

Honorary Doctorate Speech: University of Newcastle

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Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of the Council, Staff of the University, Families and Friends of graduates, and most importantly Graduates.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Awabakal people on whose land we are on today and whose knowledges enrich this community. My name is Daphne Daniels, and I am a Nunggubuyu woman from the community of Ngukurr in Southeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory - it's a long, long way from here!

I am very proud to be here today. Even though I have worked with universities for the last 25 years, this is the first time I have graduated. Education is often hard for people living in remote communities. I didn't finish school and, when I tried to go to university later, it was too difficult to stay away from home. Instead, I had to learn from my job.

My first job was with a project called the *Southeast Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project*. I started as a research assistant. My dad pushed me forward to do it and I was scared. But my dad said, "Watch her, she's the clever one". By the end of the project, I was the editor of the *Ngukurr News*, our local community newspaper. Since then, I have worked on lots of different projects, written papers and chapters for books and have taught university students on country. I am now a community leader.

I have learnt a lot about the power of education and research. I have also learnt a lot about collaboration and two-way learning. Education is the first step to making change in communities, and this is made powerful through working effectively with other people.

I am not the first person from my community to visit Newcastle. In the 1960s and 1970s my uncle, Dexter Daniels, (we both have "DD" names) was down here working with the Trades Unions to promote the cause of equal pay and landrights for Aboriginal people.

You may not know anything of Dexter Daniels, but you will know about the story he was involved in. Dexter, in his role as Union Organiser, was the person who suggested to Vincent Lingiari, from Wave Hill Station, that it was time to go on strike for wages and land. The Wave Hill Walk-off eventually led to the NT Landrights Act and changed Australian History. Dexter's story has been mostly forgotten, because he was associated with the Australian Communist party.

We found him again through a University of Newcastle research project and the archives in the Special Collection of the library. Now we are starting to retell the story of his leadership to people in Ngukurr and the Newcastle community.

Uncle Dexter was a powerful leader. Although he was only educated through the mission to read and write, he knew how important education was. He looked for people with knowledge and skills to work with. He was particularly interested in people with strong written communication skills, and he enlisted the novelist, Frank Hardy, to help him organise the Wave Hill Walk-off and raise interest in the southern states about the rights for Aboriginal people.

Together they were a powerful force and Dexter travelled through Victoria and NSW talking to Trades Unions, workers and university students. We have records of Dexter's talks to the Newcastle Trades Hall in 1968. Frank wrote a book about Dexter called the *Unlucky Australians*.

It has never been lost on me that people remember Frank Hardy, because he had the power of the written word, but no-one, until now, remembers Dexter Daniels.

Like my family before me, I am now a senior leader in Ngukurr. In all that I do I try to honour my ancestors respecting past and present, and work together with other leaders of the seven tribes to create a safe, strong, vibrant and sustainable community for future generations.

I am the Deputy Chair of *Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation* which is the community cultural governance authority in Ngukurr. We have put many years of work into building the Cultural Governance Authority of Ngukurr that represents 7 language groups and tribes, and 4 semi-moieties, I, like my uncle and father before me, have a passion for Aboriginal self-determination and community-led decision making.

I am the Chair of the *Stongbala Pipul Wanbala Bois Komiti* (Strong People One Voice Committee) that addresses social and emotional wellbeing in Ngukurr and Urapunga for children, youth and families.

I am also the Chair of the *Ngukurr Family Violence Prevention Working Group*. In this role, I have been privileged to guide the working group through complex concepts, challenging subjects, and help them navigate through perceived conflicts to cultural lore. At every step of the way I have tried to do this with respect to the difference of opinions and managed tension across genders. Somehow, we managed to come to an agreement and are working on developing an education strategy and resources to educate the community (and beyond) on these issues.

This brings me back to my message to you. Education is important, but you already know that because you are here receiving your degrees. You now have a choice in what you do with your education. You may not become committed to a cause, but always keep social justice firmly in your minds. Remember the power of collaboration – when you work with other people, you can be a force for change. The buzz word for this is “Collective Impact” but in Ngukurr we call it “Yugul Mangi” (we together as one). I encourage you to take every opportunity you can to work with and learn from Indigenous Australians.

Thank you for this honour. It is so important to my family and me that I have been recognised by this university in a city which has provided so much recognition and respect to my Uncle Dexter and the rights of Indigenous People.