An ethnography of changes in child rearing over time in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands:

Implications for policy development on health in early childhood
Health in early childhood

A quick survey of the statistics
A safe and nurturing environment

- Hospitalisation rates 30% higher than for non Indigenous children – although for the same causes – falls and land transport accidents

- Higher rates of infectious and non infectious diseases than their non Indigenous peers

- 5 – 14 year olds have 3 times the death rate of non Indigenous children

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. The health and welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, an overview 2011. Cat. no. IHW 42. Canberra: AIHW.)
More bad news

• Injury and diabetes were much larger contributors to the Indigenous burden of disease than to that of the whole of the Australian population (AIHW, 2011)

• Higher behavioural risk factors – including poor nutrition and obesity (Britt and Miller, 2009; in AIHW 2011)
Summary

Children experience poorer health conditions than their non Indigenous peers, and this continues on into adulthood.
Policy environment

• Close the Gap
• National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development
• Healthy for Life/Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program
• Strong Fathers Strong Families
• NTER – Licensing Stores program, Income management
• Linking school attendance to parental welfare payments
• Parenting programs
Program environment

- 2002 Strengthening Families program
- ‘Seeking effective interventions with Ngaanyatjarra parents in order to improve the health of children’
To illuminate the ‘why’

• To understand not only what carers might do, but why they might do it, and identify the role of historical practices in current day patterns of care

• What is a ‘style’
  – Guide carer’s everyday interactions
  – Beliefs about what is needed to become a successful adult
  – ORS Example to illuminate the why
• Scheper-Hughes – a warning bell, excerpt
• Hamilton – Top End, Pitjantjatjara Lands
• Harrison - feeding
• Myers – children seen as ‘lacking understanding’, excerpt
• Summary - excerpt
My study

Ngaanyatjarra Land Tenure

Legend:
- Communities
- Roads
- Ngaanyatjarra IPA Boundary
- Ngaanyatjarra Native Title Boundary
- Special Purpose Lease (50 year lease)
- Class A Reserve (99 year lease)
- Gibson Desert Nature Reserve

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Kilometres

0 40 60 80 120
A gulf or a continuum?

– Contact
– Non mission life
– Dormitories: 1962, two generations, dining room
  • Southern families
– Post mission
  • Money - 1971
  • Food – Warburton Christmas Party 1971
  • Now
  • Warburton Mantamaru Native Title Claim excerpt
Methodology

• Interviews
• Assignment to groups for analysis
  – Pre-contact
  – First contact
  – Later contact
  – Second generation
Observations
• Triangulation
• My own orientation
Limitations

• Small sample
• All mothers (no fathers)
• Skewed towards women and families that I knew
• Patchy data – developed the interview guide as I went, money example
Themes

- Aspirations
- Food and feeding
- Supervision
- Discipline and punishment
- Proper care
- Money
Aspirations

- Pre contact
- First contact
- Later contact
- Second generation
- Survival to helping in parents’ old age
Food and feeding

• Pre contact
• First contact
• Later contact
• Second generation
  – Dietary choice
  – Good food - bad food
  – Portions
  – Evidence of change
Supervision

- Pre contact
- First contact
- Later contact
- Second generation
- New threats
- Continuity of practice
Discipline and punishment

• Ng notions of discipline – getting your child to listen to you/reacting to unpopular behaviour
Discipline and punishment cont..

- Pre contact
- First contact
- Later contact
- Second generation
- Physical punishment
- Verbal exhortation
- Maternal expectations of being obeyed
- Lemon tree allegory
Proper care/neglect

- Pre contact
- First contact
- Later contact
- Second generation
- Evidence of change in response to changing conditions
Money

- Pre contact
- First contact
- Later contact
- Second generation
- New practice
- Health impacts
Summary

• Aspirations – change
• Food and feeding – change in foods, but not practices
• Supervision – little change, despite mission
• Discipline and punishment – no change
• Proper care/Neglect – change
• Money – culturally consistent
• 70 years of intense environmental change
Equality and autonomy

• Vignettes
  – Child being given a stone to throw at their mother
  – Mother throwing a stone at a child, and the child throwing it back
  – My son and his sun hat
  – Choosing to live in a community so that the child has the opportunity to go to school
  – Toddlers with money to feed themselves
  – Child getting the Weetbix down at creche
Children as decision makers

- Fundamentally different to our own perception of children
- We create the policies, and it is difficult to fully realise the extent to which our own cultural construction shapes our understandings and expectations of children. We therefore build our policies on our understandings, not realising that other people see things totally differently.
Parenting programs

• Offer information on child development
• Positive interaction patterns
• Help parents develop effective management strategies for dealing with a variety of common behaviour problems and developmental issues.
How likely is cultural change?

- Aims of policy
- Improve parental supervision v speed bumps
- Educate adults on child nutrition v re-arrange the store
- School attendance – whose responsibility
- Understand what you’re demanding
Conclusion

• Clear evidence that Ng culture has a different set of priorities and practices
• Given the current health stats we need interventions that do not rely on achieving cultural change
• Stress on policies that change environments – eg, speed bumps, LAF, store layout
• Stress on programs that acknowledge small children as decision makers on what they eat