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Science and Mathematics Education Centre

Kimberley Schools:
A Search for Success

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July 2002

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signature:

Date: ...31/07/02....

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the ways government schools in the Kimberley Education District of Western Australia attempted to engender success for their students. Schools in these communities are considered to be in poverty, they are largely populated by indigenous Australians, and situated in geographically isolated locations. It was important to establish the levels of student academic achievement and identify best school and classroom practices that centred on developing students' progress and achievement at school. The study was guided by the general research question: What are the effective ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes? Generating descriptions of best practices that make a geographical isolated school successful for students marginalised in the schooling process, and upon what criteria the success should be measured, were central to this research endeavour. It was critical to distinguish those dimensions of schooling in isolated areas that were malleable in improving the life chances of students.

The study relied on an interpretive research methodology using both qualitative data and quantitative approaches to data collection, such as inquiry through conversations, informal and structured interviews, participant and non-participant observations, and the examination of material such as documents and students' work samples, complemented by a confirmatory survey and case studies. Participants in the study included school administration teams, teachers, students and their parents. The study was iterative and followed three distinct phases of development. In the first phase a general picture was gained about the ways in which schools in the Kimberley worked by observing four schools. The second phase involved developing and administering a study-specific questionnaire to personnel in 14 different schools in the District. This part of the study sought to confirm the interpretive aspects of phase one. In the third phase of the study, a more detailed picture of schools was drawn through a case study approach in five selected schools. Of particular importance in the case study schools was the tracking of a purposive sample of 150 students to assess their reading and writing (including spelling) progress. The results of the student assessments were analysed in terms of the progress students made and interpreted according to the amount of time students attended school. Making judgments about the success of Kimberley schools was an evaluation process in terms of how students performed. The students' performance was linked to the best practices in schools and classrooms that best supported students' learning to ascertain areas where schools could improve their operations.

The study has identified challenges associated with school-home relationships, the ways schools and classrooms operate, the ways school plan and implement curriculum, how teachers develop their pedagogies, and the ways students are assessed. In response to teachers who do not fully understand these challenges, many Aboriginal children will choose

to continue avoiding school or actively resist engaging in the learning process. Importantly, at the school level it was found that teachers were best supported in their work when school leaders worked to make everyone's day-to-day classroom work easier, engendered a congenial workplace environment which alleviated some of the personal stresses teachers experienced, ensured school plans went into operation in all classrooms across the school, and created a close link between the school, parents, and the community. At the classroom level in the Kimberley context, calm, stable, and orderly classroom environments are essential to establish. Consistent pedagogy is required across all classrooms within a school but a variety of activities within classrooms is important to accommodate Aboriginal styles of learning. Monitoring the continuity in students' progress as they moved from one year level to the next is imperative. The study showed that there are ways that schools can work for the betterment of students' progress at school but these ways are not universally adopted or implemented. Teachers in the Kimberley schools can learn to understand how to create a good school, how schools can be described as effective and improving, and how they can be termed schools that meet equality and quality ideals. The recommendations made from the study are intended to enable administration teams, teachers, and policy decision makers to make more informed decisions about schooling for geographically isolated students in government schools in the Kimberley region.

Acknowledgments

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This thesis is dedicated to a young Aboriginal girl who was a student in one of the case study schools involved in the study. She died in 1997 before she was able to complete her schooling in the Kimberley. Her name remains unspoken in keeping with the Aboriginal cultural way. In one of my conversations with her we talked about her being an environmental biologist when she left school. I cannot put into words the tragedy of her early death.

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT, PERSPECTIVE, AND OVERVIEW

Setting the Scene

This thesis describes research into the success of schools in communities which are considered to be in poverty, largely populated by indigenous Australians, and situated in geographically isolated locations. The study explored these contextual influences in relationship to government schools in the Kimberley region, an isolated location in Western Australia (WA). More studies are needed that grapple with the complexities of schooling in WA where students come from economic and social circumstances that have the potential to negatively predetermine their educational futures, their capacity to move into the workforce, and their social positioning. Currently, educators in the Kimberley Education District express concern about the apparent lack of academic achievement of many of their students. Despite the enormous amount of resources expended and the number of innovative programs implemented, it appears that schools in the District are unsuccessful when academic performance is used as the yardstick to make judgements about their quality. This is indeed a dismal view of schooling across a whole education district. The nub of this thesis is that perhaps a more comprehensive and inter-related perspective is required to make judgements about the success of schools in the Kimberley region. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to identify whether government schools in the area, given their specific contexts, school environments, and location, are making a difference for students.

Questions surrounding the research problem readily emerged. What does it mean when we say a school is successful? Does it mean that schools make a difference in students' lives? If they do, how can this difference be described? Does it mean that schools use their resources efficiently and use effective processes for their day-to-day operations? Does it mean that schools develop curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment procedures to improve student learning? Or, do we say that a successful school is one where students achieve outcomes expected by the community? Perhaps some people would prefer to judge the success of schools on the ways students move into work or further education once they leave school.

Substantial work was conducted in this study to identify ways that demonstrate the success of schools in the Kimberley region. It was critical to explore students' progress at school

and to determine how best to measure their progress and identify the ways they succeeded at school. In Britain, for example, the National Commission on Education (1996) has re-affirmed that in many underprivileged locations students under-achieve. The Australian situation is similar, especially for Aboriginal students ("Bleak Aboriginal Education Cycle", 1999). Many schools, however, despite the difficult challenges they face, do succeed against the odds. The overall intention of the study, therefore, was to present educators in the Kimberley area with research evidence that clarified the ways schools positively supported their students. At the same time, it was imperative to gain insight into possible changes for improvement to the ways schools went about their day-to-day work.

Precursors to the Study

At the outset it is pertinent to say that I am a non-indigenous person. In the study, therefore, I expected that some of my views and actions would remain ethnocentric. I have consciously grappled with my biases, I have attempted to understand other worldviews, but I know that I do not see the world as others do. Nevertheless, I consider the study worthwhile for the following five reasons.

My Personal Interests and Motivation to Conduct the Study

The context of the Kimberley sparked much of my special interest in conducting research about the educational outcomes of students in this particular location. My work as a teacher, principal, and superintendent of education in WA has been concerned mainly with schools in economically depressed communities. These experiences afford me a practical knowledge about schools serving impoverished communities, the education of Aboriginal children, and urban and rural schooling. In particular, my consultancy work with schools in the Kimberley initiated my research endeavour. From 1992 to 1994, I joined with groups of principals to examine school development planning processes so that schools could develop greater responsibility for their operations. Thus, the study was launched because my interests merged with the desire of educators in the Kimberley Education District to identify how schools could work more successfully for students in the region. The educational research fields of school effectiveness and school improvement became another catalyst to conceptualise the study. These fields of educational research opened a series of challenging questions which are considered in more detail later in the thesis. At this point, it is sufficient to say that many school effectiveness and school improvement issues relate to the contextual nature of schooling which hold special interest for me. Economic, social, cultural, and location influences in the Kimberley context shape the work of schools in extraordinary ways.

School Reform in Western Australian Schools

In WA the restructuring of a highly centralised system of education in Western Australian government schools is shaped in a policy document, *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Program for Improvement* (Ministry of Education, 1987). During the implementation of this policy, schools embarked on the process of taking more responsibility for defining their purposes, managing their resources allocated as global budgets, and developing school plans to achieve stated goals. The intention of the policy is to enable schools to become more tuned to meeting local requirements, more accountable for their student outcomes, and more focussed on school processes that improve student learning (Ministry of Education 1989, 1990b, 1991a, 1991b). Importantly, schools are expected to share their power and authority with their communities (Wildy & Punch, 1996) and there is a greater expectation that principals fulfil a broad managerial role, rather than an instructional leadership role, in schools (Wildy & Dimmock, 1993). The Kimberley Education District is one of the districts in WA which experienced the impact of this policy. Some schools in the district are up to 3,000 kilometres from the capital city, Perth, from where key central functions, such as allocation of funding, still operate. School communities consist of non-indigenous and indigenous people who contrast in their social structures, culture, and lifestyle. One peculiarity of special interest for this study was that all government schools in the education district are associated with students who live in communities which experience some degree of poverty [Priority Schools Program (PSP), 1996. In WA, Commonwealth funding is allocated to the State for specific targeted programs.] Thus, the capacity of Kimberley communities to support, and be involved in, their children's schooling varies.

A Review of Rural Schooling in Western Australia

During the time I worked in the Kimberley region, a ministerial review of rural schooling in WA reported some evidence to suggest "that across the compulsory years of schooling, there are no major differences [in language and number] which can be attributed to school location - metropolitan, rural or remote" (Tomlinson, 1994, p. iii). Where differences existed in student test results in language and number, these differences appeared to be strongly related to social and economic factors and affected all schools in much the same way. A claim from the review was that a correlation existed between achievement and students' social and economic backgrounds but not between achievement and where they lived (Young, 1995). Thus, the review of rural schooling furnished greater impetus to begin my research work.

Surveys Conducted in the Kimberley Education District

The first survey of interest for the study was the student achievement survey conducted in 1995. The Kimberley School Psychology Service carried out some student assessment across all the schools in the District. The student assessment project, conducted at the request of schools, aimed to collect baseline literacy levels for primary-aged students in the District. District personnel hoped that the data would produce information for individual schools to evaluate their programs and allow schools to compare themselves with other schools in the District. It seemed that principals were preoccupied with determining their own worth, and that of their schools, by the way in which their students performed academically. The press for accountability was ever present. A common complaint, however, was that there was no baseline student performance information at the school level to work with. The data collected from the assessment project were concerned with students' vocabulary development, reading, and spelling skills and were reported in a document *Learning Difficulties in Kimberley Schools* (Kimberley Education District, 1995b). The tests used were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Waddington Diagnostic Reading Test, and the South Australian Spelling Test. In the document it was made plain that students from the Kimberley schools performed at a level far below the expected level for students of the same age in other schools in WA. At much the same time, a small study conducted by Leslie (1996), a teacher in a Kimberley school, examined the teaching of mathematics to primary-aged Aboriginal students in Kimberley schools. Teachers involved in the study said that students experienced many problems in learning mathematical concepts. Using the findings from these two sources, it was evident that the majority of students in the Kimberley schools were experiencing difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Significantly, it was transparent that the at-risk students in schools were in the majority rather than in the minority.

The second survey of interest to the study, also conducted in 1995, concerned the stress levels of teachers in the Kimberley. At the system level in WA, it had been recognised that teaching in geographically isolated schools presented challenges for teachers (Education Department of Western Australia, 1995). Entitlements in salary allowances, leave conditions, rental accommodation, and transportation were offered to teachers to offset the teaching and living uncertainties in regions such as the Kimberley. With the belief that student outcomes are closely linked to teacher well being, the Kimberley School Psychology Service decided to conduct a survey to collect information about the professional and personal stresses that teachers experienced while working and living in the Kimberley region. From the responses of 186 teachers (comprising 89.2% of teachers in government schools in the Kimberley) it appeared that the stress level of teachers in the

Kimberley remained high despite the incentives they received to work in the region. Teachers' high stress levels occurred for three broad reasons. The findings reported in the *Kimberley Teacher Stress Survey* (Kimberley Education District, 1995a) are listed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1.   *Factors Influencing the Stress Levels of Teachers in Kimberley Schools*

Type of Concern	Factors Influencing Teachers' Stress
Teaching and Professional Concerns	Annoyance with the bureaucracy in the system, the lack of reward for effort, the management of student behaviour, social interactions in the school and community, the low expectations for student outcomes, the poor standards of student performance, and a perceived inadequacy of colleagues' skills.
Physical Needs and Comforts	Neglect due to the way housing allocation and sharing accommodation procedures are devised, the lack of access to medical and health facilities, the harsh climate, the high cost of living and travel, and the lack of opportunity for leisure activities besides those revolving around the school.
Personal and Emotional Stresses	Stresses related to the lack of privacy and confidentiality in small communities, isolation, missing close family and friends, and the limited opportunities for friendships and relationships to be developed.

The data gathered by personnel in the Kimberley Education District further painted a gloomy picture of education and teaching in the region.

A Lack of Research about Kimberley Schools

Based on my practical experiences and the information provided by local educators, the message being reiterated in the Kimberley Education District seemed to be that students were not succeeding at school and teachers were unhappy. These precursors to the study

pointed to a system of schooling that failed most of its students and teachers. Certainly no synthesised research existed concerning the success of these schools. Rather, reported educational research related to schools in the Kimberley was close to non-existent. There was one study of importance conducted in the Broome Aboriginal school community by Poelina (1994) which provided useful background information. The study concluded that Aboriginal people needed greater access to decision-making responsibilities in their schools because schools, as a community resource, should reflect their community's values. At the same time, the study suggested that "Aboriginal parents must face this challenge and be accountable for the long term effect of not becoming actively involved" in schools (Poelina, 1994, p. 195). Other insights from the Poelina study will be taken up later in the thesis. Owen (1999) further claimed that:

> The biggest single reason Aboriginal kids are not succeeding at school is that they don't turn up. Acknowledging that there are a host of reasons why this is so, including participation in cultural events and fulfilling family responsibilities, does not abrogate parents of Aboriginal students from their responsibility to ensure their children attend consistently so they can develop a sound basis for their learning. (p. 28)

Alongside these claims, knowledge about curriculum issues such as appropriate teaching and assessment methods have been identified as a research gap in indigenous education (National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), 1999a). The study that I aimed to conduct, therefore, warranted developing a research base that looked at how schools operated in the Kimberley, especially in terms of how they responded to their sociocultural context to improve students' successful experiences at school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the ways schools in the Kimberley area attempted to engender success for their students. It was important to establish the levels of student academic achievement and identify initiatives that centred on developing students' all-round achievements. As previously stated, the study sampled only government schools in the Kimberley Education District. These schools are in socially and culturally diverse environments, are unquestionably isolated from major population centres, and draw their students from communities that are categorised in varying degrees, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, as socially and economically disadvantaged. In the Kimberley region, the urban communities served by government schools are composed of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians but the very remote schools serve mostly, or entirely, indigenous Australians. Hence, the overall research problem, one general and five

specific research questions derived from it, and a research focus were cast for the study. The problem for the study and the questions that defined how the purpose would be achieved are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

The Research Problem

Government schools in the Kimberley Education District do not appear to be successful schools because of the abundant information that says students perform poorly in their academic achievement.

The General Research Question

What are the successful ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes?

The Specific Research Questions

How does the sociocultural context of schools influence the ways they work?

How are school resources used to support students' learning?

How do within-school environments influence the ways schools work?

How is the curriculum shaped and what are best classroom practices?

How can student achievement best be measured?

The Research Focus

In what ways does the school development planning strategy provide a driving force for change in schools?

Figure 1.1.   Questions Defining the Purpose of the Study

Images of the Kimberley

Unique in Location

The Kimberley region is a geographically defined area in the state of WA and covers 4,222,803 square kilometres (Western Australian Municipal Association, 1998), an area greater than countries such as Great Britain or New Zealand. The distance from Broome, in the west, to Kununurra, in the east, is 1152 kilometres along the region's only sealed highway. There is room to move in the vastness of this part of Australia. In contrast to the vastness of the Kimberley, the population is only 29,865 people (Western Australian

Municipal Association, 1998). Approximately 51% of the population is indigenous Australians (Anthony, 1998). There are six small urban towns and numerous remote Aboriginal communities spread across the region. Figure 1.2 illustrates the main town locations in the Kimberley region but does not reveal those schools involved in the study.

Source: http://www.regional.wa.gov.au/maps/kimberley.asp
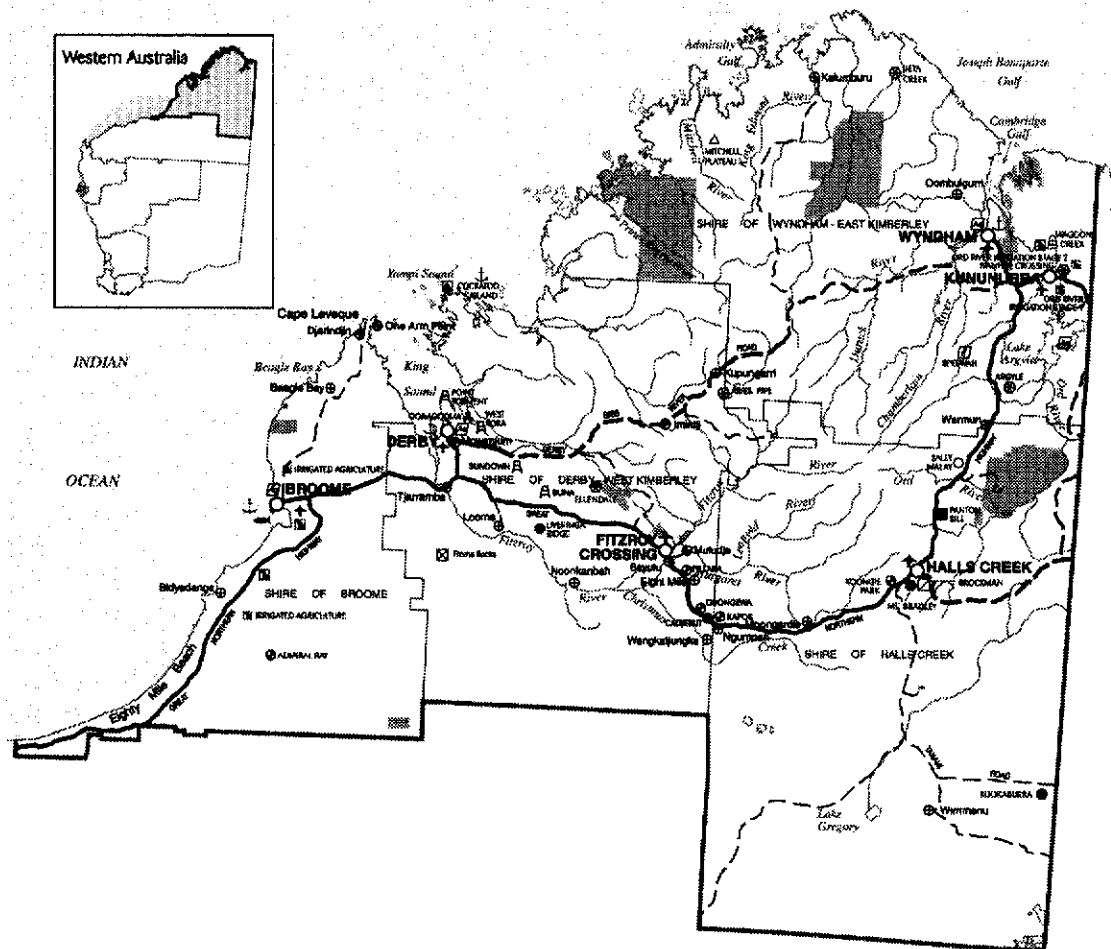
Figure 1.2.   Map of the Kimberley Region

In the past the area was called "The Land of Wait Awhile" and today locals still refer to "Kimberley Time" (Edwards, 1991). No one seems to be in a hurry. Euphemistically, most local people and visitors in the Kimberley refer to it as "another country". The Kimberley region, usually termed "the Kimberley", has to be experienced before one can begin to comprehend its vast differences and distances from southern Australia. "The Kimberley boasts an environment of both world significance and tourism potential" ("Kimberley Plan", 1997, p. 12). The physical environment is on a grand scale and the Kimberley holds its own magnificence. Mountains, gorge systems, and river valleys are up to 350 million years old. During

the monsoon season, called "the wet", a profusion of cascading waterfalls and flooded rivers bring the land to life (Coate, 1998). Roads and bridges are cut annually by the cyclonic rain. In the "dry season", bushfires can burn on fronts hundreds of kilometres long reducing the land to a dry, parched dust bowl. The area is rich in gold, diamonds, uranium, pearls, nickel, bauxite, lead-zinc, and manganese. Also, eco-tourism (MacDonald, 1998), and the horticultural, agricultural, hunting, forestry, fishing, and pastoral industries (Crough & Christophersen, 1993) contribute to the region's economy. Aboriginal people contribute to the economy in the Kimberley but, in the main, do not have a great deal of control over the larger industrial structure of the region. However, for example, Aboriginal people own and operate commercial businesses associated with Kingfisher Airlines, vehicle and boat hire, accommodation facilities and roadhouses, and architectural consulting. Also, Aboriginal people operate several radio stations across the Kimberley, provide broadcasts for remote communities, and own and manage bookstores and Aboriginal art enterprises.

Unique in History

We must be reminded that Aboriginal clans in the Kimberley have been in contact with Europeans only for just over 100 years even though Aboriginal people in Australia have their own history reaching back at least 65,000 years. After the initial land exploration by white explorers began in 1837 and the following attempts at settlement, historically things have tended to happened more slowly and later in the region than in other parts of Australia. It has been the last frontier in Australia for European exploration and development and the area has had a colourful, colonial history (Clement & Bridge, 1991). Various Aboriginal groups in the Kimberley remember tribal life as it was before white settlement of their land (Edwards, 1991). Others are only one generation removed from tribal life. Historical records and stories, which are recently more prolific, recount the past and depict European people's involvement in the Kimberley's colonisation. Records of events are found easily, such as the gold rushes beginning in 1886 (Choules Edinger, 1995), the pearling industry using divers from Japan (Choules Edinger, 1997), and epic cattle drives that traversed the whole of the continent (Allen, 1996, 1997). European history of the Kimberley relates the achievements of pioneers (Allen, 1995; Lawrence, 1995; Quilty, 1996), pastoralists (Clement, 1998), drovers (Allen, 1996, 1997), and miners (Choules Edinger, 1995).

The meeting of indigenous and "Gudia", the term for white people in the Kimberley, is marked by both cooperation and resistance. Aboriginal people worked on pastoral leases as servants, shearers, stockmen, and trackers and were enticed to yield their services with

tobacco, tea, sugar, flour, and alcohol. At the same time, many Aboriginal groups resisted the settlement. The stories of heroes abound. Aboriginal heroes include those of tribal elders and the exceptional deeds of others. Jandamarra, from the Bunuba tribe, is a hero because of his resistance fighting against colonists (Clement, 1997; Zekulich, 1997). Another is David Mowaljarlai for his recent reconciliation and artistic work (Neowarra & Redman, 1997). The frailties and strengths of people are portrayed in stories such as those told about the brutal battles between Aborigines and settlers (Green, 1995) and pioneering struggles against relentlessly harsh, but spectacularly beautiful, natural elements (Durack, 1985). Scott (1993) tells his story about his life as an Aborigine raised by a white family and his return to his own country to teach in his own people. His experiences in reconciling his two cultures are traumatic for him. Such stories reveal the often-conflicting European and Aboriginal peoples' versions about the history of colonisation in the region but one part of this history is poignantly significant. Aboriginal people were granted Australian citizenship, with the right to vote, a mere 35 years ago.

Unique in Schooling

Schooling in regional Australia is unique due to its geographic isolation and differing cultural contexts (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988). Apart from the circumstances of distance, isolation, sparse populations, both coastal and inland, school environments are different. Communities contrast in social composition, nature, culture, and lifestyle from location to location so their capacity to support schooling varies due to social, cultural, and economic influences. This diversity holds true for the Kimberley. There are large pastoral leases (Clement, 1998), called stations, in much of the Kimberley and families and workers on these stations form small isolated communities. Children on the stations receive their schooling through "Schools of the Air" or through distant education services. Schools are available in the towns and the remote Aboriginal communities which are either under the control of the State government, religious (mainly Catholic) denominations, or independent incorporations. Resource provision to all these schools is from the Commonwealth government although the State government provides WA government school staffing. Many families, finances permitting or the availability of scholarships for students, send their children to schools in the southern States, particularly for their secondary education. The only State government secondary school in the Kimberley is located in Broome. Additionally, a large district high school is located in Kununurra which caters for upper secondary students through distance education modes of study. There is one university branch located in Broome.

