaces we observed commonly incorporated the arts—music, theatre or multimedia—alongside digital technologies. The productive activities within those spaces often drew on Aboriginal language and culture and linked closely with local community interests and needs. It is clear that a vibrant learning environment often multiplies opportunities for engagement across and beyond the local community and sometimes nurtures the development of new enterprises. What we have
learned and what young people have shown us is that learning is most effectively fostered through interest-driven engagement in projects and activities that matter to young people, and that these learning spaces effectively stimulate the acquisition and development of language and multimodal literacies, organisational learning and social enterprise.

In the next chapter we further explore the underpinnings of learning spaces and link these specific and localised examples of productive learning to both a series of important national policy questions and to a growing international body of theory on the nature of learning, literacy, youth and media. As we will show later, by placing the examples of productive learning we have observed among Indigenous young people in an international and theoretical context, it is possible to identify key features and underlying processes of productive learning that can be incorporated into everyday practice as well as the design of learning spaces.

It’s like this is something that whitefellas have developed as some sort of level of fear or respect for computers, that it’s somehow sacred territory, it’s not out here, it’s kind of fair game, whatever you can get into and change around you do so…if there’s information that’s relevant and meaningful to people in the box, then they will find a way to get to it, in the same way that people will learn to fix a car if they know that the car is going to get them to where they want to go. So it becomes not so much how to learn the technology but actually creating something that’s meaningful to people.

**DANIEL FEATHERSTONE**  
CO-ORDINATOR  
NGAANYATJARRA MEDIA, 2008

Not only from the school they are learning, but from outside the school. Like in the Telecentre, like in Irrunytju young boys, well only young girls are going to school, like around about 13,14,15, young people at that age, especially, only the girls are going to school, but young boys aren’t going to school ‘cause maybe they think it’s boring at the school. So yeah, so they are interested in other things like music, doing music on the computer, GarageBand, or learning other good things from the Telecentre or from the Media.

**NATALIE O’TOOLE**  
WINGELLINA COMMUNITY, 2008
CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES

1. See discussions about youth ambivalence and resistance to schooling in mainstream contexts (Bottrell and Armstrong 2007; Corbett 2004; McKendrick et al. 2007; Smyth and Hattam 2004).


3. In addition to government funding Djilpin Arts has been supported by The Fred Hollows Foundation, Ian Thorpe’s Fountain for Youth and Caritas Australia.

4. In 1987 the former Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) was implemented, representing a federal government response to the perceived threat to Indigenous languages and culture posed by the new the national Australian AUSSAT satellite system. Through BRACS, equipment and training were provided for the production and broadcast of local community radio and video services for insertion over the incoming mainstream services now being beamed from AUSSAT (Deger 2006; Rennie and Featherstone 2008).

5. Film projects include: the DKCRC/PAW Media Stories in Land film; documentation of the Milpirri Festival with the community and Tracks Dance Company from Darwin; and assisting visiting researchers with recording elders singing traditional song cycles.

6. Yarning Up creates screen industry development and employment outcomes in remote Indigenous communities. The Boss for his Country was directed by Revonna Urban and produced by the Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcast Association (TEABBA) in association with NTFO, Screen Australia, ABC Television, NT Department of Education and Training (DET) and National Indigenous Television (NITV).