

# Northern Territory Library Yolŋu Rom Napurrn Dhukarr – the Living Room Project

A partnership with East Arnhem Regional Council



# Abstract

When Melvill Dewey first created the Dewey Decimal Classification System, we wonder did he envisage it would continue to be used more than 100 years later in remote Aboriginal community libraries in Australia?

There is a very remote community called Galiwin'ku off the coast of East Arnhem Land. Just over 2,000 people live in this island community, which is only accessible by sea or air. The Galiwin'ku community recently opened a brand new library of which they are justifiably proud.

In Galiwin'ku, like many multilingual Aboriginal communities, English is not the first, second or fourth language for many people in the community, and western mathematical concepts are not aligned with Yolŋu mathematical concepts. So the Dewey Decimal System upon which their local library collection is classified is an artificial construct. This means that we have a local Aboriginal community collection, classified according to Western knowledge constructs, created by an American in 1873. This classification practice is repeated in all Aboriginal Community Libraries throughout the Northern Territory.

We think there is another way. A Yolŋu way.

The Northern Territory Library and East Arnhem Regional Council are partnering in a unique and innovative pilot. Together, we hope to architect a new user experience for community library officers and their community using the 'living room concept'. We plan to challenge 'the Dewey' and realign community collections in a Yolŋu way ie. In respect to concepts of classification and how they relate to Aboriginal knowledge.

We don't know yet if this project will be successful, but we are willing to try and share our journey with you.

This is a story about a quiet revolution in a tiny community of 2,500 people, on a small island off the coast of Arnhem Land. An Aboriginal Community Library where we dare to create a new way, a Yolŋu way of classifying a library's collection. A way, we hope will lead to more quiet revolutions, disrupting and energising community libraries throughout the Northern Territory and beyond.