The diversities in topography, industry, and population relate to how schools work (Redman, 1991). Associated with the geographic differences of the Kimberley, are the land use and local industries which are relevant for local economics, employment, and hence schooling (Harrold & Powell, 1988; Manea, 1990; Sher & Sher, 1994). The Kimberley has an uncertain future because Commonwealth and State governments have cut back their expenditure on health and education provisions and banks have reduced or closed their banking services (Thornhill, 1997). In addition, the Commonwealth government has cut funds for the Community Employment Development Program (CDEP) which have threatened projects associated with pastoral leases and enterprises such as those connected with tourism. Bringing advanced telecommunications to regional Australia also is problematic due to the extreme isolation of communities. Many of the government schools in the region are very small (sometimes less than 15 students) and face challenges in providing the most coherent educational program possible for students. This is especially so in the face of evidence which suggests that any economic growth in the area is in the service sector industries, particularly tourism, which bring about improvements to a community's infrastructure (Grey, Edlemann, & Dwyer, 1991). It is difficult to address the rapidly changing purposes of schooling in geographically isolated locations, and particularly for students who may face obstacles in their educational experiences due to their impoverished backgrounds. The costs of providing educational services are high and teachers in these schools often find their preparation for teaching and in-service professional support inadequate (Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1993; Higgins, 1993). While Kimberley communities are diverse, they possess some common features. Most residents in the Kimberley value their lifestyle, choose to live in their isolated locations, and expect that government schools will be an integral resource in their communities.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Deep contrast and diversity in economic, cultural, and geographic location circumstances mark the influences encircling the communities involved in the study. The sociocultural dimensions of poverty, Aboriginality, and geographic location specifically relate to the education delivered in government schools in unique ways in the Kimberley Education District. Often in the literature the term "disadvantaged" is used to describe such contexts. In the main, the use of the term is avoided in this thesis because it implies a deficit perspective of people, their personal circumstances, where they live, and their lifestyles. At the same time, it is acknowledged that many children in these contexts often experience educational disadvantage. They are denied quality and equality in their access to and participation in schooling and leave school at their first opportunity for a range of reasons

("Bleak Aboriginal Education Cycle", 1999). Schools, however, cannot control or significantly change their outside context. Therefore, in the study the examination of how schools work successfully within their students' world was paramount.

Three Conceptual Referents in the Study

There were three conceptual referents in the study, each drawing from literature in a range of disciplines and each informed by several theories. The first referent in the study concerned the macro realities of the sociocultural nature of school communities. This referent, which is discussed in chapter two of the thesis, allowed me to position the study by contextualising the day-to-day operations of schools. The milieu of the Kimberley allowed the research problem in the study to be explored broadly and permitted me to consider why students perform the way they do at school. The second referent was associated with the micro realities of school contexts. The examination of various perspectives about the education of marginalised students allowed me to analyse the ways schools in the study built partnerships with parents, the ways curriculum was developed and delivered, and the ways classroom pedagogy enhanced, or did not enhance, student outcomes. This referent is developed in chapter three. The third referent in the study, explored in chapter four, was associated with the educational research fields of school effectiveness and school improvement which are associated with making judgements about the success of schools. These fields of research provided me with knowledge to initiate the study and guided the recursive nature of the research design. The inter-relationship between the concepts of quality, equality, effectiveness, and efficiency was central to the study because these notions underscore different research approaches to evaluate schools. The concepts are contested and open up the problematic nature of making judgements about whether schools are working or not working for the betterment of marginalised students. These three conceptual reference points provided a range of views and theories about schooling, the achievement of children at school, and how we might make judgments about such matters.

Referent One: The Sociocultural Context of Schools

The term sociocultural is derived from Vygotsky's work (Rieber & Carton, 1987) and is applied to recent thought in fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies (Wexler, 1983; Wertsch, 1991). The term, as used this thesis, is taken to mean that people are members of a community, or several communities, which are socially, culturally, and historically embedded. Individuals develop communication processes, interpersonal relationships, capabilities, and dispositions according to their

membership in their communities but it is the collective action of communities which creates change. This referent in the study principally examined how poverty, Aboriginality, and location shaped peoples' lives within their communities.

The issue of poverty is closely linked to the lives of many people, especially Aboriginal people, in the Kimberley region. Crough and Christophersen (1993) reported that:

> [I]t is important to keep in mind that many Aboriginal people are experiencing a range of social and economic difficulties. For example, almost half of the Aboriginal population of the Kimberley region received less than $8,000 in income in 1991—1992. The Kimberley region has the highest per capita rate of alcohol consumption in Australia. Almost half of the Aboriginal population of the region is living in some form of impoverished housing or camping out. (p. 3)

Poverty, in the main, is not caused by personal failure. It is about the circumstances that deny people the ability to buy certain goods or services. Many Australians are poor, but the condition is often compounded for particular groups of people. To be poor is to have inadequate access to resources and services, the inability to carry out certain functions that are essential to fulfilling one's human potential, and little opportunity to participate in decisions affecting one's life (Harding, 1994). Being poor has other burdens. Poor people are blamed for their lack of resources. They are patronised, excluded, exploited, and have little control over their actions in their daily lives. Castles (1994) confirmed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most economically and socially disadvantaged peoples in Australia. In an analysis of more recent ABS census data, gathered in 1996, it is reported that "Kimberley residents are among the nation's most disadvantaged, with the highest proportion of single-parent families, the worst school retention rates and a high proportion of impoverished living conditions" (Anthony, 1998, p. 10). Participants in this study constantly brought the issue of poverty and its consequences to the forefront. It was an issue to analyse in terms of how schools addressed the relationship of poverty to students' schooling.

Alongside the economic context of people in the Kimberley are the related interactions of differing Aboriginal cultures and non-Aboriginal culture. Keeffe (1988, 1992) believed that Aboriginality in Australia can be considered best by using two constructs, Aboriginality-as-persistence and Aboriginality-as-resistance, ideas that are interactive but at times contradictory. These constructs predetermine how students interact in schools in the Kimberley. On one hand, Aboriginality-as-persistence reinforces the idea of a pan-Aboriginal culture, although it needs to be understood that many distinct Aboriginal clans

still exist in Australia and the Kimberley today, and explains the continuing cultural practices of various Aboriginal groups that originated in traditional culture. Ogbu (1992) outlined a similar idea and describes primary cultural differences as those that exist before two groups come into contact. On the other hand, Aboriginality-as-resistance is described as the dynamic cultural practices between Aboriginal people and the dominant non-Aboriginal society. Ogbu (1992) termed this construct as secondary cultural differences which arise through the domination of one group over another. Secondary cultural differences manifest in the school setting as differences in students' cognitive, communication, interaction, and learning styles.

There is consistent evidence that Aboriginal students perform poorly in literacy and numeracy, participate less successfully in schooling, and teachers have lower expectations of them (Bourke & Keeves, 1977; Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1994; Groome & Hamilton, 1995; Sturman, 1997). Numerous documents also highlight the problems associated with Aboriginal students' education and the need for a more integrated effort to improve their outcomes from schooling (Commonwealth of Australia, 1989; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; House of Representatives Select Committee, 1985; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 1996; National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1985). The most damning evidence about the performance of students in the Kimberley schools was revealed in a front-page local newspaper headline *Literacy Shock* (Ashworth, 1999). Based on the National Literacy Benchmarks, tests conducted with all Year 3 students across Australia, 15 out of 19 government schools in the Kimberley Education District who participated in the survey had less than half of their students pass the reading, writing, and spelling components of the test. Four of these schools had all students fail the test components.

The location of the schools in the study also affects they way they work. Sher and Sher (1994) found that the diversity among Australia's rural and regional communities and their associated economies is astounding. For convenience, the term rurality is used to describe the location of schools in the Kimberley, although the terms rural and regional are used more frequently in Australia now to refer to any locations other than metropolitan areas. The definition of rurality in Australia is contentious. Lingering pastoral and agricultural images in Australia hide an appreciation that it is the concept of remoteness, rather than the terms used to describe location, which is the real issue. Remoteness is related to degrees of isolation and accessibility (Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1993). It is the variability in access associated with remoteness, rather than rurality, which is crucial to educational delivery problems and accompanying costs in the Kimberley region. These economic links to a school's success are inescapable.

Any analysis of school success must recognise the breadth of the economic base of a region and how it impacts on education. The issues associated with location are relevant to the study in terms of perceptions of rurality from a deficit point of view, access to goods and services, equal educational opportunities, and employment prospects for students when they leave school. As an illustration, NBEET (1999b) reported that rural students and their parents, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, were less likely than their urban counterparts to see that pursuing a university course was an option for them. Family socioeconomic background, location, and distance from home to the nearest tertiary campus shaped these attitudes.

Referent Two: Educational Implications of the Sociocultural Context

Various historical, psychological, sociological, and political perspectives about how individuals and groups are marginalised from mainstream society attempt to explain why some children do not benefit from their schooling. Usually the views are opposing with the arguments congealing around the cause for inequality residing either with the individual or with how society is structured and works. The same polarised approach is evident in the way schools are viewed as part of society, especially in terms of how schools may compound student inequalities. Consequently, there are various perspectives about schools, home-school relationships, the curriculum, and classroom practices that are relevant to the study. Each perspective carries with it different educational implications which are most striking when a deficit or constructive lens is used to examine particular issues.

In the main, much research with so-called disadvantaged students has been concerned with contextual resources such as "health, nutrition, physical security, emotional security, attention from helpful adults, peer support, time available for school work, books in the home and scholastic know-how in the home" (Connell, 1995, p. 9). A deficit approach to education is implied and the discourse associated with terms such as disadvantaged background and educational disadvantage remind us: "[H]ow might we foreground material disadvantage *without* unleashing normative moral discourses which pathologise disadvantaged communities and reduce children to amalgams of categories?" (Comber, 1998, p. 7, emphasis in original). The assumption in this discourse is that the lack of access to books, experience with dominant language codes, and financial contributions to school activities predetermine how schools develop their relationship with students and their parents and how they design and deliver curriculum to students. At a wider level this type of research has been influenced by conceptions about the capacity of individuals to master their own educational futures. It is the way schools respond to these issues ("Bleak

Aboriginal Education Cycle", 1999) that can shape how schools foster success in the education of their students. The study reported in this thesis, therefore, attempted to identify what schools do to create change for student success.

Referent Three: Seeking Out the Successful School

Making judgements about what constitutes a school that is successful is a divergent and mutable process. Silver (1994) believed that "good schools" are concerned with the achievement of outcomes and it seems that philosophers and providers throughout the history of education have always been concerned with this issue. How good schools are defined, however, has changed across time according to different economic, social, and political contexts.

> In rapidly changing societies there may be deeply controversial and conflicting views
> of what constitutes the purpose of schooling, and therefore what are the characteristics
> of a good school. Social change brings a search for redefinition, for improvement, for
> 'better' schools. (Silver, 1994, p. 2)

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) in her notable work, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*, was clear that "the search for 'good' schools is elusive and disappointing if by goodness we mean something close to perfection ... [because] good schools reveal imperfections, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities" (p. 309). In their study of schools in New South Wales, Australia, Proudfoot and Baker (1994) broadly defined a good school "as one which appeared to be successful in tackling contemporary educational challenges, including challenges stemming from the nature of the school community" (p. 23). A school's success cannot be separated from its context which is situationally determined. Glickman (1987) suggested that educational researchers further complicated the process of defining good schools because they neglect "to distinguish between the *effectiveness* and the *goodness*" of schools (Glickman, 1987, pp. 623-624, emphasis in original). Glickman asserted that efforts to clarify the difference should always deal first with defining what is a good school so that schools can then work towards becoming effective. According to Glickman, *good* refers to some identified standard and *effective* describes the processes schools use to achieve the standard.

Research into the effectiveness of schools then becomes "the search for ways – both adequate and reliable – to measure the quality of the school" (Mortimore, 1991, p. 214). The school effectiveness research field permitted me to consider a range of variables in relation to the effectiveness of schools and more recent work provided a stepping stone to

consider the assessment of student progress over a period of time, especially using authentic assessment strategies. According to Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995), an effective school boosts its students' outcomes in comparison with other schools serving similar communities. As the developmental study progressed, particularly when investigating individual school sites, the school improvement research field became useful to examine school operations and the cultures of schools. The school improvement research knowledge base emphasises the importance of careful school planning, teaching and learning, managing the change process, and providing organisational conditions that support continuity in school operations, even when a school faces great difficulties (Stoll & Mortimore, 1995). This research field gave me insight into how schools can be observed in terms of their day-day operations. In addition, Hopkins' (1996) claim about a school's development planning was useful. Hopkins (1996) stated that a school's improvement is its capacity "to keep abreast with innovation within the context of a pervasive political reform agenda, whilst remaining true to the education futures they desire for their students" (pp. 32-33). School improvement should be planned and documented. Throughout the conceptualisation of the study the complexity of schools as organisations became increasingly troublesome to analyse and I was continually reminded of the understandings of Glass (1979) and Fitz-Gibbon (1996) who maintained that schools are complex systems. It is this notion of complexity that pervaded the study but the School Development Plan (Ministry of Education, 1989), a mandated requirement for government schools in WA, led to common ground for participants in the study and me to contemplate how schools worked successfully.

The Research Design

The research design developed in three phases of the study. Starting with the general problem based on the needs identified in the Kimberley Education District, evolving research methods were used that reflected the on-going nature of the data collection and analysis processes. The first phase of the study commenced in 1995. During this phase a general picture gained from the school effectiveness literature substantiated the initial conceptualisation of the study and the preliminary fieldwork in the first year. This part of the study was descriptive and attempted to visualise what things were like in the schools. Ethnographic techniques such as informal and formal interviews, participant and non-participant observations, and gathering documents in four schools were used to generate data to design a study-specific questionnaire.

In 1996 the second phase of the study started. This phase involved developing and administering a study-specific questionnaire. The questionnaire facilitated the collection of

data about home-school relationships, school and classroom level processes, and students' participation in learning. The data were collected from teachers in 14 different schools in the District (18 of the possible 21 schools participated in the overall study). These categories of interest were derived from information found in the school effectiveness and school improvement research fields. This part of the study sought to confirm the interpretive aspects of phase one.

The third phase of the study commenced mid-way through 1996. A smaller and more detailed picture of schools was drawn through a case study approach. Five carefully selected schools, that were representative of the schools in the District, formed the case studies. This phase progressed into 1997 and concluded at the end of this third year. In the case studies, the school improvement literature was useful to generate information about school development, school monitoring systems, and the nature of school cultures. Of particular importance in the case study schools was the tracking of a purposive sample of 150 students to assess their reading and writing (including spelling) achievement. The ages of the students in the sample ranged from 5-year-olds to 13-year-olds (although in the very small schools some 14-year-old students were included). I conducted the assessment tasks with individual students at two different time points in 1996 and 1997, approximately one year apart. The results of the tasks were analysed in terms of the progress students made and interpreted according to the amount of time students attended school. In the case studies the interpretive aspect of the study deepened. The concept of backmapping students' progress as a way of judging success in a school was used (Ainscow, Hargreaves, & Hopkins, 1995; Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Reynolds & Stoll, 1997). Making judgments about the success of Kimberley schools was an evaluation process in terms of how students performed. The students' performance was linked to the type of operations and interactions in the schools that best supported students' learning.

Thus, the data were collected from whole school communities, individuals and small groups, across several sites using techniques such as interview, observation, survey, and collecting and analysing documents and artefacts. Data were gathered for a period of three years in the iterative phases that allowed me to refine, reform, and reflect on the information gathered. The methodological rigour of the research depended upon the collected data being analysed and interpreted in a believable way by cross checking interpretations with research participants and debriefing with peers. The credibility of the research was safeguarded by engagement at each case study site for up to ten days at a time, persistent observation, and collection of a variety of artefacts (documents, audio tapes, videotapes, photographs and student samples of work). In the study the school was used as one aspect for analysis. Importantly, the wider system context of public schooling

in WA, the school's local context, teachers in their classrooms, and how individual students progressed in their schooling also were kept to the forefront. The research design is summarised as follows.

Phase 1: Commencing the Fieldwork

General information was generated from four schools to commence the study. The data were analysed and themes of interest were identified to prepare a study-specific questionnaire.

Phase 2: Developing a Broader Picture

The study-specific questionnaire was designed and administered in 14 different schools to develop a broader base of information. The information was analysed to create descriptions of various aspects of school contexts. Both consensus and divergence in opinions were identified. Five schools were selected for case study work.

Phase 3: Looking in Schools

Data were generated from teachers and students in the five schools. The data were analysed to make interpretations about the success of schools in terms of the best outcomes students achieved and the best practices that fostered these outcomes.

Significance of the Study

In the Kimberley region of WA, there is a view held by some educators, politicians, and community people that the education delivered to their geographically isolated government schools is not of the same quality as that for other students. In fact, some claim that it is different in fundamental ways and consequently student educational outcomes are different, in short, inferior (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; NBEET, 1991). There is, of course, overwhelming evidence that clearly says Aboriginal children do not perform academically and do not complete schooling when these judgements are based on absolute measures. The 1996 ABS data "showed that Western Australia recorded the lowest percentage of [students] staying on at school, with Aborigines in areas such as Kununurra ... dipping to as low as five percent" ("ABS Confirms", 1998, p. 3). From this view, schools in the Kimberley are not quality schools. Whether these schools are "good" schools and work effectively to improve student outcomes is more the point of the study. There is scope for research into effective and improving schools in geographically isolated locations in WA which makes this study significant for several reasons.

Taking the Initiative to Conduct Educational Research in the Kimberley

The study was an initiative in relation to the Kimberley Education District. The Kimberley District Superintendent and schools endorsed the study and some financial resources were supplied by the District to support the study. Research in geographically isolated communities is difficult to conduct due to the costs and the travel distances involved. From this standpoint only, the study is a contribution to the knowledge about education within the Western Australian scene. The outcomes of the study will enable staff in Kimberley government schools to:

- improve planning to further enhance parent and school partnerships;
- develop possible alternative organisations for schooling;
- reconsider the delivery of curriculum content using culturally appropriate pedagogy and assessment;
- assist District Education Office consultants and psychologists with their support to schools; and
- provide policy makers within the government education system with information about adequate resource provisions to their schools.

Considering the Sociocultural Context of Schools in the Kimberley

The study highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural dimensions of schools and their locations when making judgements about the effectiveness of schools. Researchers need to be keenly aware of the cultural context of their research work. The study shows the complexity of thinking and analysis required when drawing widely from the social sciences, such as Aboriginal studies, anthropology, history, economics, politics, and sociology to contextualise the work of a researcher in school settings.

Amalgamating the School Effectiveness and School Improvement Research Fields

The study is of interest to researchers who endeavour to amalgamate the research fields of school effectiveness and school improvement. The study shows one way to use the quantitative approach of the school effectiveness field together with the qualitative approach of the school improvement research area. It demonstrates the difficulties encountered when a research endeavour attempts to make judgements about the effectiveness of schools that are working to improve the learning outcomes of their students.

Beyond the local level, this study makes a major contribution to the ways in which a school's effectiveness can be judged, especially in contexts where the wider view is that schools do not produce quality outcomes. It is recognised that the conceptualisation and the research design of the study contain tensions. For example, the sociocultural context of schools and the school effectiveness research field for many educational researchers is a contradiction in terms (Angus, 1993). The trend in school effectiveness research is to statistically control contextual factors in research and therefore has developed:

> a 'knowledge base' that children from different 'family backgrounds' can be expected to perform differently at school. However, there is no explanation of, or much curiosity in, *why* there is such a difference. There is simply an attempt to establish a mathematical *connection* between statistically equalised pupils and their performance. There is no sense of how the relationship works. (Angus, 1993, p. 341, emphasis in original)

The study focussed on the sociocultural nature of schooling and at the same time used the knowledge base of the school effectiveness and school improvement fields to guide the investigation. The study supported an approach for schools, serving students who experience hindrances in their education, to demonstrate their effectiveness by considering the inter-relatedness of their context and schooling processes. Above all, it shed light on ways to conduct assessment procedures with students from diverse backgrounds that advances reliable information about their progress at school. A school can be judged to be effective according to its capacity to add value to students' progress in learning.

Overview of the Thesis

The Hermeneutic Process in the Study

I have used the first person as a literary device throughout this thesis, but more obviously to describe the hermeneutic process in the fieldwork, to emphasise several aspects of the research process. First, my involvement in the research process at the site level was important in terms of building some workable relationship with the schools in the region. Second, the use of the first person allowed voice to be attributed to either the participants or myself in the study. I was able to let people tell their own stories and express their beliefs about their communities, schools, classrooms, and students. I believed it was important to make serious attempts not to privilege one voice over another because

interpretations should be made in the light of how power is attributed to the researcher and the researched. Third, I was the researcher-as-bricoleur, a term described by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). I was involved in an interactive research process that allowed me to observe, talk with, listen to, canvas opinions, negotiate shared meanings, examine documents, and self-reflect. At the same time, I was able to bring my extensive experience about schools in marginalised communities to synthesise my judgements. Fourth, I was able, at different stages in the research, to use different literary forms to describe, interpret, and judge the success of schools. In the exploratory first phase of the study I used the natural speech and observations of the participants to form accounts of the evidence, which were more like impressionistic tales from the field as termed by van Maanen (1988). The tales were derived from categories and themes evident in the data. In the second phase, using the questionnaire for confirmatory purposes, I used a reporting style to communicate the evidence revealed in the analysis of the quantitative data. The analysis added both breadth and depth to the tales from the first phase. In the third phase of the study, where five school case studies were undertaken, I developed a narrative, a story of events and actions, by using a metaphor of harmony to model one case study school. As Casey (1995) suggested, narrative reveals the complexity of the relational significance of human actions in specific settings and reveals how different contexts shape human actions. This narrative first explored some of the ideals existing in one Kimberley school context which supported students' progress and success at school. Next, I was able to use the narrative to review how the other case study schools operated.

An Outline of the Chapters in the Thesis

As previously noted, chapters two, three and four elaborate upon the conceptual framework underpinning the study. Chapter two examines the macro realities and circumstances that marginalise students in the Kimberley schools and create inequalities for them. The nature of schooling related to the dimensions of poverty, Aboriginality, and location characterise the particular contextual backdrop to the study. Chapter three builds on the ideas in chapter two and takes a micro level view of the realities in schools as part of society, especially in terms of how schools may compound student inequalities. The diversity in how the purpose of schooling is conceived affects the way school and home relationships are developed, the way curriculum is designed and delivered, and how teaching, learning, and assessment are shaped especially in relationship to the poor, indigenous students, and schools in rural locations. The literature reviewed in these two chapters reveals the complexity of schooling for marginalised children and the dearth of research about schooling specifically in the Kimberley area. In chapter four the ideas associated with quality, equality, effectiveness, and efficiency of schooling are explored in

relation to the school effectiveness and school improvement research fields to position the methodological framework of the study. In chapter five, an overview of the course of the iterative nature of the study is included. There is a reliance on the interpretive model of research in the study, although, both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used in the longitudinal research design. Chapter six is an account woven from several impressionistic tales to illustrate the emerging themes found in the data collected in the first phase of the investigation. The data were gathered through participant and non-participant observation, interviews with key informants, and the collection of artefacts. The analysis of the data then provided the foundation for the next phase of the study. A specific-study questionnaire was designed and distributed to 14 different schools. In chapter seven, the results of the survey are presented with a reliance on graphical representations of the data analysis. In the third phase of the study, five case studies of schools were used to explore the intricacies of these schools' contexts. Qualitative data techniques were used to observe and make judgements about school operations, classroom practices, and student achievement. In chapter eight one of these case studies is richly portrayed as an ideal type school in the Kimberley context to describe how staff, students, and parents worked together. In the following chapter nine, the students' samples of work are discussed, the relationship between student achievement and absenteeism is examined, and student progress is backmapped in relation to successful classroom and school practices. The summary of the study and its results are compiled in chapter ten. Conclusions and implications for those involved in education in the Kimberley region are forwarded.

The exposé of the study has been provided in this preliminary chapter. Chapter two commences the series of three chapters that describe the conceptual referents which position the study. Chapter five is concerned with the methodological framework of the study and four chapters, which provide the outcomes from the scope of the fieldwork, follow this. The final chapter in the thesis is ensued by the reference list and several appendices which support the discussion in the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOLS

What We Have, Who We Are, Where We Live:
Some of the Macro Realities of the Context in the Kimberley

The sociocultural referent in the conceptual framework of the study was significant. I was constantly pressed by the people I encountered in the study to consider the economic viability of communities, the sense of place that people attach to their geographic locations, and the cultural identity of the students in schools. It appeared that where the Kimberley schools are located and the nature of their communities surrounds the lives of students, their parents, and teachers in an idiomatic cultural fabric. It is the connections of this fabric to Kimberley government schools that required some analysis to position the study and examine the historical, social, economic, cultural, and location circumstances of school communities. It was important to ascertain if and how these circumstances marginalised students and created inequalities for them. The premise taken in the study was that where students live and how they live relate to the ways they move into the school culture and how their learning is affected by the particular responses made by schools to their needs. It was crucial to understand how the context of schools in the Kimberley coupled to their capacity to provide success in the education of their students. Connell (1995) was clear about the connections between schools and their communities.

