

Lessons from Ngukurr, the wrong side of the Roper

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This presentation will provide an overview of my PhD thesis presently entitled *Understandings and Values of Work in Ngukurr*. It will concentrate on my analysis of the ethnographic data collected during periods of fieldwork. I began this research project in July 2005 and hope to submit my final draft in the middle of this year.

The concept of work is complex, its purpose, structure and value has changed over time and its meaning can be interpreted from many historical, social and cultural perspectives. My thesis draws upon the work ideologies inherent in Western culture and those which have developed within an Australian Aboriginal community. It describes the issues and differences within and between these ideologies and how they have influenced Aboriginal perspectives and experiences of work within a specific Aboriginal community; Ngukurr in South East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia.

My thesis stems from a need to better understand the perceived “problem” of Aboriginal employment or more precisely unemployment in remote communities. It questions common assumptions associated with the purpose, meaning and value of work through analysing historical, cultural and social components that have influenced the development and construction of work ideology in the study setting. In this presentation I will discuss the nature of Aboriginal work ideology in Ngukurr and through this process question the usefulness of employment statistics in the measurement of life quality in this remote Aboriginal community.