> Though the school is a distinct institution, with walls and doors of its own, education
> is never a closed system. Schools are interwoven with their milieux. Both their design
> and functioning presuppose relationships with families, workplaces, labour markets,
> and neighbourhoods. (p. 9)

Furthermore, Mortimore (1996) is one of several who underscored that some students do not benefit from schooling. What is patently clear is that "schools do not receive uniform intakes of pupils but some take those who come with high levels of prior achievement and are equipped with many advantages, whilst others predominantly receive those who lack these benefits" (Mortimore, 1996, p. 5). Some children are perceived as more privileged than others and when they enter the world of schooling their success is linked closely to what their parents do and have, who they are, and where they live.

Children from poor backgrounds, and who live in geographically isolated locations, are especially vulnerable to lack of success from their schooling. Many of these children arrive

at school bringing with them a set of experiences, which are rich within themselves, but make the transition from home to a school culture difficult. The way in which schools build on these experiences usually shapes whether or not children will succeed at school. Thus, it is the significance of students' lives in the Kimberley which complicates any straightforward judgements about the level of success of schools in the region. The local contexts of the schools necessarily predetermine the directions that they may take to improve and become more effective. How then, do schools effectively provide these students with opportunities to achieve high standards, or at the very least, fundamental literacy and numeracy skills? Does attending school benefit these students in their later lives? To examine these questions several strands of thought are explored in this chapter.

First, how the purposes of schooling are constructed in relation to some economic, social, and cultural trends in Australia, and more specifically the Kimberley, are discussed. These trends provide different perspectives on locating responsibility for school success either with the individual or the dominant society. Second, a sweeping view is taken of some of the possible explanations as to why marginalised students may not enjoy success from their schooling experiences. Peoples' material circumstances, their group identity, and where they live have the potential to determine how schools respond to their school communities, parents, and students. Third, the problematic nature of finding solutions to the complexities of marginalisation within a sociocultural context are outlined in terms of public policies and institutional racism. Next, the dimensions of poverty, Aboriginality, and rurality are bounded for the purposes of the study. Finally, the over-reliance in educational research of using social categories for analysis is reviewed. This review helps to position how the judgement of school success was pursued in the study.

The Purposes of Schooling: Changing Perspectives

Some Economic, Social, and Cultural Trends in Contemporary Australia

At the global level, geographic and economic horizons have broadened and poverty in Australia reflects its position in an international market, a market which is increasingly competitive (Fincher & Wulff, 1998). Competing in international finance and world markets means that specific economic growth patterns destine large sections of a society for poverty (Gregory & Sheehan, 1998; Miller, 1996). Low wages, high inflation rates, high interest rates, and high levels of unemployment tend to swell the great wealth of a few. The challenge in the public policy of a country is, therefore, to promote economic growth without increasing social inequalities. At a national level, Miller (1996) maintained that depressed sectors of a country, irrespective of any connection or not to world markets,

could create poverty. Specialised economies in a locality that have low production are more likely to employ workers with low wages (Howley, 1991). Seasonal economies, such as tourism or fruit picking in the Kimberley, or fluctuations in the market for commodities such as beef, can make local communities more susceptible to poverty. Gregory and Sheehan 1998) also confirmed that there is a trend in Australia to regional disadvantage. Fincher and Wulff (1998) claimed that through economic restructuring in Australia there was an escalating decline in primary and secondary industries and an increase in the tertiary (services) and quaternary (information) sectors. This trend has affected the Kimberley region where the local economy has been built mainly on primary industries such as those on the pastoral leases, some mining, and tourism. Thus, at a local level, poverty is seen as the result of low human capital. People have few skills to offer employers and hence cannot gain high wages. However, if people improve their human capital, through education or training for example, it does not automatically follow that there are jobs available for them. In most communities in the Kimberley the idea that there is a job for everyone is far from a reality (Barrass, 1999; Gregory & Sheehan, 1998). Limited job opportunities available to people constrain their capacity to earn money and when a locality has limited potential to produce wealth, poverty will persist for people (Howley, 1991).

Based on his work in urban ghettos in America, Wilson (1987) argued that it was important to recognise the specific historical background of the truly disadvantaged. He claimed that while the disadvantaged may have dysfunctional personal behaviour, these problems are symptomatic of the locality rather than the person. Although Wilson's work was associated with urban living, Massey and Denton (1993) corroborated that the alienation of minority groups in any locality had the potential to create poverty for them. In Australia, for instance, it is more the case than not, that Aboriginal children will live an oppressed lifestyle and expect to get the social security assistance (Fitzpatrick, 1996). Employment opportunities are restricted for most 15- to 19-year-old Aboriginal people, especially in isolated communities where jobs do not exist (Bell, 1992). Many Aboriginal families experience physical and emotional health problems and lack access to reasonable levels of goods and services ("Troubles in the Bush", 1999). This situation diminishes their well being and, for example, the incidence of anomic suicide of Aboriginal men is increasing. These problems are entrenched in remote communities in the Kimberley region (Hunter, 1993; MacDonald, 1996). In particular, substance abuse, its related diseases, and a range of social problems are prevalent in communities throughout the region (Douglas, 1993). Mental health problems associated with depression, suicide, and substance abuse for Aboriginal youth (Beresford, 1993a) is yet another sign that they are frustrated and bored because they have no alternative leisure pursuits or plans for the future. Participation

in a full traditional life has been disrupted and changed and as a consequence finding a place in today's world is difficult for many.

Income poverty for Aboriginal people is real although there is a view that they have disposable income through government direct cash payments. Also, many believe they receive too much of "what has become known as the 'social wage' – the provision of subsidised services in areas such as health, education, housing and welfare" (King, 1998, p. 96). This is a myth according to Tickner (1992). Social security assistance is means tested in Australia. Unskilled workers often cannot afford to work (Miller, 1996). It is more income-beneficial to remain on assistance, or take "sit down money" as termed by Aboriginal people. Government assistance, however, does not necessarily take an individual or a family above the poverty line. Fundamentally, there are not enough job opportunities for people and inadequate levels of income support for the unemployed (Saunders, 1998). Thus people in poverty have continual dependence on welfare agencies and often this frequent institutionalised contact is a constant source of stress for them. But the experience of many indigenous Australians moves beyond material deprivation (Taylor & Challen, 1998). Choo (1990), for example, found in her study of Aboriginal children in poverty that while they suffered material deprivation, a much greater problem existed. Loss of culture, loss of dignity and self-respect, racism and oppression, the non-material sides of poverty, were more deeply felt. Alongside their impoverished conditions, the lasting effects of government policies have left for numerous Aborigines in the Kimberley, who retain strong and vivid memories of what has happened to them, a legacy of oppression, trans-generation grief, and a lack of faith in white people. Despite these obstacles, growing numbers of Aboriginal people continue to strive to gain both their individual identity and their identity in association with other Aborigines, for acknowledgment of land ownership, and the recognition of a continually adapting Aboriginal culture. However, there is an evident poverty cycle in the Kimberley that is difficult for many people to break, especially for young people leaving school. The purposes of schooling in such contexts are perplexing.

Schools Mirror the Economic Needs of Society or Reproduce the Social and Cultural Dimensions of Society

There are views that mass schooling merely exists to enrich the economic potential of a nation. Particularly since the 1960s, there have been several radical theories postulated to explain the relationship between schools and society. These ideas are grounded in political socialism and conflict theories such as the hegemony theory of Gramsci (1994). Althusser (1984) argued that domination in society comes through the economic domain and determines social life. The school is a predominant institution in the dynamic. Based on

this idea, the correspondence theory of schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) suggested that schools reflect the needs of the workplace in a capitalist society. They produce the labour required for capitalism to flourish. The relationships that students have with principals, teachers, peers, and their work at school correspond to the hierarchical nature of the workforce. The values of production, the use of force to control, and learning specific forms of knowledge for work characterise school and classroom life. The strength of this type of theory is that the blame for school failure shifts from the student and the teacher to the structures of the dominant society. Critics of the theory, Apple (1981), Giroux (1980, 1981) and Willis (1981), for example, believed that the theory is not sufficient to explain social and cultural reproduction. The theory posits human action as passive, ignores the school as a site where teachers and students mediate meaning of their different social and cultural worlds, and accepts the domination of the existing social order. In the Kimberley context, the idea that education is to provide most students with the capacity to move into the workforce is contentious. First, many students do not achieve essential competencies for the workforce, and second, if they do happen to experience school success, there is no guarantee they can gain employment.

At the same time, there are other views about schooling. Schools reproduce the dominant social order. The reproduction theory in schooling, developed by Pierre Bourdieu in France, is based on constructs such as cultural capital and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Individuals may not have economic capital but everyone possesses cultural capital which is their capacity to use language, to think and construct meanings, and develop their own behavioural styles, values, and inclinations (Gibson, 1986). It is schools, because they enjoy relative autonomy, which reproduce certain types of culture and transmit the valued knowledge that counts in the curriculum. Children learn that these are more important than their own. Thus, education is a social and political force in legitimising and reproducing the dominant culture. The theory suggests that schools devalue some children's culture, knowledge, and experiences and favour those already favoured. It was worthwhile in the Kimberley context to explore how schools empowered students to meet the challenges in their lives, to move between different cultures, and retain their own cultural identity and self-worth.

Schools are Agents for Changing Society

Giddens (1984) was critical of some of Bourdieu's ideas. Giddens (1984) and Giroux (1980, 1981, 1988) dismissed economic, social, and cultural reproduction ideas about schooling. They stressed the agency of the individual in society and the active role they took in shaping it. Others, like Hargreaves (1982) and Connell (1995), believed that the views about economic, social, or cultural reproduction were all static.

Even dominant groups do not seek simple reproduction through education. They know the world is changing, and they want the schools to help their children get ahead of the game. (Connell, 1995, p. 9)

Sultana (1989), however, pointed out that we might have been too optimistic about contemporary educational rhetoric that relates change at the micro-level of the school to changes in society.

Societies are rapidly changing but whether schools in the Kimberley are abreast, let alone ahead, of such changes remains open to debate. Current trends in the Kimberley are influenced by global and national events but in the day-to-day realities of lives in rural and remote communities how the purposes of schooling are constructed required some consideration in the study. Do schools merely mirror the region's needs for human capital in the workforce? Do schools transmit a dominant culture by subjugating Aboriginal culture? Do schools expand the cultural and social capital of students to allow them to live in a changing world? Or, do schools and their teachers just survive, doing the best they can, in overwhelmingly contextual circumstances? How these purposes are conceived may influence the way students are either alienated or included in their schooling and the wider society. Not only did the purposes of schooling in the Kimberley provide complexity in the study, but the consideration of how students may be marginalised from the schooling process was thought provoking. The different ways schools might or might not respond to their sociocultural contexts had the potential to determine the level of success students experienced because they attended school.

Different Explanations for Marginalisation

Inequality is Founded in Residency:How can Schools be a Community Resource?

Australia is both the most urbanised and sparsely populated country in the world with its population concentrated in a few coastal capital cities. Often the term rural is associated with colourful folk tradition (Walton, 1993) and a "mental map of a powerful urban centre (the strong core) and relatively powerless hinterland (the weak periphery) that pervades public rural policy in Australia" (Sher & Sher, 1994, p. 6). It is a dominant and deficit view of residency. The problem is that while lifestyles in rural communities are diverse (Walton, 1993), most people who live in rural areas believe that they are different from city people. City people do not understand the harsh realities or the benefits of rural life (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; Redman, 1991).

Where one resides, however, can create the circumstances for poverty (Howley, 1991; Fincher & Wulff, 1998). Miller (1996) maintained that where one resides affects the likelihood of moving into, remaining in, or moving out of poverty. Colloquially, Australians refer to locations other than the city as "the bush" or "the outback". Steketee (1999) claimed "the poor now live mostly in the bush, city fringes and small towns where the mainstream aren't likely to meet them" (p. 22). In the Kimberley, specific local conditions and limited economic diversification increase the risk of poverty. The isolation factor places a costly burden on transport, farming, pastoral leases, mining, and small community industries or enterprises. What social policy cannot do is to provide a stable job with reasonable pay to every rural Australian seeking one (Sher & Sher, 1994). The employment ladder is short and young people in a rural location are less likely to gain the educational and training chances that enable them to be competitive in the job market (Share, Lawrence, & Boylan, 1994).

In the Kimberley region this problem has manifested into a reliance on government assistance for many people. The provision of goods and services is stretched as government and private services are rationalised. People, especially Aboriginal people, who depend on such services, in relation to health, mental health, dental care, and welfare, experience further inequality (McClelland & Scotton, 1998). Living costs ("Troubles in the Bush", 1999), certainly those connected with basic commodities and perishable goods, are disproportionately high (Altman & Hunter, 1998). To be an Aboriginal person living in the Kimberley places one at high risk of being economically and socially marginalised. Thus, it was of interest to ascertain whether schools were able to use their allocated resources, and expand their resources through enterprise, to be an active part in changing students' local lives.

Inequality is Founded within the Individual: How are these Attitudes Compounded in Schools?

Biological determinism is an ideology that holds inequality is due to the characteristics inherited by individuals. Problem families produce problem children. Closely allied to this ideology is social Darwinism postulated by the English sociologist, Herbert Spencer (1971). Inequality occurs because people fail to provide for themselves. They are moral failures, weak willed, or do not have the inborn ability to hold positions essential to the functioning of society. From this view, the poor are portrayed as having the choice, and therefore the responsibility, to overcome their problems. It is about their individual agency. It is the things that individuals do that make them or their households unequal with others. Underlying this view is the potential to blame the victim for their untenable circumstances because equality is seen as inherent in the worth of the individual. Injustice is about the

discrimination against individuals because of their natural attributes. It can be argued that this version of equality remains cemented in structures of power and elitism.

Moreover, scientific racism and ethnocentric thinking compound equality of worth ideals, although, it is contended that we are all ethnocentric to some degree, but not necessarily racist (Lechte, 1988). Scientific racism as a theory of race supports the idea that some races are naturally less physically, intellectually, and creatively capable than others (Banton, 1998). Today, there are still views expressed that black people are intellectually inferior to white people (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Unfortunately, in Australia, Aboriginal people basically remain stereotyped by non-Aboriginal Australians (Bourke, 1994b; Eckerman, 1988a). Because many Aboriginal people have clung tenaciously to their cultural ways, there are persistent contemporary views held by some non-Aboriginal Australians that indigenous people are dirty, lazy, unpunctual, thriftless, unreliable, and drunks (Lippmann, 1994). Such prejudice lies in a social psychological explanation of racism. It is motivated by a person's need to feel superior and hold status. Resulting discriminatory attitudes and behaviours give foundation to such stereotypes. This theory has developed from Freudian principles (Banton, 1998) and expanded upon by Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford, & Nevitt, 1950) and Allport (1954). "Racism is thus constituted as individualised, exceptional phenomena; it is an irrational, even pathological, response which originates in ignorance" (Rizvi, 1990, p. 170). The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation reported that:

> the misinformation and prejudice in the wider Australian community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is derived from the comparative lack of knowledge about indigenous histories, culture and lifestyles compounded by the commonplace negative stereotyping of present day indigenous lifestyles. (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, p. 59)

Miles (1988) strongly argued that the ideas associated with race and race relations are used often to obscure historical and social process. Lechte (1988) further pointed out that eighteenth century ethnocentrism and twentieth century racism are different and we must not conflate the two ideas. Paternalism is different from open hostility and aggression. Banton (1998) extended ideas about racial theories. The world has changed. There are vast improvements in communications, transport, technologies, and the like, which have fostered global relations and markets. The old boundaries between races are no longer distinct.

In the study it was important to ascertain the attitudes of people in schools towards their communities. Are children and their parents portrayed as victims because of their personal endowments, and thus, stereotyped and negatively portrayed? As a consequence, is schooling in the Kimberley communities merely perceived as making students more worthy by making them more equal in school performance with their counterparts in other parts of WA?

Inequality is Founded in Individual Circumstances: How do Schools Respond to Different Ways of Living?

In the 1950s Oscar Lewis, the noted American anthropologist, developed a theory of poverty which was influential in thinking about poverty within a cultural context. Based on his case studies in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and New York, Lewis (1959) described a culture of poverty. A culture of poverty is a blueprint for living that is transmitted from one generation to another. Therefore, poor people live in an unique world of their own bound by certain values, norms, practices, and outlooks which insulate them from the mainstream culture.

There are many critics of this theory. One is Elliot Liebow whose work with a group of Negro men led him to believe that poor people behave as they do in reaction to their situational constraints. It is their survival and coping behaviours that may be dysfunctional or ineffective. This idea is quite different from the culture of poverty concept (Miller, 1996). People in poverty tend to live from moment to moment. They do not plan for the future because there appears to be no future in their lives. Thus, poor people slip into patterns of behaviour that may be different from other groups in society because their situation prevents them from making commitments to long-term plans. Nevertheless, according to Liebow (1967), poor people subscribe to the dominant culture and if poverty is removed, they have no difficulty adapting to mainstream culture and seizing opportunities that come their way. The work of Keddie (1973) in classrooms also upheld that cultural deprivation was a myth. Poverty is about social and economic circumstances and not a characteristic of a person, culture, or sub-culture. Those who believe that different cultures are deprived assume that if they suddenly became poor they would cope more effectively in the situation than poor persons who are always in poverty (Miller, 1996).

Aboriginal people retain strong ties to their own kin or language groups. For them culture is seen a seen a whole way of life. It is a distinctive way of perceiving the world, a characteristic way of communicating with one another, and a particular way of acting and valuing their lifestyle (Partington & McCudden, 1992). They realistically are concerned

with how their culture is socially learned and transmitted to their young people in a rapidly changing world (Aunger, 1999). However, some non-indigenous Australians link Aboriginal culture with a culture of poverty rather than celebrate Aboriginal culture as the vibrant essence of Aboriginal people. There is a lack of understanding that poverty for Aboriginal people has been caused outside of their cultural ways. In the study it was imperative to examine how particular ways of life for children and their parents were perceived in school communities. Are students considered to belong to a culture of poverty? Or, is schooling about supporting students to change some of their circumstances and actions?

Inequality is Founded in a Capitalist Society: How do Schools Provide Opportunities in the Curriculum for Critical Analysis?

As sociology steadily expanded as a human science, different explanations emerged to theorise about inequality in a modern capitalist society. Instead of trying to find some defect with the individual or their circumstances, sociologists looked to the make-up of society to find structural explanations of inequality. Analysing the structures of society lie in two main sociological approaches, functionalism and conflict theories. Functionalism became a dominant theoretical paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s and sees people as being paid according to their abilities and the needs of society. The distribution of rewards reflects the importance of different jobs to the functioning of society. Thus, all key positions in society are filled by the most able through competition. Of necessity, rewards are distributed unevenly. Minority groups, therefore, are forced into poverty which reduces their opportunities to achieve economic viability and social integration (Miller, 1996). Social exclusion from this point of view is seen as a dominant characteristic of poverty. While functionalism has long been criticised as a sociological theory, Sargent (1994) believed that:

> it is alive and influential in our society right now. It is the dominant group ideology. It is what most of us grow up with and absorb through social practices, because it is an important means by which Australian capitalism controls the ideas of subordinate groups. (p. 183)

Conflict theories, with their roots in Marxism, embody the attempts to explain disharmony, power relations, and why different groups in society are at odds. It is not cohesion that holds society together but coercion and power of dominant groups. These theories attempt to explain the structural nature of social inequality and poverty is seen as inherent in the stratified nature of a capitalist society. Poverty exists because wealth exists. Poor people are unable to sell their labour, or if they do, receive few rewards from their work to lift

themselves beyond poverty. Poverty cannot be overcome unless society completely changes its structures.

As part of the revision of Marxist theory, based on the premise that society is complex, a set of critical theories about society exists. These theories are wide ranging but simply stated, they focus attention on dominance and subordination (power) in social experiences, emancipation of oppressed individuals, and learning to critically analyse and organise valued knowledge. From this perspective, markets do not distribute wealth. Wealth is given out by privileged groups who have the economic and political power concentrated in their hands (Miller, 1996). Poor people are poor because they do not have the political capacity or the knowledge to challenge their exploitation. Therefore, marginalised people face damaging crises. They will question authority, they will decide not to participate in work or education, and they will become cynical and indifferent (Gibson, 1986). In the study it was useful to ascertain if and how students were provided with opportunities to analyse their sociocultural contexts and how these impacted on their lives. Are students provided with opportunities to understand or challenge their marginalisation from society? At a more fundamental level, it was of interest to examine the extent to which parents and their children considered attending schooling and participating in education was a worthwhile pursuit.

Inequality is Founded in Colonisation: How do Schools Provide a Pedagogy of Deconstruction?

At the time when Europeans were moving into the Kimberley region, Aboriginal people were usually thought of as noble savages who needed to be tamed (Hemming, 1994). A conservative political position prevailed although, given time, liberal political action began to challenge the injustice wreaked by the colonisation process. Based on deficit views of Aboriginal people, there was a concerted effort to advance their conversion to Christianity and civilisation, which included learning English (Reynolds, 1989, 1999). The 1900s, and right up to the 1970s, were marked for most Aboriginal people by enacted legislation and policy to dispossess them of their lands, control their movements and regulate the essential ways that they went about their everyday lives (Haebich, 1992; Long, 1980; Prentis, 1988; Reynolds, 1999). The purpose of the assimilation process was to institutionalise Aboriginal people in order to train them for useful occupations and to teach them to respect white laws, authority, and property (Lippmann, 1994). Aboriginal culture and population, however, did not fade so governments resolved to segregate full blood Aboriginal people onto government controlled "reserves" and raise "half-caste" children away from their families in missions and orphanages. One of the current issues for Aboriginal people is about coming to terms with their grief because they, or their relatives, belong to the "stolen

generations". They were removed from their families when they were children (Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, 1995). Tensions between different Aboriginal groups gathered together created disharmony within families in the reserve or mission communities and these rivalries are evident still in school communities in the Kimberley.

Béteille (1998) stated that a significant dimension of outsiders' identification of indigenous populations is derived from the history of settlement and usurpation. Mason's (1986) opinion was that with the scientific investigation of the origins of humans, racist theory developed to explain and justify the exploitation and subordination of blacks by whites. Much of the colonisation process of Australia is entrenched in this thinking. The seminal work of Cox (1948) suggested that white racial supremacy strengthened in the era of colonisation across the world and as Reynolds (1999) contended, the settlement of Australia was not a peaceful annexation by the British. Many of the encounters Aboriginal people had with intruders into the Kimberley were marked by aggression, labour exploitation, abuse and exploitation of women, attack, armed arrest, massacre, and polluted water supplies (Clement, 1989; Prentis 1988; Reynolds, 1999). In just over 100 years in the Kimberley, the economic, political, and cultural balance for Aboriginal people has been destroyed. Once again, if and how students are able to explore diverse cultural histories in their curriculum was worthy of exploration in the study. How do the schools accommodate critical analysis of colonisation in their curriculum and how is Aboriginal history privileged?

Finding Solutions to Inequality in the Sociocultural Context of the Kimberley

Unifying Public Policies

Peoples' solutions to poverty, even in the realm of public policy, vary according to the ideological stances previously discussed. Some believe that it is an individual attribute and each person is responsible for dealing with his or her own poverty. Others think that changing how society works is the solution. Improved or changed redistribution roles of welfare systems will overcome poverty. More radical solutions involve communal approaches to overcoming poverty so that everyone shares resources more equally. In essence, when public policy only challenges thinking, but not the distribution of power, the emancipatory capacity given to marginalised people is questionable (Starr, 1991). Irrespective of any political or theoretical basis that suggests how inequality is constructed, there is overwhelming evidence that gives substance to claims that poverty exists in Australia. As part of the developed world, the divide between the rich and the poor in Australia is plainly evident ("Poverty Gap", 1996). More to the point, Australia's

indigenous people have become the single most socially and economically disadvantaged group in the nation (Harding, 1994; Madden, 1994). Many leave school early, are unemployed, live in poverty, suffer poor health, and are often arrested or imprisoned. Furthermore, the dependency on institutions and a welfare system has left numerous Aboriginal people without the capacity to forge their own economic viability and hence they are often denied the basics for every-day living: food, shelter, and clothing. In Australia socialist public welfare policy and redistributive government programs strengthened with the landmark work conducted by Ronald Henderson for the Commonwealth Commission for Inquiry into Poverty in 1972-1975 (Henderson, 1975). The Henderson poverty line, a statistical measure of income poverty, remains a common reference point to describe poverty in Australia (Fincher & Niewenhuysen, 1998). Fincher and Niewenhuysen (1998), however, highlighted that given the abundance of information interpreted using excellent analytical tools, changes in the distribution and the patterns of poverty remain unclear. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that social policies and the distributive role of governments adequately counter the impact of economic structures and associated policies. Material deprivation for many occurs because holistic public policy is too difficult to accomplish (Miller, 1996). A point of interest in the study was to explore how schools viewed public policies and whether these were integrated to benefit students' learning at school.

Overcoming Institutional Racism

When considering the different perspectives about why inequality occurs in Australia, especially for Aboriginal people, it is a challenging task to draw a bigger picture about the reality of the situation in the Kimberley. There is the perspective, of course, that the plight of many Kimberley people is not only due to material deprivation and location circumstances but is compounded by blatant racism. Individuals probably experience, on a day-to-day basis, racist slurs and alienation associated with their colour and way of life. Alongside the idea that individuals continually experience racism at a personal level, exists the idea of institutional racism. In their substantial work in the United States of America (USA), Carmichael and Hamilton (1969), reported in their book, *Black Power*, that the effects of institutional racism are different from those experienced at the individual level. Pettman and Chambers (1986) argued that the effects in Australia are clear.

> Institutional racism refers to a pattern of distribution of social goods, including power, which regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and racial groups and disadvantages others. It operates through key institutions: organised social arrangements through which social goods and services are distributed. These social

arrangements include such institutions as the judiciary, the parliament, the public bureaucracy and, of course, the school. (p. 7)

Levi-Strauss (1984) believed that racism is founded in social rather than cultural differentiation. The social context of racism suggests that institutions and social structures are biased in respect to markets such as housing and employment (Banton, 1998). Rizvi (1990) stated that racism "is a manifestation of an ongoing collective process of group interaction, whereby the status and behaviour of minorities is defined and re-defined with respect to the dominant group" (p. 171).

The 1967 Referendum, which gave Aboriginal people Australian citizenship, began to counter some institutional racism for them. Citizenship gave them the right to be counted in the national census and the release from many restrictions on their lives. For example, they were allowed to choose where they lived. Above all, citizenship gave Aboriginal people the right to control their identity and to live outside the stereotypes created by other people (Dodson, 1994). The 1975 the Racial Discrimination Act gave Aboriginal people a legal standing to resist discrimination and to begin land right claims. The 1980s saw greater "self-management" by Aboriginal people. Numerous corporations were established to enable Aborigines to become economically self-sufficient. Today, many of these corporations in the Kimberley have strong community links to their schools. Conflict, however, remains about corporate mining leases, national parks, and pastoral leases on traditional lands. Some progress has been made to enable Aboriginal people to gain rights of ownership to their land that will provide them with an economic and symbolic base to work from and bring more dignity to their lives (Kalantzis, 1995). Federal Court judgements have passed native title of their traditional lands to Aboriginal people, such as the Miriuwung and Gajerrong groups in Kununurra (Gibson, 1998). These judgements continue to be clouded with controversy and challenge (Martin, 1998). The idea that nomadic people owned land is an anathema for many Australians because they accept the doctrine of terra nullius (Reynolds, 1999). Others believe Aboriginal people hold native title over their traditional lands. As Reynolds (1999) suggested, it does not mean that colonisation should not have happened, but land was not purchased directly from the Aborigines nor were they compensated for their land that was taken away without negotiation.

It seems in Australia there has always been an emphasis on race, colour, and national ethnic origin (Tonkinson, 1990). Belonging to the dominant ethnic group, Anglo-Celtic Australian, affords some people the permission to be superior. One product of this dominant thinking has generated the idea of pan-Aboriginality. Aboriginal people reject

the idea that the entire Aboriginal population is one ethnic group, a concept many non-indigenous people find difficult to grasp (Jones & Hill-Burnett, 1982). However, since colonisation, Aboriginal people have recognised their political power as a whole group to challenge their marginalisation and exclusion from the benefits of mainstream society. They have taken up issues such as land rights and removal of children from their families, and used the structures and processes, such as the judiciary system, available to all Australians, to seek truth and natural justice. Some Australians find that when Aboriginal people exercise these human rights it is alien to their sense of fairness. From the sociocultural perspective, the interest in the study was about the whether schools continued to promulgate institutional inequality for students. Overall, issues of poverty, racism, and residency require appropriate responses through the ways a school plans and operates. The basic premise is about what sorts of attitudes schools foster because it is the deeper issues of how curriculum content and process are conceived, implemented, and evaluated that have the capacity to liberate under-advantaged communities.

Bounding the Contextual Dimensions in the Study

There are several explanations about how we construct ideas about poverty, Aboriginality, and residency. Often these explanations, as explored in the preceding part of this chapter, are conflicting based on historical times, philosophical and political perspectives, and theoretical foundations. In the study the dimensions of poverty, Aboriginality, and location were considered in the following ways.

Understanding the Deprivation Caused by Poverty

Poverty is multi-dimensional. It can be concerned with inadequate income (family or community), labour market vulnerability and economic dependence, lack of organisational power and exclusion from collective resources, damaging environments (physical and social), and cultural marginalisation. The Henderson Inquiry in Australia recognised that poverty often was seen as an income measure but the Inquiry reiterated that it is also concerned with housing, employment, and the availability of services to communities (Taylor & Challen, 1998). As a consequence, poor people, besides material deprivation, experience limited educational opportunities, undesirable working conditions or unemployment, and a sense of powerlessness over their lives. Poverty can mean exclusion from social participation in mainstream life. Essentially, poor people do not own productive assets or possess marketable credentials (Connell, Johnston, & White, 1991). Debates remain about defining poverty as absolute or relative. The term absolute poverty came out of the early work of Seebohm Rowntree in Britain during the first part of the

twentieth century (Stitt & Grant, 1993). He described a poverty line below which people do not have sufficient food or shelter for subsistence. Relative poverty is more about the line which distinguishes the poor from others. This line varies according to the affluence of different societies.

> Australians often assume absolute poverty to be a Third-World phenomenon, but
> infant mortality and malnutrition rates among indigenous Australians indicate that this
> is not so. Indeed, some lifestyles in Australia are very different from the 'minimum
> acceptable standard of living' of the 1960s and 1970s. (Taylor & Challen, 1998, p. 34)

Altman and Hunter (1998), importantly, stressed the conceptual complexities in defining indigenous absolute or relative poverty by conventional measures. This is not just an epistemological issue but includes a consideration of how some Aboriginal people, as part of the efforts to be self-determining, choose to move from townships to small outstation communities. Usually the small communities are located in their traditional homelands, which are isolated from mainstream labour markets and opportunities for commercial ventures (Altman & Hunter, 1998). Measuring their poverty by standard social indicators, such as home ownership and low household populations, is problematic.

Understanding the Essence of Aboriginality

Aboriginal people believe they have always been in Australia and originated here (Bourke, 1994a; Stockton, 1995). It is estimated that there were up to a million original inhabitants speaking 250 languages with up to 600 dialect groups before colonisation. With colonisation Aboriginal people were perceived as an undifferentiated mass (Tonkinson, 1990). They were labelled as Natives, Aborigines, Blackfellows (Blackfellas) and later with more derogatory terms such as Abos, Niggers, Coons, or Boongs. Today, according to Reynolds (1999), the terms Whitefella and Blackfella are accepted and widely used in Aboriginal society. Government policy in the early 1900s determined Aboriginal people by their blood: full blood; half-caste; and quadroons. The use of these categories reflected how hereditary characteristics and culture were used for assimilation and absorption type policies. For non-Aboriginal Australians, colour, rather than race, was, and continues to be, the major criterion of Aboriginality (Tatz, 1982). Further, it seems non-Aboriginal Australians continue their antagonistic attitudes towards those Aboriginal people whose physical characteristics are not so visible or who do not live a traditional lifestyle (Eckerman, 1988a). Some believe that "authentic Aborigines are black, live in remote areas, and have exotic languages and cultural features" (Tonkinson, 1990, p. 208).

Based on some party political policies in Australia, there is evidence of racism in the nation. There are those who still order the world according to the claims of blood and soil (Béteille, 1998). However, "across Australia groups live in a cultural environment of Aboriginality ... albeit of different kinds and different manners ... [and it] is being lived daily" (Tatz, 1982, p. 21). According to Tonkinson (1990) the term Aboriginality is becoming more commonly used as a broad term to capture Aboriginal identity. Cultural markers such as their kinship group, sense of history, language, traditional practices, and place, particularly shape the self-identity of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have adopted several symbols, such as the Aboriginal flag and a National Aboriginal Week celebrations, to signify their separate but unified status (Tonkinson, 1990). As the Aboriginal novelist, Mudrooroo Nyoongah wrote, "it is the Aboriginal 'essence' which makes an Aborigine and it is this essence which states, restates, informs and reforms his/her and our culture and social reality" (Nyoongah, 1992, p. 157). Thus, for the purpose of the study, Aboriginal people are those who are of Aboriginal descent or who identify themselves as Aboriginal people and are accepted as such by other Aborigines (Bourke, 1994a; Tatz, 1982).

As detailed by Groome (1995a, 1995b) young Aboriginal peoples' self-identity is shaped by their Aboriginal family, their Aboriginal community, their peers, their school and the schooling system, and the wider world. Between and within these spheres of influence are tensions, conflicts, uncertainty, and confusion about what should be considered as valuable knowledge and accepted ways of behaving. Today, there are several influences, which can be positive or negative, which affect the identities of young Aboriginal people. Besides their Aboriginal families and communities, the self-identity of young people is moulded by significant people in their schools, school activities such as language, vocational programs, and Aboriginal cultural programs, role models, the media, and their contact with the police. While many Aboriginal students have positive self-identity, that is they know who they are (self-concept) and value who they are (self-esteem), it does not necessarily translate into self-efficacy about their belief to succeed at school. More often than not, the context of school is contrary to home values and ways of living. The interest in the study was not to examine the Aboriginality of students and their self-identity but to discern whether schools supported Aboriginal students' self-efficacy.

Understanding the Sense of Place

Harvey (1994) believed that a person's meaning of place is built on ideas of space, experience, and identity and so the meanings people attach to rural places are differently shaped from those formed about large population centres. Experiences physically distant

from the major and central resources of society, however, do not mean that the experiences are less valuable (Harvey, 1994). As Béteille (1998) noted, with particular reference to indigenous populations, besides language and dialect, habitat is a significant marker of group identity. This marker has been dislodged for Aboriginal people. The past mission policy, often with the best intentions, together with the reserve system in the Kimberley (Broome, 1994; National Library of Australia, 1980), have alienated Aboriginal people from their land, culture, kinship ties, protocols in relationships, lifestyle, and spirituality. Visiting homelands, carrying out cultural rituals, and maintaining ties with relatives were interrupted. In the Kimberley, pastoral leases that covered thousands of hectares, were carved out of traditional homelands and the basic conflict remains over land and how it is used. The settlers saw it as empty space to be taken and used for their purposes. The land for Aboriginal people is associated with their whole being, their mythology, and their spirituality. The sense of country associated with each clan or language group is part of their whole existence.

When a broad category of rural is retained, it is essential to be reminded that isolated and remote in Australia really means that people have restricted access to goods and services.

> The term rural Australia is being used by the Commonwealth Government in recent
> times very, very broadly, indeed, to encompass about ninety five percent (95%) of the
> Australian mainland. Indeed, it deals with virtually all of Australia that is outside the
> large metropolitan areas and is more than fifty kilometres remote from a sizeable
> community. ... My definition of rural Australia is the remote section of rural Australia
> and not the larger, provincial areas. (Scott, 1993, p.3)

The definition of rurality in Australia, as with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, is varied with a preference on definitions based on population figures in different locations. Rousseaux (1994) even questioned the fascination policy makers have with trying to distinguish between rural and urban schools. Budge, Hugo, and D'Rozario (1992) pointed out that rural and urban lifestyles are now more similar than ever because of communication and transport technologies. Rurality defined just on population figures is contested. Redman (1991) asserted that rurality in Australia has two dimensions, a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. The quantitative dimension refers to the circumstance associated with distance, isolation, costs, opportunities, and issues of time and space. The qualitative dimension describes the common experiences particular groups share as a community because of their location. Redman (1991) defined rurality in the following way.

Rurality is the perceptual setting adopted by those residing in rural ares. It is characterised by social, cultural, and occupational diversity and encompasses dimensions that are quantitatively and qualitatively different from those which characterise urban lifestyles. (p. 13)

People who live in remote areas recognise the constraints on their lives associated with their location. Many are adamant, however, that the interdependence of community members and the sense of belonging together outweigh the disadvantages (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988). The idea of community in rural areas is very strong with the threads of interpersonal life tightly linked and people in each community knowing many details about each other's lives (Nachtigal, 1994). A rural location creates a culture of small places where individuals are noticed (Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990).

While Redman (1991) and Rousseaux (1994) argued that categorisation by population does not capture the diversity of Australia's populations, the geographic classifications used by the ABS to categorise communities were used in the study. The Kimberley region, using ABS classifications, comprises three geographical units: urban centres (population cluster over 1,000 but less than 99,999); bounded localities (small centres of 200 to 999); and other rural outstations (smaller populations associated with activities such as pastoral leases). For the purpose of bounding the study, the 21 government schools across the Kimberley region formed the diverse sites for potential investigation, and were grouped according to the outlined ABS classifications. The government school sites in the Kimberley serve six urbanised towns of 1000 – 3000 residents and several remote centres of populations approximately between 100 – 200 people. For the purpose of the study, however, all schools in the Kimberley region were considered to be geographically isolated and remote, when using the broader rural category, although some schools serve small urbanised towns.

Using Social Categories in Educational Research

Any comprehensive analysis of poverty, Aboriginality, and location is beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, the concepts of gender, social class, and socioeconomic status are not used in the study to define social categories but it is acknowledged they are inextricably inter-related. Poverty, Aboriginality, and location are considered to be aspects of the broader social context of school communities in the Kimberley and numerous people, especially children, are marginalised in their day-to-day lives because they are poor, Aboriginal, or live in remote communities. It must be said, though, that not all Aboriginal people in the Kimberley are poor or unemployed. Some Aboriginal people have

a sense of pride in their identity, are in control of their lives, and move freely between cultures. Younger Aboriginal people tend not to have their parents' fears of white people and lack any sense of subordination (Reynolds, 1999). Further, many Aboriginal people have choice over their place of residency. We should not mistake being an Aboriginal person for being poor, being unfortunate, or being out of control of life decisions.

Rizvi (1995) cautioned that differences are socially created categories and no category is homogeneous. An assumption cannot be made that any category is unmarked by gender and class, for example, especially when any categorisation "effectively marginalises and silences the specific demands, issues and circumstance of localities" (Luke, Nakata, Singh, & Smith, 1993, p. 143). Community location is more than a geographical statement about school. It is a statement about how a school responds to the needs of its neighbourhood (Silver, 1994). Also, the reification of race is questionable according to the valuable work of Robert Miles (Banton, 1998; Miles, 1988). While some consider race as a natural and immutable category of difference, marked by obvious phenotypical features, others question it as an analytical category in the social sciences (Mason, 1986; Miles, 1988) and biologists have abandoned race as a legitimate scientific category of analysis (de Lepervanche & Bottomly, 1988). Race is a discredited concept and yet the term is still used in the analyses of social conditions (Reynolds, 1999).

Social categories can intersect in contradictory ways "not only in their complexity but the impossibility of predicting the effects of these dynamic relations in any formulaic way" (McCarthy, 1990, p. 87). Rizvi (1995) also contended that it is erroneous to consider all ideas and manifestations of disadvantage as equivalent. Rather, he advises that it is more important to identify the significant difference in particular situations. Furthermore, any dualistic view of wealth and poverty, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, and rural and non-rural life only contributes to a simplistic social analysis of school communities in the Kimberley. Social categories are non-synchronous, therefore, they can work together in different ways inside and outside the school (McCarthy, 1990). In educational research, therefore, social categories should not be reified. According to Comber (1998).

> Student populations are frequently described in terms of their socioeconomic *background*, family *background*, poor *background*, cultural *background*, minority *background*, linguistic *background*, and so on. ... While it may appear a neutral or even empty signifier, I argue that the word (with its attendant abstract adjectives) may unleash powerful, and at times, dangerous, effects in educational sites, and that it is increasingly problematic in terms of what it implies about students' (and teachers') lifeworlds and subjectivities. (p. 3, emphasis in original)

What was important in the study was that poverty, Aboriginality, and location were important considerations as aspects of the social milieux of communities that contribute to the uniqueness of schools in the Kimberley. This study attempted to determine how these dimensions significantly related to the education government schools provided in the Kimberley region. If students are marginalised from the schooling and education processes, how does this manifest itself within the school?

It is important to note that, in Australia, "while the concept of [SES] has dominated the interest of educational researchers ... poverty itself has not been so thoroughly researched in relationship to education" (Sturman, 1997, p. 69). Measures of SES are not measures of poverty. The Australian Education Council Review Committee (1991) reported that the economic indicators of SES (income and wealth) are less predictive of students staying on at school than social aspects of status (educational attainment, employment, occupational status). Income deprivation affects the education of many children in the Kimberley. Whether some children have adequate daily food is a concern. Consequent health problems, for example otitis media (middle ear infection), affects participation in classroom activities, and relationships with other members of the class (Australian Rural Education Research Association, 1997; Lowell, 1994; Ministry of Education 1990a). Stress and anxiety trouble parents, especially Aboriginal mothers, and sometimes children become the victims of neglect, violence, or abuse (Pettman, 1992; Walker, 1993). Increasingly, mental health problems are evident for Aboriginal people (Smallwood, 1994). Aboriginal children react differently to these stressful situations: they accept; they assume responsibility for the family; they leave home and live with a relative; or they escape into the towns or into some form of substance abuse. These situations impinge on the way an Aboriginal child chooses to participate in schooling and more specifically, to engage in learning. School learning, therefore, continues to present difficulties for many Aboriginal students (Groome, 1994; House of Representatives Select Committee, 1985).

The use of SES measures is evident in the expansive literature which suggests that the home background of students determines their educational and occupational futures (NBEET, 1999b; Sturman, 1997). However, NBEET (1999b) stated that "the definition and measurement of socioeconomic status and rurality or isolation are notoriously difficult" (p. 5.). A deficit model is implied in this type of research where student achievement is linked to their home background, their culture, or where they live. Involuntary minorities, those people who are brought into a society against their choice, experience deep and persistent difficulties with learning at school (Ogbu, 1992). Fundamentally, Valadian (1991) believed that education of Aboriginal students has failed to teach them how to cope with and overcome their hardships, hardships that are often due

to who they are, what they have, and where they live. And, once again, a deficit approach is implied in their education.

Implications of the Sociocultural Context of Schools for the Study

In this chapter some expositions of the economic, cultural, and geographic location factors that influence the communities involved in the study have been provided. The dimensions of poverty, Aboriginality, and location combine in multiple ways and link to the way education is provided in government schools in the Kimberley Education District. The interplay of these dimensions affects the daily operations of schools in the region and how schools and their communities interact. Why students succeed at school in varying degrees was a prime issue that required examination in the study, particularly in relation to the sociocultural context of schools.

In the study, the idea that school contexts could be statistically controlled in the research process was put aside. The view taken was that the contextual fabric of schools shapes the way they worked. Whether schools can improve the way they work, given their context, was taken to be a more productive line of inquiry in the study. Ultimately, the concern in the study was about how parents and children involved with the schools were treated respectfully and how students' lives were enriched because they went to school. It was imperative, however, to have some knowledge about poverty, Aboriginality, and location as theoretical constructs to support any interpretation of how these dimensions related to the work of schools. Furthermore, it was important to interpret the views of participants in the study to make judgements about how school and classroom level processes responded to students' personal, social, cultural, and residency circumstances. In the next chapter the educationally significant ideas that relate to poverty, Aboriginality, and geographic location are explored.

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONTEXT

Material Deprivation, Social Distance, and Sense of Community: Some of the Micro Realities of School Context

In chapter two various perspectives about the purposes of schooling and how individuals and groups are marginalised from mainstream society were explored. Links to the Kimberley sociocultural context were drawn. In this chapter another layer of thought is uncovered to further position the study. Several perspectives relating to the second conceptual referent of the study, the educational implications of the sociocultural contexts of schools, are examined. First, the way home-school-community relationships are developed in schools is discussed. Second, the complexities of meeting the individual difference of marginalised students in educational settings are highlighted and finally, the ways a school responds to individual difference is explored to understand how some curriculum and teaching practices become more privileged than others. It is these issues that now receive closer attention.

Home-School-Community Partnerships and Networks

Most parents want the best for their children. Poelina (1994) attested to this idea in relation to Aboriginal parents in the Kimberley context. What is different, is the relationship some parents have with the school system. Marginalised people are not other, different, exceptional, or necessarily a minority group. Schools do not merely register the effects of poverty, Aboriginality, or geographic location. Rather, parents and students try to deal with their encounters at school, a powerful, highly structured institution, and cope with their disempowerment due to these encounters. In schools, therefore, there needs to be an emphasis on building some cultural match between home and school (Connell, 1995).

> The family does not form the child's character and then deliver it ready-packaged to the doorstep of the school. The family is what the members do, a constantly continuing and changing practice, and as children go to and through school, that practice is reorganised around their schooling. For its part, the organisation of the school varies with the kinds of families in its catchment and the nature of their collective practices. (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982, p. 31)

Whether Aboriginal families in the Kimberley communities reorganise their lives around the school is a moot point. Also, it is worthwhile questioning how effectively schools organise to meet the needs of their families. However, what is claimed in the literature is that parent partnerships with the school are a vital part of students' success (Chrispeels, 1996; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). While educators cannot change some of the background circumstances of students, Epstein (1991, 1995), Sanders and Epstein (1998) and Walberg (1984, 1986), for example, found that schools working with parents to improve academic conditions in the home, such as homework facilities, is conducive to improving student achievement. Fraser, Walberg, Welch, and Hattie (1987) claimed while schools can improve the quantity and quality of instruction and the classroom environment, it is important to establish partnerships between school and home to increase the favourable influences in the home for student learning. There is much agreement in the literature that parents who help their children learn at home contribute to the school success of their children.

We must be reminded here that any research that suggests the homes of under-privileged students "need fixing up" must be viewed with caution. For example, most Aboriginal people in the Kimberley live in accommodation designed to suit a mainstream family unit but Aboriginal families are extended and all relatives are welcomed into any home. Usually space and opportunities for optimum home study are constrained. Any ideas that all households should be judged as appropriate using some white, middle-class standards, is not helpful in educational research associated with poverty because Chrispeels (1996), for example, contended that family structure does not limit the family being supportive of education. Rather, the point in hand is, as Doecke (1987) challenged: "How does the link between family circumstances and schooling actually work?" (p. 34). Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom (1993), however, believed that many homes require assistance to meet the educational needs of their children so it is the school in Aboriginal communities which should be a locus around which people can work (Reynolds, 1999). In the literature, as exampled by Maynard and Howley (1997), there is evidence of the varying approaches that have been adopted in communities to increase parent involvement in schools: programs that focus on parenting skills; developing home conditions to support children's school learning; home-school-home communication about school programs and children's progress; the use of volunteers in school, classroom, and excursion activities; and parent participation in school decision making. Therefore, it was of interest in the study to ascertain how school and community leaders worked together with families to improve their students' educational opportunities and outcomes.

Poelina (1994) provided evidence about parents in the Kimberley that they saw schools as providing better futures for their children and they praised and supported school innovation that benefited their children. Similarly, research reported by Chrispeels (1991, 1996) and Chrispeels and Coleman (1996) claimed that developing local policies and building staff capabilities to create home-school-community partnerships as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-supporters are important. Stoll and Fink (1996) suggested that good partnerships also must be built so that parents can be made aware of and helped to understand the changing nature of education. Poelina (1994) reinforced this notion about Kimberley communities. Many Aboriginal people in the past have had poor or limited experiences with education and the retention rates of Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12 continue to be of great concern in WA (Beresford, 1993b; Lake, Kerr, & King, 1987). Staying at school until Year 10 is a benchmark of success for many Aboriginal parents who have had little first-hand experiences of the demands of schooling, particularly in high school. There is, however, a tension about building home-school relationships. It cannot be assumed that all types of parental involvement in a school are beneficial. Schools may build bridges or buffers with their parents according to priorities in their core work (Boyd, 1996). How this tension is resolved in Kimberley schools, where many parents feel alienated from the school environment, was of interest in the study.

In WA, the involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools is mostly confined to informal, social gatherings and special school events. Their participation in school affairs and decision-making is minimal (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington, & Richer, 1999). This type of participation in schools, however, is typical of many parent bodies associated with WA schools. The significance is that most Aboriginal people feel they have no contribution to make in the operation of their schools (Poelina, 1994). For both schools and classrooms to be effective for Aboriginal students in particular, the sociocultural context of the learners and the historically situated background of their families and past generations must be acknowledged (Harslett et al., 1999; Smallwood, 1994, 1995). For example, excluding the role of grandparents as storytellers, reinforcers of social relationships, and providers of emotional security in the learning environment for Aboriginal children, cannot be underestimated, especially in the early years of schooling. There has been little appreciation of how schooling has intellectually and emotionally separated Aboriginal children from their culture (Smallwood, 1995; Valadian, 1991) and as Poelina (1994) reported, Aboriginal parents in the Kimberley context deplored teachers' lack of knowledge of understanding about Aboriginal culture and history.

In all schools in the Kimberley most teaching staff are non-Aboriginal, although Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) assist in classrooms. Some research in Australia suggests that these workers are used with varying degrees of effectiveness (Aboriginal Pedagogy, 1991). The presence of AEWs in classrooms is important to help Aboriginal children adjust to the schooling process and assist non-Aboriginal teachers understand the socialisation process of the children. Much of the socialisation of Aboriginal children in the Kimberley is still linked closely to traditional ways. These processes are similar to those described for kin groups in the work of Malin (1990). Children are very strongly affiliated to immediate kin and extended families and their social knowledge about their worlds has grown from conversations and story telling about family genealogy and geographic origins. The transmission of knowledge for Aboriginal children is part of their day-to-day human interactions (Collins, 1993). Groome (1995a), however, explained that it is impossible to generalise about Aboriginal families, but, he believed that "Aboriginal adults have a common saying that a child needs to know who they are and where they come from, highlighting the value placed on kin and on an attachment to a distinct home territory" (p. 18). From the evidence available on home-school relationships in Aboriginal communities, there appears to be great scope for schools to work more closely with their families. In the study it was considered important to investigate the strength of home-school relationships to ascertain if cooperative and mutually respectful relationships existed.

Community and School Relationships

Alongside the home-school partnership issues is the one concerned with the role the schools play in contributing to a sense of community. Cox (1995) and Putnam (1993) declared that in today's world there must be more attention given to strong civil societies. There is a need to establish networks of close support, social trust, and cooperation in communities to support children as they grow up (Coleman, 1987). In rural communities, especially Aboriginal communities, a sense of place and community is especially binding. In mixed cultural communities, however, "beyond meeting for commercial or social need, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians rarely meet" (Groome, 1995a, p. 19). It is important then, as envisioned by Goodlad (1997), that schools play a role in making sense of the interconnections among individuals and the collectivity, the notion that is central to sociocultural theory. Sergiovanni (1994, 1995) suggested that schools needed to become caring communities where everyone knows each other so that learning at school is a collaborative process. Place-base education, so to speak, is about preparing citizens and promoting community interests. Schools should be places where people are bonded to one another by beneficial relationships and where they share ideas and values that they are

committed to. Boston (1999) believed that the education provider in a community must meet the needs of that community. "This puts the school in the community rather than the community in the school" (p. 37). Maynard and Howley (1997) further claimed that "parent involvement programs in rural communities work best when they respond to particular features of the communities they serve" (n. p.). Even if the school is small, it provides a ready venue for cultural and public activities in rural communities (Capper, 1993). Miller (1993) demonstrated that the school can support community development, especially in a time of rural decline, because it needs to address school priorities by capitalising on community and family ties. In a case study of a Navajo community in Arizona, McCarty (1989) showed how the school and the community can work together to design class-based and community-based programs to improve the educational outcomes of their children. In other promising projects cited by Maynard and Howley (1997) efforts in Montana, West Virginia, and South Carolina have made progress to improve home-school-home interactions. Teachers in Australian rural locations face huge demands from the community and there is a high expectation of them to participate in all community life (Boylan et al., 1993). In remote schools, the teachers usually are significant interpreters of the outside world. In many instances these teachers provide the only models of Standard Australian English (SAE) for indigenous students. It is the school, then, that has some responsibility to "support the richness, vitality, and diversity of contemporary Aboriginal society [which] is hidden from most white Australians" (Groome, 1995a, p. 19). In the Kimberley schools a close home-school-community link would be conducive to supporting students' learning in the school environment and this issue was integral to the study.

Historically, rural education has been designed to skill students to leave their communities. Not all children want to leave their home and Aboriginal children, especially, can find the experience traumatic. Hektner (1995), in his study of rural students across the USA, found that some rural students can lower their educational aspirations because they do not wish to move away from home. Thus, the same question arises for Aboriginal students in the Kimberley. Most students have ties that bind them to both their families and their community. However, rural education must equip students with the capacity to move to the city if they wish but also allow for those students who are happy, or need to, remain in their home place. They need the skills to create their livelihood (Hass, 1991). Both purposes must be fulfilled and community and school partnerships are crucial in this endeavour. Beresford (1993b) also argued that is not just up to the school to take responsibilities for students in a rural community. All government agencies that support a small community need to cooperate and overcome demarcations in their roles and responsibilities in order to benefit students. Crowson and Boyd (1998) suggested that these challenges are difficult to face but three diverse elements must be brought together. First,

there is the need for the coordination of bureaucratic professional services. Second, there is the need to reconcile community development strategies, which are often of a political nature, with the availability of work opportunities in economically depressed communities. Third, there is a need to search for workable approaches that allow schools to be sites of action for services to their communities. Thus, the purposes for schooling in the Kimberley schools, as part of their wider sociocultural contexts, provoked contentious thought.

Catering for Individual Differences in Education

In What Ways do Students Experience Educational Disadvantage because of their Personal Circumstances?

Political conservatism has pervaded much of the 1900s when compulsory, mass education in Australia has been considered the avenue to bring poor children under control. They needed to learn how to conform to the dominant norms of society so they could improve themselves (Connell et al., 1991). The motivation was the same for the education of Aboriginal children, made compulsory in WA in the 1940s. Only then, were Aboriginal children allowed to attend government schools provided they met acceptable standards of personal hygiene (Mounsey, 1980). The role of schools was to create social cohesion especially for errant children or children who did not conform to the mainstream way of living. Unfortunately, this type of thinking about some children still emerges within schools. Some people believe that:

> The disadvantaged miss out on affluence because they are different – in values, motivation, linguistic skills or cultural knowledge – from the middle class, and therefore lack some things needed for achievement in school. Social theory thus underpin[s] a 'deficit' understanding of educational disadvantage. (Connell et al., 1991, p. 27)

Dent and Hatton (1996) claimed in their Australian case study of education and poverty that teachers were derogatory in their comments about poor children and especially held deficit views of most Aboriginal children. Teachers linked aspects of students' home lives, such as poor nutrition, inability to save money for educational materials, and a poor standard of language, to making their work more difficult (Dent & Hatton, 1996). These researchers also found that teachers related the lack of school achievement to deficiencies in the children, such as their limited experiences and their inability to persist, concentrate, and work independently.

This type of thinking has been supported by the culture-of-poverty idea which became a popular view in the 1960s. Great importance was attached to educational credentials, and from a liberal political position, positive discrimination to provide equal educational services justified assistance to children from poor neighbourhoods because they were not succeeding at school. The purpose of additional resources to schools was to remove the predictive power of background characteristics such as poverty and race (Hass, 1991) and intervention education programs were mounted. Headstart in America (Zigler & Valentine, 1979) and, in Australia, the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP), and a range of Aboriginal programs are examples. Intentions of the programs involve compensating for children's educational deficits, especially their language skills. While positive discrimination programs, based on a cultural deprivation model, attract additional resources for some students, students remained positioned in bounded categories adding weight to their continued marginalisation.

Despite all the extensive efforts in financing education, it is suggested in the Coleman Report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al., 1966), a landmark study conducted in the USA, that schools have little independent impact on students' achievement. The inequalities that children bring to school with them persist, in the main, to the end of their schooling because schools cannot overcome the way society works (Lawton, 1994). How educational disadvantage is constructed for students is a thorny issue. Educational disadvantage is concerned with the lack of opportunities that deny students full access, participation, and success in their schooling. It is not to say, however, that the lack of opportunity is due to out-of-school experiences or circumstances. It may be due to in-school opportunities. Being poor, being Aboriginal, or living in isolated locations does not mean the same as an inability to learn. It may mean that the school is unable to work effectively with these circumstances. Orr (1995) believed that schools are vital to breaking the cycle of poverty for children and need to work in different and better ways to support students from less privileged backgrounds.

In What Ways do Students Experience Educational Disadvantage because they Attend Rural Schools?

Rural schools are different from other schools because of their distinctive size, the scale on which education takes place, and their isolation from support structures present in more populated areas (Hass, 1991). Educational programs may be less comprehensive because economies of scale are stretched. Darnell (1981) and Hatton (1994) asserted that not all rural children are disadvantaged, although in Australia, comparative research about achievement of rural and city students is inconclusive (Doecke, 1987). Rural schooling is

about amplifying the educational advantage of children (Darnell, 1981). "Rural location is unlikely, on its own, to produce inequities of the type typically cited in the literature on rural disadvantage" (Hatton, 1994, p. 243). However, because rural communities are often perceived as resource poor (Capper, 1993), it is believed that the differences associated with rural schools can be accommodated with additional resources, especially specialist human resources, and a curriculum that is suited to a locality

Resources in rural schools is not the only issue that is of concern. Teaching approaches and students' achievement are other issues discussed in the literature. Huang and Howley (1993) in Alaska and Bell and Sigsworth (1987) in Britain emphasised that small peer groups in rural schools, in comparison to larger urban schools, provided a range of significant others, differing in maturity and status, which is worthwhile for students' learning. According to Smylie and Perry (1998) small schools foster organisational cohesion, strong communication, and social relationships that are conducive to positive personalised teaching and learning situations. The problems of student alienation and detachment are more easily overcome. Lake et al. (1987), in their study of rural schools in WA, however, pointed out that multi-age classes demand complex management skills which many inexperienced teachers in rural schools did not possess. Moreover, the opportunities for mentoring by experienced staff to improve their technical repertoires were limited. In WA there is evidence that schools attempt to offer health education, life skills, and pre-vocational programs, especially for Aboriginal students (Lake et al., 1987) but generally, Aboriginal children's failure at school is explained by the disadvantaged or deprived nature of their homes and communities (Dent & Hatton, 1996; Groome, 1994). Educators have tended to reduce the complexities of racial inequality to two concerns. How educable are minority groups? How can we explain the differences between achievement scores on standardised tests for different students? (McCarthy, 1990, McConnochie, 1982). These ideas about minority groups are the very foundation of educational programs to compensate for children's deficiencies, their language, experiences, and motivations, their backgrounds, and where they live. What is not recognised, for example, is that from a very early age, Aboriginal children develop their sense of identity as separate from white society because of their distinctive language, worldview, and social values. They learn about dispossession, survival, indifference, negative media images, and racism (Groome, 1995a).

From the literature it would seem that where children live causes some educational disadvantage for them. Lack of teaching expertise and a range of curriculum offerings are aspects which preclude students from equal opportunities in their learning. But let us be clear. It is not the location that is deficit but inequality for students may develop because

the schooling system is unable to modify its structures and procedures to address location issues. Also, rural schools can be exemplary or imperfect, but often at the school and classroom levels there is a constrained capacity to accommodate economic, social, and cultural differences and diversity. In the main, the response in schools since the 1960s has been to compensate for differences children bring with them to school because they have been perceived as social and cultural deficits. The deficit model as applied to rural schools has been based on the premise that the location of schools, and the children in them, are lacking in some way. In order to understand inequality in rural schools, closer consideration is now given to curriculum delivery. It appears that various curriculum perspectives shape the way system, school, and classroom responses are developed to accommodate individual differences.

Curriculum Responses to Individual Differences

Compensatory Curriculum: Trying to Fix the Problems

Cultural and economic explanations of poverty have been progressively reflected in curriculum theorising since the 1960s, although, curriculum responses to poverty, Aboriginality, and location often have been influenced by varying political reactions. Compensatory programs to combat poverty, for example, a product of the 1960s, were developed with good intentions about breaking the cycle of poverty in families. It was considered that people in poverty held low aspirations for their children and did not support them to achieve at school (Sturman, 1997). Also, it seemed that "community problems as varied as unemployment, family poverty, domestic violence, family breakdown, sexual abuse, hunger and malnutrition, transience, and emotional deprivation, inexorably translated themselves into social and intellectual difficulties at school" (Johnston, 1995, p. 33). The purpose of compensatory programs was to accommodate children's inherent environmental deficits and to fit them with the requisites for educational success (Reid, 1995). From a remedial perspective "we see the curriculum as innocent of producing disadvantage or injustice, the problem (which is not to say the fault) lies with the children" (Willis, 1998, p. 11). There is abundant literature that provides evidence that the compensatory approach is mostly unsuccessful. Any educational response which centres on remedial action to improve academic skills or to overcome connected problems is doomed to fail (Johnston, 1995). The literature about compensatory curriculum is decorated with a litany of failure.

Relevant and Meaningful Curriculum: Trying to Meet the Needs of Students

During the 1970s curriculum development for so-called disadvantaged students took a more liberal political turn because compensatory approaches centred too much on the deficits of the child. The discourse about curriculum progressed to one of meaning and relevance (Reid, 1995). It was thought that the curriculum needed to be less academic, less abstract, and suited more to the needs of children. Willis and Johnston (1998) stated the issue clearly.

> On the one hand, students may be provided with different curricula which are considered appropriate to them. On the other hand, they might be provided with a common curriculum and fixed time, and expected to achieve differently. In either case, the expectation is that there will be different outcomes which reflect students' different abilities. (p. 126)

Willis (1998) described such an approach as non-discriminatory (non-racist or non-sexist upholding the perspective of a fair go for equal success). Such an approach means that, even though teachers may adapt their pedagogical approaches and respond to students' contexts and experiences, children in some social groups remain in a worse position than other children (Willis, 1998). Connell (1991) concurred that children alienated from the mainstream curriculum through a differentiated curriculum are discriminated against. Approaches that result in a reduced curriculum or reduced outcomes, and where students are separated and treated unequally, are not desirable. Eventually, the achievement of students is distilled as to why they cannot cope with the mainstream curriculum. Connell (1991) termed such a curriculum response as "curriculum ghettos" because meaningful and relevant curriculum still fails to interrupt the two curriculum cultures. These are an academic and an alternative curriculum, which sort students into those who will work with their minds and those who will work with their hands (Reid, 1995; Murphy, 1992b). Banks (1993) agreed that the construction of knowledge in the curriculum, influenced by factors of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, should not shape students' lives by denying them a position to understand the nature of wealth, prestige, status, and power in their social world.

Empowering Curriculum: Trying to Provide Control over One's Life

Empowering curriculum for minority groups became a focus in the 1980s and resided with a socialist political perspective. Kreisburg (1992) considered empowerment to be the capacity of people or groups to control and change their lives. Moreover, Kreisburg (1992)

believed that the empowerment of the individual should be for the benefit of the community with the connection between individuals and the community being forged through dialogue and collaboration. Once again, this conception is associated with sociocultural theory, however, the empowering curriculum can be viewed from two perspectives.

One perspective, as described by Banks (1993), Johnston (1995), and Willis (1998) is the inclusive curriculum. The curriculum is envisioned as one that is culturally appropriate and built on the life experiences and history of students. "The educational task is to provide children with a curriculum which gives value and validity to their own knowledge and experience and which acknowledges and respects diversity and differences between social groups" (Willis, 1998, p. 14). But Nakata (1995) warned that if the cultural difference agenda for curriculum does not improve student outcomes then something is seriously wrong with culturally sensitive pedagogy. The agenda is not sufficient in itself to improve student standards because cultural difference can soften rather than strengthen the curriculum for students. For example, there are different views about which languages should be taught in schools. In a newspaper report ("Tackling Aboriginal Problems", 1999) there was a strong claim that Aboriginal languages and culture should not be taught in WA schools. Aboriginal educators such as Nakata (1995) believed that the way forward for his people was for them to use the language and perspectives of those who have constructed indigenous people as marginalised. Aboriginal people need to make themselves understood in the mainstream context. He sees that the teaching of English is paramount for Aboriginal student success in schools. Their own languages should be used to help them understand how the English language works. Education should be a tool to understand one's position in the wider context.

> [We] do not stand in a separate domain from the Western world. We are not just Black
> and others White. We are part of the global picture, and part of the Australian
> economy. We are subjected to internal and well as external influences on a day to day
> basis. We have been since the contact period. We interface with Western practices and
> ways daily in all areas of our lives, and we deceive ourselves if we think that we don't.
> But we know so little about how we interface with Western knowledges, how we slip
> in and out of different language codes, and how we intersect traditional knowledge
> and Western technology to assist how we weaken or strengthen our position. (Nakata,
> 1995, p. 33)

Also, Nakata believed that indigenous students must be able to work with non-indigenous learning strategies to cope with or access higher levels of educational attainment.

A second perspective of the empowering curriculum, which S. Willis (1998) termed a socially critical perspective, grew from the work of people such as Apple (1982) and Giroux (1980, 1983) in America and P. Willis (1981) in Britain. Giroux (1989) believed that curriculum work should follow Deweyian principles (Dewey, 1916) which laid the foundation for schools to teach a curriculum based on democratic values and individual differences. Giroux (1989) viewed schools as deeply implicated in producing those aspects of the dominant culture that serve to reproduce inequalities that positioned and privileged some but not others. Hence, schools needed to allow students to learn about democracy and empowerment so that the voices of the marginalised were not silenced in the traditional educational setting. There should be a curriculum that moves from correspondence and reproduction to resistance and transformation (Hargreaves, 1982). Hatton (1994), in a case study of an Australian rural school considered to be disadvantaged, showed how a school's school-based programs were successful in educating students about social transformation rather than social reproduction. Based on these ideas there is an attempt in the curriculum to critically analyse the social and economic interests of the least advantaged and increase their power to do something about it (Connell, 1991, 1995). Connell used the term "counter-hegemonic curriculum" to describe this type of curriculum. At the practical level, while an emphasis is placed on the learning styles of different children and their sociocultural context, the empowering curriculum idea often fails because teachers, in the main, are unable to find ways to turn curriculum content on its head. There are difficulties for them in defining the valued knowledge to be taught and how this knowledge should be taught from different social and cultural perspectives.

The radial aspect of this curriculum perspective is that students draw upon their own culture to respond to schooling which means teaching and learning are shaped by the struggle of resistant students (Reid, 1995). Connell (1995) regarded this type of curriculum as legitimate because marginalised students are part of a society and suffer the most severe effects of the larger pattern. They are not outside of the pattern. While the rhetoric is liberating, the idea of resistance theory at the practical level is based on scant empirical evidence. One substantial study conducted by Anyon (1981a, 1981b) termed resistance as ranging from non-compliance to teacher directions to placing an insect in a student's desk! Dent and Hatton (1996) found in their Australian study that discipline and control of disadvantaged students were a major concern for teachers. Teachers' main survival strategy was to be absent from work. Therefore, what aspects of students' resistance should be included in the curriculum? Does a student have to be resistant in order to be critical? Where does the line come between resistance as a theoretical construct and perverse student behaviour? Viegas Fernandes (1988) questioned whether the rejection of

intellectual work, dropping out of school, and violating school norms be accepted as the basis of social change and access to higher levels of knowledge. Thus, the counter-hegemonic curriculum struggles for legitimisation in schools. There is uncertainty about how to incorporate into the curriculum the knowledge, language, language codes, learning styles, and the prejudices that different students encounter in their day-to-day lives.

Outcomes-Based Education: Trying to Find Out What Students Have Learnt

Currently, in many countries there is curriculum reform concerned with outcomes-based education. This type of reform in WA has resulted in a mandated curriculum for every school in the State which defines the outcomes all student are expected to achieve. There is wide-ranging use of the term (Brady, 1996; Forster, 1996; Spady, 1993, 1994; Spady & Marshall; 1991; Willis & Kissane, 1995a, 1995b) but Willis and Johnston (1998) articulated a conception that is acknowledged in WA.

> Rather than focussing on what should be in the curriculum taught to students,
> outcomes-based approaches focus on what students are expected to be like as a result
> of those experiences. These descriptions of expected outcomes are intended to form
> the basis of curriculum planning and evaluation. (p. 123)

At the same time, Lingard (1990) believed that economic uncertainty in Australia has given rise to a move back to the rigour of the competitive academic curriculum. Lingard (1990) suggested that this move has "reduced the significance of equity and restructured its meaning in a weaker direction so that equity largely becomes synonymous with a notion of fairness for each individual" (p. 157).

Influential educators in Australia, however, have tried to meet the push for accountability and the struggle for equality by promoting more equal outcomes in the curriculum for all students. For example, in WA the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998) emphasised that all students should achieve the same outcomes. The accountability of schools rests with them to ensure the conditions necessary for student success exist (Willis & Johnston, 1998). In the Curriculum Framework, outcomes are expressed both as statements in subject areas and as cross-curriculum understandings, skills, attitudes, and values. O'Neil (1994) also believed a curriculum should encompass these two sets of outcomes. Alongside expecting the same outcomes for all students, there is the notion of inclusivity in the Curriculum Framework because it is expected that the knowledge and values, culture, and experiences of all children will be included in curriculum development and delivery. This means teachers need to include strategies in their teaching repertoires

which incorporate the learning styles of different students so that they can acquire the defined valued knowledge (Reid, 1995). The central tenet of the curriculum reform is that there can be common outcomes but they can be achieved through uncommon curricula (Willis & Johnston, 1998) because different students vary in their learning styles, rates, motivations and predispositions. Moreover, communities differ "because of geographic, economic, topological, and cultural considerations [which should] allow for the prospect that students' demonstrations of their knowledge will be grounded in these contextual differences" (Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 489).

Hughes (1993) further suggested that the curriculum for the future must be constructively balanced to meet the needs of an industrialised democracy and those of individuals to shape their futures. The curriculum should not just have vocational ends but also be about developing citizenship and personal development. There are, of course, opponents to the common outcomes, uncommon curricula theory (Smythe & Dow, 1997). Their argument is that such an approach reflects a correspondence between education and economic goals through curriculum manipulation. The technical rationality of assessing students according to outcome descriptions, a predictable standardised way of monitoring teaching and learning, overshadows the realities of schools and classrooms which are stamped by doubt, uncertainty, and unpredictability. The added argument is that assessing generic outcomes can create a link between benchmarking of student achievement and allocation of resources to schools.

Curriculum Reform: What Does it Mean for Rural Locations?

As noted before, government schools in WA are directed to take on more responsibility and accountability for their operations. Furthermore, the current curriculum initiatives stress the expected outcomes for all students. However, as Hass (1991) highlighted in American rural schools, such an approach to student outcomes requires implementation that rural schools may not have the capacity to deliver. Some commentators in WA go as far as saying, "it would be no exaggeration to suggest that country education in is a shambles" (Barrass, 1999, p. 9). The vital issue, which has been pressed for several decades by commentators such as Darnell (1981), Karmel (1985b), and Walton (1993), is that students in rural schools should receive worthwhile education. Location should not be a factor in differentiating the curriculum although rural schools' access to urban type resources, such as museums, libraries, and further education facilities, restricts the way in which rural schools can enhance programs and learning opportunities (Capper, 1993). The dilemma here is whether the curriculum in rural schools should be the transposed curriculum from urban schools or a curriculum suitable for rural students. For many

experts, rural education needs to be about playing a vital role in community development (Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Capper, 1993; Maynard & Howley, 1997; Randell, 1981; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990; Whitfield, 1981). The curriculum should be predicated on entrepreneurship and ecologically sustainable principles (Nachtigal, 1994) through a locally relevant curriculum. Arguably, equality of educational provision, equality in opportunity, and student outcomes for students in geographically isolated schools cannot be considered in the same way as for urban and suburban schools. According to Nachtigal (1994)

> we need to: (1) to reconsider how we think about the purposes of schooling; (2) shift the focus of the curriculum, at least in part from a generic, national-focussed curriculum to one that focusses on the local community context; (3) educate students to create their own jobs rather being prepared to find jobs, and (4) to use the investments in facilities and other resources available in the school to support entrepreneurship and community development. (p. 146).

Nevertheless, as Howley (1991) suggested, "the realities of the economic structure impose a limit on how many rural students can become successful entrepreneurs" and "the hope of self-employment is a distracting delusion that serves to legitimate wide inequalities" (p. 109). Vining (1997) exposed how the rapid decline of rural populations is affecting the work of schools in countries like Australia and New Zealand and constrains the employment opportunities for rural youth. Howley (1991) further pointed to the dilemma about the purposes of rural education. Is it a view that "pits rural education as a cultural act (the preservation and extension of culture) against education as an economic end (global domination and integration)" (p. 116). Haller and Virkler (1993) found in a study in rural areas in the USA that it is not that rural students do not aspire for jobs but it is the rural labour market that can determine the nature of their aspirations. Quaglia and Cobb (1996) went further with the notion of aspiration for rural students. They contended that schools should help students understand the relevance of what they are doing in the present to what is in the future for them. It is well and good that students are encouraged to dream about their future but in some contexts, as Valadian (1991) emphasised for Aboriginal students, learning to survive is just as important.

Thus, for schools in the Kimberley there are conflicting interests about the purposes of their schools. Unlike urban schools, the goals for education in geographically isolated schools are more complex and they need to be achieved with fewer resources and a flexible curriculum. At the end, Howley (1991) believed that the main purpose of education is to enable students to make meaning of the world and the same can be said for

schools in the Kimberley. A common outcomes, uncommon curricula approach would accommodate this purpose of rural schooling but Howley (1991) reminded us of some of the realities. Given the constraints of location, poverty, and small-scale school sites, funding must be generous. Highly skilled teachers are required. Technological advances need to be used as part of an information based society and resources need to be channelled to meet students' educational needs such as occupational training. This reminder is significant. One of the bigger problems in the Kimberley is the costs involved in providing technological delivery systems that Barker (1991) and Lundin (1994) found, based on successful initiatives in American and Australian rural schools, are so vital for education and training.

Another problem is that teachers are reluctant to move to the Kimberley region to teach. There has been a long tradition of retaining teachers in rural locations in WA which are considered less favourable than the city or larger towns (Lake et al., 1987). "Successive State governments ... have failed to offer any real incentives to get a constant stream of experienced chalkies flowing into the backblocks of WA" (Barrass, 1999, p. 9). Boylan et al. (1993) found in their two-year study that retaining teachers in Australian rural schools related to motivating factors associated with the classroom, the school, the community, and their own family circumstances. Some negative influences which mitigated against teachers staying in schools were "a lack of personal privacy, economic costs associated with the isolation from services and facilities, a conservatism in outlook in some rural communities, access to tertiary education for their children, and a lack of cultural activities both for their children and for themselves" (Boylan et al., 1993, p. 127). Furthermore, there is a more recent trend for teachers to prefer a city lifestyle ("Troubles in the Bush", 1999). The survey conducted in the Kimberley about teacher stress levels, mentioned in chapter one, confirmed these ideas. Thus, the study directed attention to the important role that the community plays in attracting, retaining, and welcoming teachers to their community. Research in Australia and Canada confirms that teachers who remain in their rural schools are stable in their family life and actively join community life (Boylan & Bandy, 1994). Successful curriculum implementation in rural schools is linked to teacher expertise and adequate resources. In the Kimberley, success of any specific curriculum approach demands that teachers are skilled at extraordinary levels, both in their social and professional lives, and that they work in schools that are highly resourced.

Curriculum Reform: What Does it Mean for Aboriginal Students?

It seems that there are conflicting ideas about the purpose of education for Aboriginal students. Some indigenous communities see that access to mainstream society is through

mainstream education, while others wish to maintain the cultural integrity of their communities. Many want both of these things and argue that the two are not incompatible (Kalantzis, 1995). Scott (1993), therefore, believed that students should be encouraged to be bicultural so that various tracks to different opportunities are opened. Luke et al. (1993) argued that the fundamental need of Aboriginal students, apart from schooling for skill development or education for cultural maintenance, is to develop knowledges and competencies for the information economy. Keeffe (1990) also argued that education should be concerned with sociocultural context because overcoming poverty, unemployment, and alienation is manifest in a community domain rather than in cultural autonomy. Others (Education for Social Justice Research Group, 1994; Singh, 1990) maintained that education lies in a resistance and empowerment approach to curriculum provision and delivery. Once again, a common outcomes, uncommon curricula approach would accommodate the differing purposes of education for Aboriginal students but there are further issues to be considered. These issues are explored in some detail in the next section of this chapter. They relate not only to Aboriginal children but also to any children marginalised in education because of what they have, who they are, and where they live.

Shaping Classroom Practices to Meet Individual Differences

On one level, there can be different ways that schools may envision and implement the curriculum. How a school shapes the curriculum to respond to individual difference is only one set of planning decisions it makes. Significant decisions need to be made by classroom teachers about the way they might implement a specific curriculum approach in their classrooms. While all school planning may seem to be in hand, many students may continue to be unsuccessful in their learning. There are particular individual differences in the Kimberley schools which must be addressed at the classroom level. Issues associated with language, worldview, social relationships, learning interactions, learning styles, and pedagogical and assessment practices are examined in this next part of the chapter to ascertain how the learning of each individual might be optimised.

Appreciating Students' Language

It is important to appreciate the richness and profundity of the differences between social and cultural groups such as their language. In Britain during the 1960s, the work of Basil Bernstein, concerning the codes and control of language in relation to social groups was influential. He asserted that different social groups use distinct forms of language, a restricted code or an elaborated code (Bernstein, 1977). The elaborated code is used in schools and is intellectually and emotionally complex. Children who do not have

experience with the elaborated code struggle to understand it. Heath (1983) in America confirmed this work. It is not to say, however, that these researchers concluded that some people had a language deficit, although this was often assumed in the compensatory curriculum response at the time. Instead, the work emphasised that there was a social distance between the language practices of some communities and those of the school. Over the last three decades there has been:

> an explosion of knowledge concerning the inter-relatedness of language and thought, of the ways in which children create their own first language in interaction with the significant persons in their environment, of the development of the cognitive abilities of very young children, and of the particular demands which the language of schooling requires of them. (Kale, 1988, p. 45)

Thus, the language practices of Aboriginal children create distance between them and the school and difficulties in learning. Second language learners are always trying to catch up to a moving target within the curriculum (Cummins, 1998).

Even though the traditional languages of the north of Australia are dying, oral rather than written language remains a highly significant feature of Aboriginal identity (Whittaker, 1999). Traditionally, language differentiated one group or clan and their country boundaries from another. Today, in the Kimberley four main language families and areas have been determined (Jones, 1999). Thus, Aboriginal children may use, or be exposed to, a Creole (Kriol is the term used in the Kimberley), Aboriginal English, a traditional language/s, and General and Standard Australian English (Ministry of Education, 1990a). Creoles are recognised as viable languages (Hudson, 1984) and when full Kriol is spoken in the Kimberley it mostly is not understood by non-Aboriginal people. Growing numbers of Aboriginal people speak varieties of English as their first language, and most Aboriginal children use their Kriol or Aboriginal English in their daily lives, at home, and in the informal aspects of school and classroom interactions (Hudson & Taylor, 1987). It is strongly argued by Hudson (1984) that language teaching in Kimberley schools should be based on the premise that English is Aboriginal children's second language. It should be recognised that many "children are quite fluent bilinguals and trilinguals – a fact that might unfortunately not be perceived by teachers or other government workers who have daily contact with them" (Ministry of Education, 1990a, p. 105). In general, teachers are poorly prepared to identify the precise differences between Kriol, Aboriginal English, and General Australian English. Cummins (1998) pointed to a similar situation across the world where indigenous populations have poor facility with the mainstream language. Consequently, teachers are unable to help Aboriginal children in a worthwhile way to

acquire new language forms for appropriate use in unfamiliar situations (Ministry of Education, 1990a). The issue is that time at school slips away for Aboriginal students to engage in rich curriculum experiences. Their English skills do not allow them to keep up with the spiralling increase of content in the curriculum because they spend an inordinate amount of time grappling with the English language, especially it written forms.

Appreciating Students' Worldview and Boundary Crossings

Kearins (1985) debated persuasively that "while it is to be expected that strong similarities exist in most areas of human potential, differences in emphasis or thinking style engendered by different cultural conditioning may be extremely important in teaching" (pp. 65-66). McConvell (1991) discussed that it is difficult to compare cultures because words and "metaphors cannot adequately express the way cultures in contact interact with each other and change" (p. 13). Most non-Aboriginal attempts to describe what is Aboriginal, for example, fall back on early anthropological approaches that emphasise the conservative rather than changing nature of a culture (McConvell, 1991). It must be noted that Keeffe (1992) and McConvell (1991) warned that generalisation of cultural descriptions of Aboriginal groups from different locations should not be made, especially between rural and urban groups or between different cultural groups. Many non-indigenous Australians now recognise that the worldview of Aboriginal people is not mono-cultural. However, diverse cultural groups with differing social practices, languages, geographic locations, and varying contacts with non-indigenous Australians do have some common and distinctive ways of knowing (Christie, 1992). For example, "relations in time are largely understood in terms of spatial location" in Aboriginal cosmologies and they "memorialise the past through myth, narrative and names" (Silverman, 1997, pp. 114-115). Traditionally oriented Aboriginal children such as many in the Kimberley do not ask "why" and "how" questions. Like Aboriginal children observed in other studies, they are more interested in "who" and "where" to build their conceptual knowledge (Christie, 1992; Harris 1981).

Different social and cultural groups find that boundaries exist around their ways of knowing and acting. To cross these boundaries to become a member of another group (or community, the term used in sociocultural theory) can be challenging. This is especially so for people faced with the hardened boundaries usually associated with belonging to a certain racial group (Banton, 1998). Therefore, school learning may not just be difficult for Aboriginal children, or any child for that matter, because of their background social experiences, but because, when it is taught as a Western subculture, it requires them to cross several cultural borders. It can be further compounded when subjects, such as

science, are bounded by a Western value system (Aikenhead, 1996, 1997, 1998; Giroux, 1992; Michie, 1997). Usually a dominant Western perspective is assumed in the content and the teaching of the curriculum rather than considering that conceptual ideas can be understood from multiple worldviews (Christie, 1988; Fleer, 1997; Linkson, 1999). Schooling for indigenous children, particularly those who retain strong links to their traditional ways of living in the Kimberley, requires careful planning. Moreover, there are different requirements for planning in schools where all students are from indigenous backgrounds from the planning requirements in schools where indigenous and non-indigenous cultures are mixed. As Harris (1990) urged, there must be a crossing of cultural borders but the crossings are not about a one-way schooling process. In response to teachers who do not fully understand worldview influences, many Aboriginal children will choose to avoid school or actively resist engaging in the learning process. Christie (1988) pointed out that Aboriginal children learn through a unification of where, when, and who. What Aboriginal children learn to do is to weigh up a situation and respond to what is happening around them (Christie, 1988). They are present-time oriented (Harris, 1981; 1990). From his research, Christie (1985) reported how one Aboriginal elder exemplified school learning; what crossing borders means.

> We want (the children) to learn English. Not the kind of English you teach them in
> class, but your secret English. We don't understand that English but you do. ... That's
> the English we want our children to learn. (Christie, 1985, p. 50)

The day-to-day knowledge of Aboriginal people appears to differ considerably from non-indigenous Australians (Kearins, 1985) and as previously mentioned, is deeply rooted in the interactions between Aboriginal people especially adult-to-child relationships (Collins, 1993). Thus, learning the secret language gives Aboriginal people access to other privileged knowledge and structures of power. Such an approach to educational programs requires deep thinking and special planning on the part of teachers consistently working together within a school.

Appreciating Students' Social Relationships and the Learning Interactions that Most Aboriginal Students Prefer

Within the traditional Aboriginal family, child rearing is based on an intense mother-child relation in the first 18 months when non-verbal rather than verbal communication is emphasised and exploration of the environment is discouraged (Partington & McCudden, 1992). As the child becomes older, power, authority, and decision-making for the child are equally shared around all family members with increasing emphasis on the child's

autonomy, independence, and social equality (Malin, 1990). In this type of home, from a very early age, Aboriginal children develop a strong sense of their own individuality and personal style (Kale, 1988; Malin, 1990; Partington & McCudden, 1992). They do not have to defer to adults, although individualism is kept in check by the small, well-defined kin group (Eckerman, 1988b). Customarily, discipline is through ridicule in preference to scolding or physical punishment because feeling "shame" is undignified (Malin, 1990). ("Shame" for Aboriginal people is mostly about being embarrassed but also is mixed with feelings of pride. From an indigenous perspective, "shame" is seen as a positive component of self-identity). There is a strong expectation from the wider Aboriginal community to meet kinship obligations concerning social, ritual, and religious conventions because all these events reinforce Aboriginal solidarity. As Ogbu (1992) detailed, the issues of how the individuals act within the collective group are important for consideration in the schooling process of minority groups, particularly involuntary minorities. Aboriginal social relationships provide trellises for connecting the content of the curriculum and the way it is taught, to the students' context and environment. Nieto (1998) referred to this idea as using cultural motifs, the values, themes, and traditions, which are part of the lives of the non-dominant group. Such an approach allows children, with their parents, to relate to the schooling and education processes in better ways.

Certain cultural language continuities are evident in contemporary Aboriginal society (Eades, 1988; Harris, 1981). Aboriginal people are highly verbal but use language sparingly to teach any ordinary day-to-day knowledge and skills (Harris, 1990). Asking direct questions of Aboriginal students, for example, usually results in silence. Klecan-Aker and Fisher (1994) found with teachers of Native American children that sometimes they are unsure of the normal behaviours that should be anticipated from culturally and linguistically different children. Little Soldier (1989) found with Native American children that classrooms needed to be very informal and supportive of oral communication, a prerequisite for reading and writing. Classroom organisation needs to be flexible with students taking control and responsibility for small group cooperative approaches. Much the same applies to Aboriginal children. There is ample research conducted with Aboriginal children, especially those living in remote regions, that they possess very strong cognitive abilities to store and retrieve spatial information in a systematic way (Davidson, 1979; Graham, 1988, McConvell, 1991). The teacher must consider the nature of learning activities and must grapple with the conceptions defined by any elaborate and technical language used at school. Of prime importance is the way in which the teacher enables the Aboriginal child to retain individual style within the group. The line is fine, and invariably non-Aboriginal teachers are more often than not challenged in walking this line.

Appreciating the Need to Accommodate Students' Different Learning Styles

For the purpose of the study, descriptions provided by Christie (1985) and Groome (1995b) proved useful in recognising the differences in some of the thinking strategies used by Aboriginal children, and most importantly, how teachers accommodate their students' learning style in their classroom practices. For example, Christie (1985) believed that traditionally, specialised knowledge is bestowed on Aboriginal people through rituals depending on their stage of development and personal characteristics. Ordinary knowledge, like school knowledge with an everyday practical worth, is learnt informally through "observation, imitation, listening, personal trial and error, participation, repetition, ... successive approximations to the efficient end product, and responding to significant relationships" (Harris, 1990, p. 139). Children copy and repeat ritualised processes based on the adult demonstrations they observe. At school, learning new knowledge is the teacher's decision. The teacher is responsible for providing the appropriate models for students to imitate or mimic. Learning experiences and practice situations need to be varied and interesting, but above all, they must occur frequently so children can be successful in learning what is required of them (Harris, 1981; 1990). The model of learning and the permission "to know" must be explicit for children in learning activities. Their learning must be related to their past and their future and how they use it in the wider community. Teachers who are unable to change their practice to meet Aboriginal children's learning style usually push their students into patterns of failure and reluctance to attend school.

Appreciating the Need to Change Pedagogy

The work of Freire (1972), which highlighted the education of the oppressed in Brazil, conceptualises education as merely a banking system. Teachers deposit knowledge into students who withdraw what they know for tests. Rather, Freire urged that teachers should form a partnership with students and conduct active dialogue with them; this is a tenet of sociocultural theory. Along these same lines, Haberman (1991) argued that a pedagogy of teaching exists with students from underprivileged communities. It revolves around providing information, asking questions, giving directions, setting assignments and tests, and managing non-compliant behaviour. He claims that teachers tend to have low expectations of minority groups and the poor and believe students respond best by using a directive and controlling pedagogy. Dent and Hatton (1996) found that teachers lowered their expectations of students from different backgrounds and adopted a non-work, non-academic strategy to their teaching which did not require any instructional effort from the teacher. Free time, watching videos, and completing worksheets, often little more than

colouring-in, were resorted to as survival teaching tactics. Connell (1993) conceded that "children from poor families are, generally speaking, the least successful by conventional measures and the hardest to teach by conventional methods" (p. 1). Ornstein (1990) argued that knowing about effective teaching, however, does not necessarily change teacher behaviour. "If our purpose is to change or improve the practices of teachers, then we must come to grips with teachers' beliefs and attitudes and with their concepts of 'good' or 'effective' " (p. 87).

Brophy and Good (1986) were very clear from their meta-analysis that effective instruction varies with context and even within the same class. What constitutes effective instruction will vary according to subject matter, group size, and the instructional objectives of the teacher. These researchers also pointed out that even experienced teachers vary in what they expect from themselves, their classes and individual students, how they select and plan learning experiences, and how they teach and communicate with their students.

> Teachers who do these things successfully produce significantly more achievement
> than those who do not, but doing them successfully demands a blend of knowledge,
> energy, motivation, and communication and decision-making skills that many
> teachers, let alone ordinary adults, do not possess. (Brophy & Good, 1986, p. 370)

The teacher of Aboriginal students requires special abilities. Aboriginal children like to be part of planning the learning experience, regardless of their abilities. Freedom, independence, choice, sharing, and attitudes to the material world take on a different form in the everyday life of most Aboriginal students (Christie, 1988). The relationships teachers establish with their Aboriginal students are paramount to helping students succeed at school. There is evidence in the literature (Fanshawe 1976, 1989) to suggest that there are requisite characteristics of effective teachers of adolescent Aboriginal students: being warm and friendly; having realistic expectations of students; organising and managing the classroom in an efficient and systematic way; and being able to motivate and stimulate students with imaginative and original teaching. The work of Eckerman (1988b), Collins (1993), Green (1982), and O'Keefe (1989) supported these effective teacher characteristics. Partington and McCudden (1992) discussed that many teachers do not set high expectations for Aboriginal students' learning and therefore, treat them unequally. It would seem that the teachers of Aboriginal students must be more than ordinary adults and develop a pedagogy that embraces the essence of Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning.

Alongside the teaching practices that suit Aboriginal children are assessment practices that best determine what they have learned. Knowledge about learning theory has increased (Brown, 1994) and Howard Gardner (Gardner, 1993; Gardner, Kornhaber, & Wake, 1996) has proposed the theory of multiple intelligences. The assessment of the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, however, has advanced very slowly (Davidson, 1995). Davidson (1995) emphasised the frustration and problems associated with making judgments about the cognitive capabilities of indigenous Australians. Traditional tests carry social, cultural, and political biases that do not allow Aboriginal students to easily demonstrate their understandings and skills. Christie (1991) maintained that Aboriginal people use metaphor and constant re-negotiation of knowledge in a particular cultural way to explain their world. It is the relatedness of the individual to all aspects of daily life, such as family activities, spirituality, mythology, ceremonies, art, music and dance that are significant in the Aboriginal system. Aboriginal people collaborate with each other to pull together their individual points of view to build larger pictures and understandings about their social world. Thus, not only does teaching need to enable children to learn from their perspective by participating in collaborative experiences, but also the assessment process must capture this cultural way of learning. In the wider sense, assessment needs to be authentic so that it has some match with students' reality (Wiggins, 1993). While there are opponents to authentic approaches to assessment (Terwilliger, 1997), assessment that finds out what students know, rather than what they don't know, leads to more productive curriculum planning in the school and classroom (Wiggins, 1991). Such beliefs supported the search for the more appropriate assessment of Aboriginal students' learning in the study.

Implications for the Study

Drawing on the contextual information explored in chapter two and the educational links examined in this chapter, there are important implications for the study. First, the impacts of any impoverished conditions of communities needed to be explored to ascertain how these related to the education of students. Does material deprivation affect the cohesiveness of communities and how a sense of community is engendered, especially with the school? How does material deprivation strain household relationships and the roles children have to fulfil at home? What are the social problems children experience because there is lack of money in the household for the necessities of day-to-day life? What health problems do children experience and how do these affect their participation in learning? Associated with the economic factors of income, the employment prospects for

youth in the communities also required some consideration. Are there jobs available for students once they leave school and if not, how are students motivated to dream about their futures? How is schooling and learning made relevant? In making judgements about how poverty links to the work of schools it was important to observe how schools effectively accommodated any negative impacts of poverty in their general operations and, in particular, how the curriculum was designed and delivered to enable students to critically analyse any inequality they experienced. Second, it was important to learn about the relationship parents and their children had with the schools. Are the schools highly regarded by parents and do they involve them in substantial ways in decisions that affect their children's schooling and learning? In these schools, it was significant to find out whether parents were valued because they could make some contribution to their children's education. Third, it was crucial to discover how people in schools understood and acknowledged their communities, parents, and children. The critical issue for the study was to explore whether cultural differences were considered as deficits thus biasing the whole perspective in the educational approach to these children. Being excluded from positive school experiences because of cultural differences compounds children's marginalisation due to poverty and location. Are school personnel aware of the cultural ways of their communities and do they appreciate and accept how cultural differences relate to their work? At the classroom level especially, it was meaningful to make judgments about the schools by observing how the students were managed, how their background experiences were drawn upon to support their learning, and how students were motivated to learn and succeed at school. Of critical importance was to examine how schools and their teachers supported children in the learning of SAE irrespective of whether English was the children's first, second, or third language. Thus, the contextual framework, both from macro and micro perspectives, provided ways to explain why students performed the way they did at school.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEEKING OUT THE SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL

Some Terms and Research Approaches

In chapters two and three attention has been given to the complexity of the macro contextual influences and the micro school considerations that create the potential for the marginalisation of students in Kimberley schools. In this chapter some attention is shifted away from that project to examine how these issues can be ignored or over-simplified in research about schools. To examine the challenges associated with making judgements about school success, the third conceptual referent in the study, some problematic terms and two contested educational research fields are explored. The terms quality, equality, effectiveness, and efficiency are often connected to making judgements about schools (Karmel, 1985a). These terms are discussed briefly. Next, a synopsis of the claims in the school effectiveness and school improvement research fields are outlined. Reynolds, Hopkins, and Stoll (1993) professed that the knowledge and understanding required to improve the quality of schooling resides with these research approaches. These fields of research have come from opposing directions, philosophically, theoretically and methodologically, in the attempt to define successful schools. Ultimately, the search has been about finding adequate and reliable ways to measure the quality of a school (Mortimore, 1991). However, knowing what makes a "good" school does not necessarily mean we know how a school can improve to become a "good" school (Reynolds & Creemers, 1990). Slee and Weiner (1998a) alerted us to the concern that "the discourse of school effectiveness and school improvement is narrow in its assessment of school effects … reducing school learning to discrete assessable and comparable fragments of academic knowledge" (p. 2). Riddell, Brown, and Duffield (1998) further cautioned that unless these fields of research are linked to the macro and micro contexts of schools, they will remain of little intellectual and practical use. "Schools with high proportions of low achievers rarely feature among the most effective schools" (Riddell et al., 1998, p. 173). Nevertheless, the research approaches are compared to extrapolate how these fields offered ways, although certainly no neat answers, to judge the success of schools within the Kimberley context.

Judgements about Schools: Changing Times, Changing Discourse

"Views of schooling vary according to the economic mood and needs of the times and are adjusted according to the perceived benefits or disbenefits conferred by schools in relation

to their costs" (Mortimore, 1998, p. 85). Judging schools according to their benefits or not became more apparent in the 1960s with the investigation of why children from impoverished backgrounds failed to achieve at school (Silver, 1991). Reform during the 1960s and early 1970s had a profound influence on education systems (OECD, 1989) and in Australia redistributed taxes were invested heavily into education (Thomson, 1998). There was great optimism about the benefits of schooling (Gannicott, 1997). Massive Commonwealth funding was directed into programs such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program (Connell, White, & Johnstone, 1990). There was an emphasis on equality and prosperity in both state and educational policies across the Western world, although the 1970s gave rise to a radical pessimism that saw "the interpretation of the causes and solutions of inequality scattered to the winds" (Ball, 1998, p. 72). As world economies declined in the late 1970s and 1980s, more and more, schools were scrutinised for their efficiency (OECD, 1989). Poverty was seen less as a primary category of analysis in research on schools, although gender and race assumed some prominence, because educational reform was escalating. Progressively into the 1990s conservative thinking about global markets, market economies, choice, consumerism, and individualism, often termed economic rationalism and managerialism, dominated public sector reform. Education became firmly ensconced in the political rhetoric of policy and reform. In schools, structure and function, cause and effect, quality, evaluation, leadership, and accountability assumed ascendancy in the educational discourse. Yet, critics of current educational standards have endured (Spaull, 1998). There is an increasing public interest in the performance of schools, especially in the light of re-structuring educational systems in conservative political times (Apelt & Lingard, 1993; Skilbeck, 1995), and today, schools in Australia are held more accountable for what they produce (Farrell, 1998; Townshend, 1996). Ball (1998), however, suggested that studies about schools have converged so much on explanations of student performance that they have been, in turn, the catalyst for "displacing and rendering silent other explanations related to the embeddedness of education in social and economic contexts" (p. 74).

In Australia, Thomson (1998) maintained that students and their families are not equal educational consumers. Angus (1992) further proposed that a market approach to schooling compounds social inequality by fostering racial, ethnic, and social class differences. The greater the social inequalities students experience, the less likely they are to achieve equality of educational outcomes (Gibson & Meuret, 1995; Marginson, 1992; Porter, 1994). In Australia, Hattam, Smythe, and Lawson (1998) argued that little has changed since the 1960s in terms of the lack of school success for children from underprivileged circumstances. Apple (1993) contended that until attention was returned to the curriculum issues of inclusivity and critical awareness nothing would change for

under-privileged students. Lingard, Ladwig, and Luke (1998) made claims along similar lines. Until educational research about schools "attempts to find out in what ways schools might be able to make a difference, with difference conceptualised as the potential to interrupt the reproduction of inequality and the production of homogenised subjects" many students will continue to be relegated to the margins of society (p. 97).

Educational Quality

The term educational quality is a contested term but Ruby (1995) stated that the quality idea resides within the economic rhetoric and assumed that measurement will enhance production. Sources within the educational field suggest the term quality, however, has various meanings because many factors interact (Aspin & Chapman, 1994; Karmel, 1985b; OECD, 1989; Skilbeck, 1995). Adams (cited in Jansen, 1995) summarised the wide-ranging associations with quality in education found in a review of the literature. The term quality was associated with resource inputs, outcomes/outputs, processes, content, reputation, and value adding. Creemers (1996a) further argued that the term quality is complicated because it can include notions about effectiveness and efficiency. Mortimore (1996) defined an effective school as one that "regularly promotes the highest academic and other achievement for the maximum number of its students regardless of the socioeconomic backgrounds of their families" (p. 6). McGaw (1995) also assured us that schools were efficient when they maximised student outcomes with particular resources.

Bosker and Scheerens (1989) took the view that maximising output or enhancing quality could be considered as effectiveness but they drew a clear distinction about different types of outcome measurements when making judgements about schools. Measuring student achievement using standardised tests or benchmarking assessment was about judging educational quality and schools as productive organisations. Student attainment, measuring student outcomes according to their time at school, that is, value-adding, was about making judgments about a school's effectiveness. Along a similar line of argument, McGaw (1995) and Cuttance (1994a, 1994b, 1995) believed that the some of the confusion surrounding the term quality arose because different purposes are pursued in measuring quality. Quality could be about accountability with an emphasis on outcomes or it could be about improvement with an emphasis on processes. Hughes (1993) agreed that the accountability and improvement purposes were often in competition but advised that they could be complementary. When accountability was foregrounded, there was the possibility that the quality of outcomes were reduced because teaching becomes instrumental (Hopkins, 1990). The issue in the study was that a school may not be a quality school in the strict sense, because it did not reach benchmark standards, but it could be accountable

because the school was effective. The school added value to student progress and worked to improve learning outcomes. In this sense, a school could be termed successful.

Educational Equality

Equality also is a term that is elusive in definition (Burbules, Lord, & Sherman, 1982; Lingard, 1990; Secada, 1989; Sturman, 1997; Troyna & Vincent, 1995) and the link between educational quality and equality in today's world remains complex. "There is no single relationship between them ... [and those] who deny any tension at all between these concepts, ignore this complexity" (OECD, 1989, p. 47). Quality is about levels and standards. Equality is about the distribution of benefits and power. At the practical level these terms are difficult to disentangle. Equality varies in conceptions about fairness, that which is deserved (both rewards and punishments), and justice (Karmel, 1987). In education, equality has been framed around ideas about access to educational inputs, participation in educational processes, and achievement of educational outputs.

Early studies about schools in the USA examined the effects of inputs on student achievement to examine the efficiency of investments (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; Monk, 1992). During the 1960s it was the landmark large-scale national survey, the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), that found many children from impoverished backgrounds were not experiencing equal opportunity in education. Other large-scale studies in the USA and inquiries such as the Plowden Report, *Children and Their Primary Schools* (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) in Britain and The Fitzgerald Report, *Poverty and Education in Australia* (Fitzgerald, 1976) provided a dismal view of schooling for certain groups of students. The consensus at the time was that schools did not make a difference because home background already determined children's achievement at school (Austin & Reynolds, 1990). The public policy reaction to the research, as discussed in chapter three, was simply to increase resources for programs in schools to compensate for students' background (Lawton, 1994).

With past reforms there was a belief that schools were equitable if they provided equal opportunities to students through appropriate educational inputs for participation in specialised programs. Huge educational expenditure, however, did not overcome recurring educational problems for marginalised children. On one side, Coleman (1975) believed that equality of inputs did not define how much input was required to make opportunities equal. On the other side, Hedges, Laine, and Greenwald (1994), in a re-analysis of available literature, suggested that increasing resources to schools improved student learning. Payne and Biddle (1999) claimed that it was obvious that public schools required

adequate funding to address issues of poverty. However, what was evident, as Guthrie (1993) asserted, is that now schools are characterised by much record keeping, measurement, and assessment which leads to inappropriate student achievement measures, inaccurate assumptions about the quality of schools, and the resources they require (Farrell, 1998; Gray, 1990; Guthrie, 1993; Sammons, 1994). There is always the possibility of disinvestment of public resources into schools if they were seemingly unsuccessful (Mortimore, 1998).

Educational Quality and Equality for Marginalised Students

Keeffe (1990) and Singh (1990) specifically debated the issues associated with the quality of educational programs for Aboriginal students. Keeffe's (1990) view was that an economic approach to schooling is valid because efficiency is one part of gaining equality. Past programs have been poorly planned and inefficient so Aboriginal students have not attained desirable educational outcomes. Singh (1990) counter argued that it is more efficient to allow Aboriginal students to continue underachieving to maintain a high level of expenditure to improve their performance. Using these arguments, it would seem that even though outcomes may decrease, it is inefficient to increase expenditure. Karmel (1985a, 1987) concurred with Singh and claimed that the level of inputs is not a satisfactory measure of educational equality because it is the outcomes that should be challenged. The debate seems convoluted and Monk (1994) argued that there is ambiguity between inputs and outcomes in terms of equality.

Connell, Johnston, and White (1992) claimed that the 1980s discussions about assessment and evaluation of quality rarely were joined to those about poverty and educational inequality. "Under the banner of standards, back-to-basics and excellence, educational conservatives nudged educational *equality* off the policy agenda to replace it with the notion of *quality*" (Connell et al., 1992, p. 1, emphasis in original). For these scholars, and supported by Cuban (1988, 1990, 1992), Kliebard (1988) and Starr (1991), it is the underlying deep structures of schooling that are never really challenged in reform movements. Often, it is the structures of schooling that deny all children to be included in the schooling and educative processes. Ultimately, what frequently is overlooked in the quality debate is the nature of the students and their background (Aspin & Chapman, 1994) and the way schools do not work for certain groups of students (Ashenden, 1994; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984). Smythe (1993) was convinced that economic rationalism debates about the quality of schools are circuitous because there is misplaced faith about what schools, as only part of society, can produce. He maintained that schools need to be places where there is less measurement against defined standards

and more concern with enabling teachers to connect with the lives of their students so that education has real meaning for students within their lived contexts. Schools do not need to be blamed solely for education failure (Slee, 1998).

The study to examine school success in the Kimberley region confronted many issues associated with the terms quality, equality, effectiveness, and efficiency. Making judgements about a school's quality cannot be ignored even though there was overwhelming evidence to suggest that many students did not perform well at school in the Kimberley region. The study, therefore, looked at how better to make judgements of school success and the merits of students. While acknowledging the confounding issues associated with the school effectiveness and school improvement research fields, these fields assisted with working through the challenges faced in the study. The educational research fields of school effectiveness and school improvement, although in different ways, grew from the Coleman Report even though Slee and Weiner (1998a) have described the development of these fields of research as research industries rooted in functionalist views of schools. These fields of research have not questioned the purposes of schooling such as preparing students for citizenship, parenthood, or work. Lingard et al. (1998), therefore, suggested that these research approaches should be reconceptualised. "The question is not 'What are the effects of schooling?' rather the questions become, 'What counts as an effect?' and 'What effects make a difference, for whom, when and how?" (p. 91). Even given the criticism of the research approaches, some historical grounding of the research fields was required to make informed decisions about the research design throughout the study.

The School Effectiveness Research Approach to Make Judgements about Schools

School effectiveness research originated in the USA with the renewed political interest in the link between poverty and education (Stringfield & Herman, 1996) and in Britain with the rise of sociological thought (Reynolds, 1992; Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber, & Hillman, 1996). More recent work, however, has been conducted in Israel, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Creemers, 1996b). School effectiveness overviews, both affirmative and critical, are prolific. In the earlier literature triumphs and warnings are evident (Clark, Lotto, Astuto, 1984; Cuban, 1983; D'Amico, 1982; Duignan, 1986; Good & Brophy, 1986; Gray, 1981; Murnane, 1981; Purkey & Smith, 1982, 1983; Ralph & Fenessey, 1983; Reynolds, 1982; Stedman, 1987). In more recent sources the same critiques continue (Austin & Reynolds, 1990; Jansen, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Ryan, 1993; Sammons et al., 1995, Sammons, Mortimore, & Thomas, 1996; Slee & Weiner, 1998b; Stoll & Fink, 1996). In some way, most of this literature attributed the emergence of the field to the criticisms of the large-

scale school effects studies of the 1960s which concentrated on macro-system analysis. The studies were considered to be narrow because of their dependence on quantitative data, the use of standardised tests to measure student achievement (Silver, 1994), and a reliance on a particular political, economic, and social approach to equality (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). Even when researchers deliberately used the same statistical methodologies, with increasing capacity to analyse data more sensitively to explain variation in student achievement, criticism of the findings continued (Lawton, 1994; Reynolds, 1994, Rowe & Hill, 1994).

In reaction to the pessimistic findings of school effects studies, researchers turned to school level analyses by conducting small-scale studies that focussed on outlier cases. The aim of such studies was "to suggest that schools *could* make a difference, that there was a school effect" (Slee, 1998, emphasis in original). Weber (1971), Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, and Wisenbaker (1979) and Edmonds (1979) in the USA, and Ramsay, Sneddon, Grenfell, and Ford (1983) in New Zealand, for example, conducted such studies. During this period Edmonds (1979) identified five characteristics of school effectiveness. Figure 4.1 lists these characteristics which sometimes are referred to simply as the five-factor model.

Five Characteristics of
School Effectiveness

- Strong administrative and educational leadership so that all elements of schooling can be brought together.

- High expectations of student achievement so that student levels of achievement are efficacious.

- Emphasis on basic skills over all other school activities.

- A safe and orderly climate but one that is not rigid but conducive to instruction and learning.

- Frequent monitoring of students' progress to remain constantly aware of their progress.

Figure 4.1.   The Five-Factor Model of School Effectiveness (Edmonds, 1979)

A first generation of school effectiveness research emerged based on a central question: Why were some schools, even in the same locality, more successful in gaining high student achievement than others? The effectiveness of schools was judged by student achievement in the basic skills and so the quality of achievement characterised successful schools. The five-factor model was extended in continued research in the USA and is described by researchers such as Brookover and Lezotte (1979), Edmonds (1982), Eubanks and Levine (1983), Stedman (1985), Levine and Lezotte (1990), and Levine (1992). The list of effectiveness factors grew. In a recent review of 160 studies across Britain and North America, Sammons et al. (1995) extracted the eleven most frequently identified factors they found: professional leadership; shared vision and goals; a learning environment for students; concentration on teaching and learning; purposeful teaching; high expectations; positive reinforcement; monitoring progress (both student and school performance); student rights and responsibilities; home-school partnership; and a learning organisation for staff. Importantly, from this era, the idea of equality and quality of schools became enmeshed (Sammons et al., 1995).

The pursuit of equality, however, demands that schools uphold the fundamental principle that all children can learn and schools cannot be absolved from their duties in teaching marginalised children (Edmonds, 1979; Mortimore, 1998; Murphy, 1992a). The tension between quality and equality remains problematic. This tension was highlighted by Walker and Murphy (1986) when urging that the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) in Australia should focus on school effectiveness characteristics such as: high expectations of students; orderly and safe school climate; clear academic mission and focus; tightly coupled curriculum with alignment of objectives, materials, instruction and assessment; opportunities for students to learn; direct instruction teaching methods; instructional leadership; and frequent monitoring of student progress to improve the cognitive outcomes of students. At the time, DSP had a strong focus on non-academic domains and schools tended to use their allocated funds to address the low socioeconomic backgrounds of their students by improving the physical and material conditions of schools and developing self-esteem and self-concept programs. One of the main aims of DSP was to redress the inequalities experienced by students because of their parents' low socioeconomic status so that students could develop skills to participate in mainstream society. The tension between equality and quality created a double bind for schools. To achieve quality in students' cognitive outcomes demanded that students had the equality of opportunities within their homes, neighbourhood, and schools as any other student in the schooling system.

The Development of Models in School Effectiveness Research

There were criticisms of early school effectiveness findings (Lauder, Jamieson, & Wikely, 1998) and researchers acknowledged methodological problems in the school effectiveness field. It had been difficult to establish the relationship between the inputs, processes, and outcomes of schooling (Hill, Rowe, & Holmes-Smith, 1995) and the confidence limits of school effects (Sammons et al., 1995). In the development of the research field, models were developed (Scheerens, 1992; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997) in attempts to explain these relationships and effects.

The Input-Process-Output Type Models of School Effectiveness

The input-process-output models emerged in the 1980s as part of a second generation of school effectiveness research based on a return to large-scale studies resembling those of the 1960s. The assumption was that by using increased methodological sophistication and multi-level analysis of quantitative data (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1988; Goldstein, 1987, 1995; Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986; Willms & Raudenbush, 1989) a more definitive answer would be found about the correlates of effectiveness (Jansen, 1995) and the nested nature of schools (Lauder et al., 1998). These studies tended to be longitudinal, used larger samples, were cross-sectional concerned with between-school comparisons, controlled for students' background, and investigated the processes that lead to student progress.

In Britain the development of such studies was especially evident (Reynolds et al., 1996) and arose out of the seminal work of Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979) in the *Fifteen Thousand Hours* study. This work was furthered by notable examples such as Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, and Ecob (1988) in primary schools, Reynolds (1982) in secondary schools in a Welsh mining community over six years, Smith and Tomlinson (1989) in British secondary schools with ethnic minority groups, and Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar, and Plewis (1988) in infant schools. These studies "moved away from an explicit equity definition towards a focus on the achievement of all students and a concern with the concept of progress over time rather than cross-sectional 'snapshots' of achievement at a given time" (Sammons et al., 1995, p. 3). The British studies grappled with broadening the definition of school effectiveness by moving the interest from student outcomes to student progress and measuring both the academic and social outcomes of students (Mortimore, 1991; Stoll & Mortimore, 1995, Thomas, Sammons, & Mortimore, 1995). The measures of achievement were analysed to show the value added to what students brought to school. While the greater attention was placed on the school, classroom factors for effectiveness were considered, such as concentration on learning, purposeful

teaching, monitoring of individual progress, active involvement and attentiveness of students, fitness of methods for purpose, consistency of approach, and role modelling (Mortimore, 1996).

Other British work has compared school effects (Gray, Jesson, & Sime, 1990; Nuttall, Goldstein, Prosser, Rasbash, 1989) and provided insight into school contexts, school cultures and phase of a school's development. Maughan, Pickles, Rutter, and Ouston (1990), for example, also looked at individual schools and examined the change efforts to sustain the improvement in student performance. Studies conducted by Leithwood, Lawton, and Cousins (1989) in Canada, Odden (1990) in the USA, Cuttance in Scotland (1992), Daly (1991) in Northern Ireland, and Hill and Rowe (1996) in Australia, are examples that have attempted to show the differential effectiveness of schools. It was realised, however, even after using very large samples of students, that when the characteristics of students, such as their home background, were taken into account, the differences between schools were not especially large (Creemers, Reynolds, & Swint, 1995; Levine, 1992). Furthermore, other studies, such as the one conducted by Leithwood et al. (1989) could not show how much of the variance in dropout rate, for example, was explained by school-related factors.

Indeed, Scheerens and Creemers (1989) proposed that school effectiveness might be more about the effects of student achievement rather than causes of that achievement. Scheerens (1992) and Levine (1992) also suggested that most of the variation among effective schools is due to the difference between classrooms even within the same school. Moreover, the effects between secondary and primary schools differ and in secondary schools there are differences within various subjects (Mortimore, 1998). Thus, the performance of students is not dependent on socially categorising them according to sex, ethnic majority or minority, or privileged or under-privileged economic status (Mortimore, 1998; Mortimore & Sammons, 1987). In fact, the circumstances over which the school has no control limit the capacity of the school to make a difference (Lauder et al., 1998). Yet, Wang et al. (1993) examined evidence that represented over 11,000 relationships and found that proximal variables, such as developing the cognitive capacities of students, improving instruction, and accommodating home environments, exert more influence on school learning than distal variables such as state or district policies and demographics.

Multi-Level Type Models of School Effectiveness

The debate remains. Do schools make a difference and for whom? In the Netherlands the world's most extensive research base about school effectiveness is evident (Reynolds et al.,

1993). The research in the Netherlands has forwarded contextual multi-level models of school effectiveness to address the contentious issue of whether schools make a difference or not. The Scheerens and Creemers (1989) model, as an example, is featured in Figure 4.2.

Context


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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                              Context                                   │
│  ┌──────────────────────────┐                                          │
│  │ SCHOOL LEVEL             │                                          │
│  │ Inputs                   │                                          │
│  │ Structure                │        ↘                                 │
│  │ Managerial Processes     │                                          │
│  └──────────────────────────┘   ┌──────────────────────────┐          │
│                            ↗     │ CLASSROOM LEVEL          │          │
│                                  │ Inputs                   │   ↘      │
│                           ↙      │ Teaching Strategies      │          │
│  ┌──────────────────────────┐   └──────────────────────────┘          │
│  │ Background Variables:    │   ┌──────────────────────────┐           │
│  │ Socio-economic status    │→ │ STUDENT LEVEL            │           │
│  │ Aptitude                 │   │ Individual achievement and│          │
│  └──────────────────────────┘   │ educational attainment   │          │
│                                  └──────────────────────────┘          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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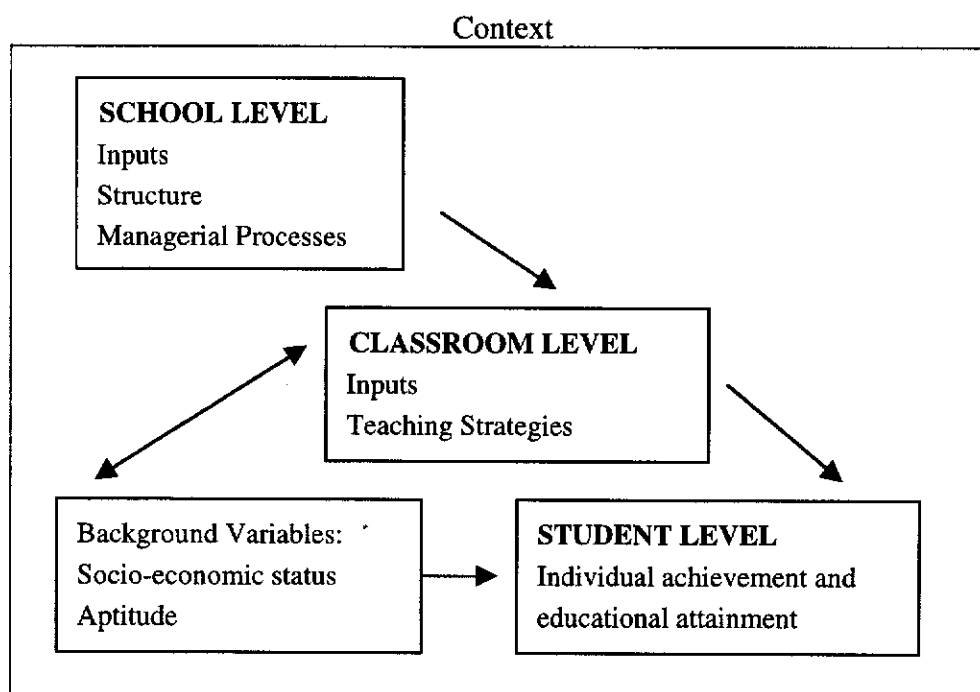
Figure 4.2.   A Contextual Multi-Level Model of School Effectiveness
(Scheerens & Creemers, 1989)

The Scheerens and Creemers (1989) model indicates that there are:

relationships between levels, specifically between the organisational and the classroom level and between contextual conditions and organisational characteristics.
... The most straightforward way of thinking about these cross-level relationships is through the idea that higher levels should provide facilitative conditions for the central process at lower levels. (p. 702)

Reynolds (1995) believed that the Scheerens and Creemers (1989) model typifies the attempts to explain relationships between school, classroom, and student variables within their contextual environments. Creemers (1996b) extended the above multi-level model using the foundational work of Carroll (1963, 1989) and Stringfield and Slavin (1992). He offered a more comprehensive multi-level model of school effectiveness to emphasise elements at the classroom level (quality of instruction, grouping procedures, teacher behaviour) and the student level (time for learning, time on task, motivation, attitudes,

social background) that need to be considered as part of school effectiveness. Skilbeck (1995) and Riddell et al. (1998) underscored that classroom practices must be examined to identify links to student learning. School level factors can be the purpose for straightforward comparisons of schools but it is classrooms where the teaching and learning action occurs. Creemers' work, supported by Levine (1992), also extended the idea that student outcomes should include problem solving, higher order thinking and meta-cognitive skills. Mortimore (1998) believed that future school effectiveness research will necessarily investigate the progress of the individual learners because during the 1990s there has been a gradual spotlight thrown onto department (secondary schools) and classroom level analyses of effectiveness.

Scheerens and Creemers (1996) contended that a multi-level contextual model facilitates the investigation of contexts across time, classrooms, educational outcomes, different subgroups and schooling environments. While such a model may assist researchers to statistically analyse how different levels of schooling may be linked, Huberman (1992) warned that the relationships between different levels of schooling and the chemistry between these transactional shifts are highly complicated. Trying to explain these relationships is complex and they are not open to exact measurement. Scheerens (1998) affirmed that there is no conclusive evidence showing that different level conditions facilitate each other to improve students' outcomes. Measuring the nested nature of schools provides great challenge when investigating school contexts such as those found in the Kimberley. Lauder et al. (1998) argued that a contextual model of schooling is a defensible way to investigate schools but quantitative methods and indicators have been reified by current political times.

> Schools in different contexts will have different capacities, potentials and limits. This then has a direct bearing on accountability, for schools cannot all be held accountable in the same way. ... The purpose [of research] is to ask under what conditions schools can best perform and how should they be held accountable. (Lauder et al., 1998, p. 63)

Lauder et al. suggested that research questions should look not only at the internal organisation of the school and student performance but how the community-school relationship can be arranged in better ways.

Untenable Assumptions in School Effectiveness Research

Sammons et al. (1995) claimed that much evidence has accumulated to show that students in schools in similar social circumstances can achieve at very different levels. Early in the

attempts to research effective schools, Cuban (1984) foreshadowed that over enthusiasm would lead to narrowness in the research approach. Cuban (1984), Senge (1990), and Fullan (1994) alerted educators that change in schools that is directed towards effectiveness and improvement must link "top-down" with "bottom-up" strategies. However, the hope in school effectiveness research always has been to find correlates common to successful schools (Creemers & Scheerens, 1994). Such an ideal may be fruitless because of the complex nature of schools (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996) and there are no simple solutions to the practical problems faced by schools (Riddell et al., 1998).

Reynolds, Creemers, Nesselrodt, Schaffer, Stringfield and Teddlie (1994), Reynolds (1995) and Stoll and Fink (1996) re-affirmed that controversy has remained about what are the central tenets of the school effectiveness research. "Currently school effectiveness researchers devote much attention to issues of measurement of student outcomes, stability and continuity of school effects, differential effectiveness and context specificity" (Stoll & Mortimore, 1995, p.1). There is still debate in the research approach as to what student outcomes should be measured to define a school's effectiveness. A school that is effective in academic outcomes may not be effective in promoting social and affective outcomes (Mortimore et al., 1988). Basic skills are starting points for students' outcomes, but in today's world what knowledge is learnt, how it is learnt, and how students learn to extend their learning is important (Eisner, 1993). At the same time, endless objectives being added to the curriculum within the constraints of time cannot be expected of schools (Fullan, 1991). Schools that concentrate on a few objectives can be more successful than others because the organisation of time is maximised and subject differentiation is not emphasised (Creemers, 1996a; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

Fuller and Clarke (1994) suggested that school effects vary because when a student's reading skill, for example, is measured it is an aspect of a student's achievement which is susceptible to home circumstances. In contrast, subjects such as mathematics are more influenced by school and classroom approaches. Therefore, there can be different school effects for students from different cultural backgrounds, ability ranges, and SES (Nuttall et al., 1989). Creemers and Reynolds (1989) and Cowell (1996) expressed concern about the over-reliance of academic achievement to identify effective schools. In Australia, McGaw, Piper, Banks, and Evans (1992) and Townshend (1994) found that an effective school is one that communities and parents see as providing students with a love of learning, positive self-concept, a sense of self-discipline, confidence as individuals, and skills for employment.

Importantly, from the school effectiveness research it is recognised that factors of school effectiveness vary according to different countries (Creemers, 1995, 1996b; Murphy, 1992a, 1992b; Scheerens & Creemers, 1996) and contexts (Brown, Riddell, & Duffield, 1996; Capper, 1993; Creemers, 1994; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Stringfield & Teddlie, 1991). Context in effectiveness research can be associated with location (rural, urban, inner city) and the background of the students (gender, ethnicity, SES, language characteristics). The size and importance of school effects suggest that student background characteristics account for a much larger proportion of the total variance in students' academic outcomes than attending a particular school (Sammons et al., 1995). Reynolds and Packer (1992) and Creemers (1994) claimed that between-school differences or school and classroom factors can explain only 12% to 18% of the variance in student outcomes. In a meta-analysis reported by Scheerens and Bosker (1997), there was evidence that suggests school organisational factors have little impact on school effectiveness. Rather, instructional conditions have larger effects. Wang et al. (1993) and Hill et al. (1995) confirmed this idea.

From his case studies in Britain, Africa, and Thailand, Harber (1992), however, strongly argued that context influences effective schooling and urges that more grounded research about schools is required to identify the obstacles they encounter due to their context. There is no recipe for school effectiveness and the consistency of school effects cannot be assumed (Reynolds & Packer 1992; Scheerens, 1992). Reynolds (1995) stated:

> The traditional belief that schools were effective or ineffective for all sub-groups or pupils within them is no longer tenable in view of the evidence that there can be different school effects for children of different ethnic groups, ability ranges and socioeconomic statuses within the same school. (1995, p. 9)

Lezotte (1982), nevertheless, argued that school effectiveness research provides a framework for school improvement because school performance can rapidly change in short periods of time (Nuttall et al., 1989). School improvement research, therefore, has been the field which has investigated how schools change to become more effective.

The School Improvement Research Approach to Make Judgements about Schools

School improvement research has generally been more applied than pure. It depends on the analysis of qualitative data derived from case studies describing school processes (Bollen, 1996) and used methods such as those developed by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994). Importantly, it has been educators who have created the research interest in school

improvement as they have struggled to apply the assertions of the school effectiveness research (Mortimore, 1996; Sammons, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1992, 1996). School improvement is clearly defined as:

> a systematic sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions ... with the ultimate goal of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. (van Velzen, Miles, Ekholm, Hameyer, & Robin, 1985, p. 48).

School improvement literature, especially as the field merged with educational change, is abundant and evidences distinct phases of development in the research field (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996; Lieberman, 1998). The first phase emerged in the 1970s when curriculum and instruction were studied to ascertain how schools improved student achievement. School improvement research escalated, particularly in the USA, based on the evaluation of schools' efforts to adopt and implement large-scale, federally funded organisational and curriculum innovations that followed the Coleman Report (Stoll & Mortimore, 1995). At this time, the curriculum reform was concerned with "top down" initiation. The reform used elite knowledge developed outside of the school, related to the curriculum and associated organisational requirements, measured the student outcomes which were given in the innovation, and centred only on part of the school (Reynolds & Stoll, 1996; Stoll & Mortimore, 1995). Any evaluation of the improvement was quantitatively orientated (Reynolds et al., 1993). In the main, school improvement through implementation efforts failed (Hopkins, 1990). Teachers were not included in producing materials and their in-service training was rudimentary so they simply implemented the parts of the innovation that fitted into their practices (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996).

A second phase of school improvement research, late in the 1970s, was concerned with trying to uncover why the curriculum reform movement had failed. Organisational development in schools was investigated to see how change could be better supported. Generally, it was seen that "top down" initiatives were ignored by teachers, even if they were mandated, because teachers required more on-going support to acquire new knowledge which they could then translate into their classroom practice. During the 1980s, a third phase of school improvement research re-focussed on "bottom up" initiation with the idea that the teacher within the school was pivotal to school improvement and students' outcomes (Reynolds & Stoll, 1996). During this period, much was learnt about the dynamics of the change process in schools through several large-scale studies (Crandell, Eiseman, & Louis, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 1984a; Louis & Miles, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). Fullan (1991), Fullan and Miles (1992) and Miles (1998) pointed out that knowing what successful schools look like does not necessarily lead to the management of change

towards success. Not all change is good. Change creates instability and adopting change does not necessarily result in school improvement (Cuban, 1988, 1990, 1992). Change imposed from outside the school, or even adopted at the school level, is not always taken up as a matter of course in classrooms. Change takes time, often several years, because it is a process, an uncertain learning journey which is resource hungry and requires management (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Impacts on education, such as changing politics, further dislodge change and do not allow innovation to hold long enough to become embedded into the school culture (Cuban, 1990).

Hence, a more recent fourth phase of school improvement research has examined the management of change (Fullan, 1992, 1993) in an era of devolving decision-making to the school level. School improvement research is now about understanding how to manage change in a school to ensure successful student outcomes are achieved (Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1989; Caldwell, 1998; Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Evans & Teddlie, 1995; Hopkins, 1994, 1996; Scheerens, 1992; Stoll, 1996). Change requires modifications to the organisation, cooperative teachers, and a supportive leader (Hopkins, 1990). Hargreaves (1998), however, warned that most of the literature on educational change does not recognise the influence of teachers' emotions and passions (worry, envy, boredom, despair, hate, hurt, and the like) on change. Teachers have strong feelings about changes to school and classroom structures, curriculum planning, and their pedagogy and as Reynolds (1995) claimed, school effectiveness studies "have continuously shown teachers to be important determinants of children's educational and social attainments" (p. 4).

Thus, the school improvement literature has provided information about planned change (Berman, 1981; Fullan, 1972, 1982, 1983, 1985; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Gross, Giacquinta, & Bernstein, 1971; Giacquinta, 1998; Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 1984a, 1984b; Miles, 1981), the paradoxes and ironies in educational change (Fullan, 1982, 1992, 1998; Glickman, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994, 1995), descriptions of school cultures (Sarason, 1971, 1990, 1996), insights into teacher development, and how the transformation of teachers' cultures may improve student outcomes (Barth, 1990; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; A. Hargreaves, 1994; D. Hargreaves, 1995; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; Stoll & Fink, 1994). Additionally, Fullan, Bennett and Rolheiser-Bennett (1990), for example, showed that school improvement is strongly linked to classroom change. The teacher is pivotal to school improvement (Hopkins, 1987; Rudduck, 1991). Others, such as McLaughlin (1990) and Proudfoot and Baker (1994), maintained that school improvement is idiosyncratic to each school. Policy cannot mandate what matters; implementation dominates outcomes; local variability is the rule; uniformity is the exception (McLaughlin, 1990; 1998).

Of special interest to the Kimberley study was work conducted by several scholars. Capper (1993), in a review of literature, found that research about community influences on effective schooling is limited. Nieto (1998) asserted that cultural difference, language, and poverty have not been taken seriously in educational change because macro-level reform strategies, sometimes even micro-level changes, assume students begin their education on a level playing field. Nieto outlined several international studies that point to the benefits of using students' linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds as resources to make a difference in their learning. Initiatives, such as bilingual literacy and teaching skills to live in the wider society, are hallmarks of successful innovation. "A growing body of research is suggesting that the very view of *diversity as deficit* needs to be reframed if educational reformers are serious about affording all students an equal opportunity to learn" (Nieto, 1998, pp. 430-431, emphasis in original). Cummins (1998) highlighted the issues of cultural diversity and language in research about schools. Stedman (1987) and Garcia (cited in Cummins, 1998) showed some consistent classroom factors which allow culturally diverse students to gain success at school. These factors are illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Educational Effectiveness for Culturally Diverse Students

- High levels of communication in classrooms emphasising student collaboration on small projects within family-like settings.

- Integrated thematic curriculum for the instruction of basic skills and academic content with student input for the choice of themes.

- Support for language learning and literacy development which allows students to use their own language in concert with the classroom language.

- Clear educator perceptions and role definition so that high academic expectations are set for students, instructional innovation is adopted, and home-school communication is fostered.

- Principal support for teacher autonomy and innovation.

Figure 4.3. Educational Effectiveness for Culturally Diverse Students
(Adapted from Garcia cited in Cummins, 1998)

Slee (1998) cautioned that the compelling logic of the school effectiveness field taken up by school improvers initiated a swing to concentrate on the teacher rather than the student. However, Riddell et al. (1998) showed in their work that the deep intricacies of teachers' classrooms in low SES schools must be studied to examine how teachers make sense of their work, conceptualise student progress, and foster interactive learning. Here was a tension that was of interest to explore in the study. If we examine the work of teachers in different community contexts and find ways to improve teachers' practices, how will this in turn improve students' progress and achievements at school? How do we keep the focus on students' learning without devaluing the work of schools and teachers?

The Development of Frameworks in School Improvement Research

There is a preference for frameworks and guidelines, rather than models, in school improvement research (Stoll, 1996). One such framework is illustrated in Figure 4.4.
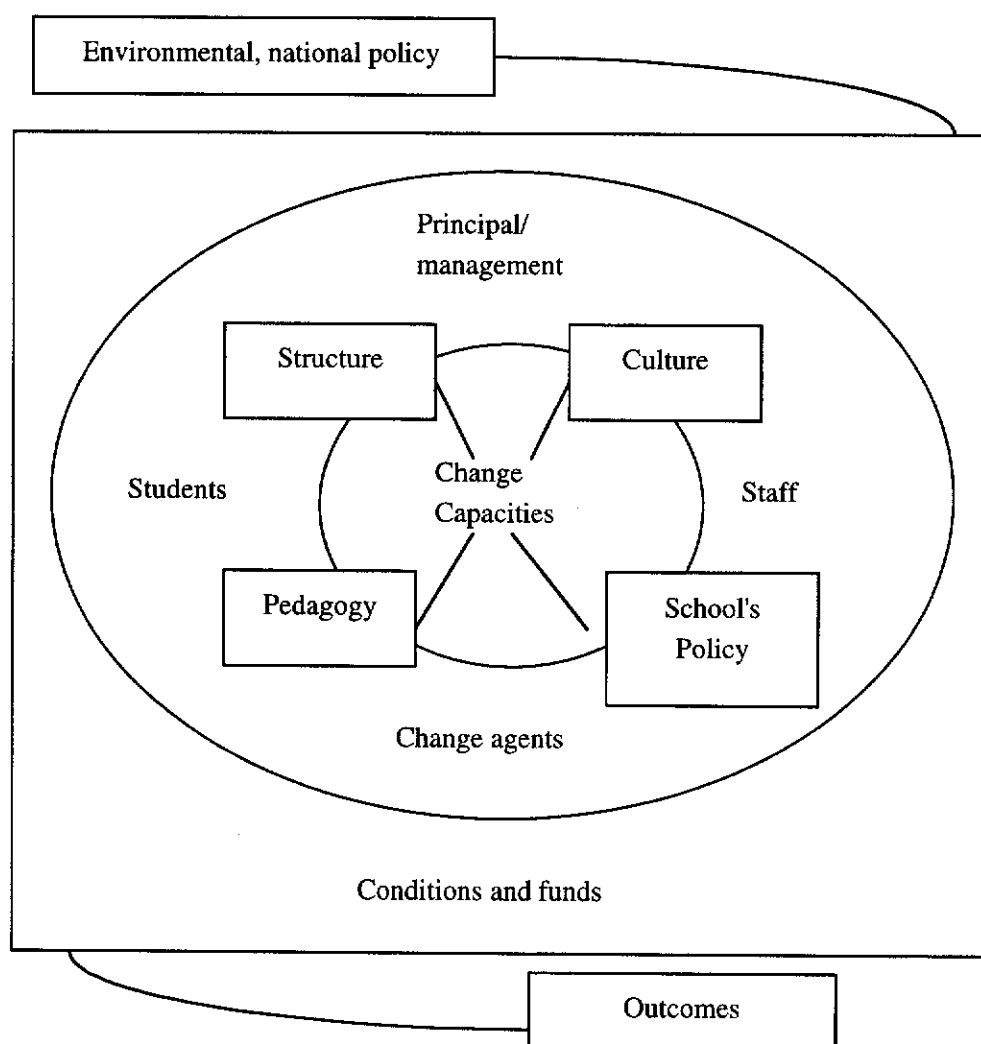
Figure 4.4. A Framework: Analysing School Improvement (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996)

Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996) argued that the heart of school improvement research is about investigating the capacity of the school to learn and change. This capacity is based on a dynamic interaction amongst different groups (the school leader, staff, change agents, support people and students). Internal conditions that influence the interaction can be investigated. Internal conditions include the resource and fund conditions that support the school, management of the school, the innovation policy of the school, the organisational structure of the school, the school culture, and the educational structure of the school (curriculum and pedagogy). West (1998) also argued along a similar path about generating the capacity of a school to improve. There is the capacity to manage external change (inquiry, reflection, collaborative planning, coordination, leadership practices, staff development policies, involvement of the school community) and the capacity to examine classroom practice (relationships, rules and expectations, teaching repertoires, curriculum development, self evaluation, pedagogy) to promote school quality.

There are different opinions about how school improvement research should continue, with some thought that studies should become more quasi-experimental (Ainscow et al., 1995; Hopkins, 1995; Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996). Proudfoot and Baker (1994), however, based on their Australian study, believed that understanding school improvement is through an inductive practical theory which describes school processes that are embedded in the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the setting. Despite these different thought, the process and change capacities of the school can be examined through the school's development planning process to increase the success of the school as an organisation (Hopkins, 1994). School development planning in schools is a medium to investigate how a school improves its performance.

School Development Planning

Recent reform to re-structure schooling requires schools to improve student achievement by rearranging decision-making processes, power and authority structures and organisation at the school level with a clearer view about teaching and learning (Elmore, 1990; Murphy, 1992b). Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996) reported that "one of the best known and widely used 'meta-strategies' for school improvement in the Western educational system has been *development planning*" (p. 77, emphasis in original). As mentioned in chapter one, school development planning is mandated in Western Australian schools. Hopkins (1996) suggested that school development planning and change were closely linked and successful schools used change for developmental purposes. "*Schools continue to develop by adapting external change to internal purpose through a process of structural and cultural accommodation*" (Hopkins, 1996, p. 37, emphasis in original). School development

planning strategies, therefore, have the potential to improve student outcomes (MacGilchrist, 1996; Stoll & Fink, 1996) but the research evidence about this notion is not encouraging (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996). There are several reasons for this. There has not been a clear interest in the internal conditions of the school. Clear decisions have not been made about development and maintenance activities in school planning, change has not been based on the school as a unit with the teacher as the pivot in the change process, school performance data have not been collected to direct school planning, and teachers have not had enough opportunities to talk about teaching. Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996) questioned whether the re-structuring reform agenda was sufficient for school improvement, whether school planning could be sustained without external support, and whether different schools at different stages of development required different support strategies. Thus, any improvement program should be concerned with several issues. These are school-based development of change, change supported by outside inputs and resources, and change involving the organisational, structural, and cultural relationships within the school. Change that is based on a long term cycle of review of school planning, improvement, evaluation, and further improvement can lead to school success (Hopkins, 1990). Ultimately, school planning should be about the teaching-learning process because it is at the level of teaching and learning where it is most difficult to effect change (Hopkins, 1990).

Using the Two Traditions to Frame the Course of the Study

Stoll (1996) showed that school effectiveness research is quantitative in orientation and focusses on outcomes, emphasises equality, provides data for schools to base decisions upon, shows what happens in a range of contexts, and confirms the importance of the school as a site for change. The research has been more concerned with the formal organisation of school and has tended to describe schools as static and steady from a 'scientist" point of view premised on the scientific quality of the data (Reynolds, 1998). School effectiveness researchers devote much attention to issues of measurement of student outcomes, stability and continuity of school effects, differential effectiveness, and context specificity (Reynolds et al., 1994; Reynolds, 1995; Stoll & Fink 1996; Stoll & Mortimore, 1995). The research identifies that high expectations of students according to their potential is crucial to improving their achievement which is an important message for hard-pressed teachers who face challenges because of the sociocultural context of schools (Reynolds, 1994). The school effectiveness research does not allow teachers to reason that it is the students' background which is a precursor to their success and does not validate the overuse of standardised test scores as a measure of a school's effectiveness (Reynolds, 1995). The field also has shown that teachers in classrooms have a significant potential to

improve schools although there has been little attention to classroom process data in school effectiveness research. At the same time, school effectiveness research has not provided a course of action for school improvement (Bollen, 1996; Brown, Duffield, & Riddell, 1995; Cuban, 1984) because the power for change to improve student outcomes ostensibly lies with managing change effectively (Maughan et al. 1990; Ouston, Maughan, & Rutter, 1991; Reynolds, 1991).

Stoll (1996) also indicated that school improvement research is qualitative and humanistic in orientation and focusses on processes, emphasises taking action on school selected priorities, shows the importance of school culture, the significance of teaching and learning, and confirms the school as the dynamic centre of change. School improvement research, much of it anecdotal and providing rich descriptions of school contexts using ethnographic techniques (Ainscow et al., 1995), has directed attention to the school as the site of action and change. There has been a gradual realisation that processes such as leadership, school climate, organisational characteristics, and curriculum provision all impact on how teachers work. The main criticisms of school improvement work, however, is that the work neither addresses the current policy frameworks of schools nor shows that change efforts are conclusively related to improving student outcomes (Huberman, 1992; Reynolds, 1998). Much of the investment to improve schools has centred on staff development rather than improving students' learning.

Merging the Two Fields of Research

School effectiveness research has shown what works well and studies in this field have provided a somewhat static snapshot of factors about a school's effectiveness at a particular point in time. School improvement has shown how schools can change using successful facilitating conditions for effectiveness. Studies have revealed the fluidity of the processes schools use to change and improve. Merging these two research fields, however, is not straightforward (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996) and these two ways of thinking about schools rarely have joined in the past (Hopkins, 1996; Reynolds, 1992; Reynolds et al., 1993). During the 1990s there have been efforts to merge the two research fields (Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds et al., 1993; Reynolds & Stoll, 1996, 1997; Stoll, 1991) for pragmatic purposes. For example, Stoll (1991), based on the work of Mortimore et al. (1988), used 12 characteristics of school effectiveness as a basis to implement school improvement programs in the Halton Education District, Ontario. Reynolds, Davie, and Phillips (1989) in the United Kingdom trained teachers in a two-year course as change agents to improve school effectiveness. There have been strong efforts to apply school effectiveness research in the USA which is typified by the practical work in schools by Swan and Nixon (1992).

However, there has been a tendency to rely on the five-factor model of Edmonds (1979) as a recipe for school improvement (Levine, 1992) rather than the more advanced work of researchers such as Teddlie and Stringfield (1993). Across the world, substantial studies that increase the links between school effectiveness and school improvement have emerged: Canada's Saskatchewan School Improvement Program; the Dutch National School Improvement Project; Israel's 30 Communities Project; Australia's Effective Schools Project; Sweden's Researching Effective Improvement; Hong Kong's Towards a Better School Movement; and Britain's Improving the Quality of Education for All (Reynolds & Stoll, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 1996). In addition, other notable studies have been conducted using mixed methodologies: the Louisiana School Effectiveness Study (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), Ouston et al., (1991) in Britain, and the Cardiff Project (Reynolds et al., 1989). In such studies there has been a strong emphasis on student outcomes and to ascertain whether the change processes schools undertake are able to affect students' learning (Reynolds, 1998). These studies have tried to define more clearly the differences between educational processes and the criteria of measuring school effectiveness but the issue of researching ineffective schools has brought a merger of the two approaches to the forefront.

Ineffective Schools: Why Do They Fail and How Can They Improve?

Murphy (1992a, 1992b) noted that some school effectiveness correlates may have outlived their usefulness in today's world. The correlates do not address the dynamic nature of schools as organisations (Hopkins, 1990) and when used as lists, engender forms of control rather than growth (Barth, 1990). Rather, as Barth maintained, schools can only improve if the conditions are right. The school culture must be improved to change the nature and quality of learning experiences. For example, in the USA, Slater and Teddlie (1992) identified a typology of school effectiveness. The typology includes three interacting elements: principal appropriateness at the school level; teacher preparedness at the class level; and student learning readiness at the student level. Interaction between these elements creates the school's context (contingency). What is highlighted in the typology is that different strategies may be required in different schools to improve their effectiveness because the school, teacher and student level elements are always changing. Fundamentally, "while community effects are important ... the most ineffective schools are those in which the administration is inappropriate, the teachers are not prepared to teach and the students are not ready to learn" (Slater & Teddlie, 1992, p. 242). Other studies show school effectiveness varies according to the phase and year levels of schooling (Louis & Miles, 1990), stage of development of a school (Stringfield & Teddlie, 1991), and the day-to-day school management (Brookover et al., 1979).

Of special interest for the Kimberley study was the work of Brown et al. (1995, 1996) and Riddell et al. (1998). They showed from their study of Scottish secondary schools that different improvement strategies were required for schools in high SES or low SES circumstances. While effective and ineffective schools could be distinguished by their within-school culture, the basis for school improvement depended more on knowing the nature of the student and parent population. Low SES schools were characterised by deep learning difficulties in association with poor student motivation and low self-esteem. In other studies of interest, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) and Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) found that while high and low SES schools shared some characteristics of effectiveness (clear academic focus, orderly environment, high academic engaged time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress) there were several differences. Low SES schools:

- promoted present short-term educational expectations for students rather than focus on future goals;
- were managed by principals who initiate change and monitor classrooms closely to provide instructional leadership rather than just manage the school well;
- made achieving students feel special rather than rely on the home for reward;
- focussed on basic skills first and foremost in the curriculum rather than offer a wide range of content;
- created a buffer from the community when it exerts a negative press on the school rather than encourage home-school partnerships; and
- were staffed by younger, idealist teachers rather than experienced teachers.

Reynolds (1995) stressed that as more responsibilities are handed to schools, such as school development planning and budgeting, teacher appraisal, and curriculum reform, many schools will succumb to failure. Pressures also will increase in schools as they accommodate delinquent or disturbed children and children with special learning needs (Reynolds & Packer, 1992). Influences such as the power of the classroom level, the sociopolitical nature of school culture, and the link between schools and other socialising agencies outside the schools will make the work of schools more difficult.

School effectiveness and school ineffectiveness, therefore, are not simply exact opposites (Reynolds, 1991, 1995, 1996). Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) found that in ineffective schools there was unstable and inappropriate leadership, strained and uncohesive staff relationships, large variance in teaching across classes, an adult oriented school climate, little assistance given to new staff, poor school discipline, and consistently low student achievement. In historically ineffective schools a great deal of support was required, and sometimes clear directives must be given, to allow schools to change their priorities and

examine improved teaching and learning strategies (Reynolds et al., 1993). Rosenholtz (1989) used the terms "moving schools" (learning enriched) and "stuck schools" (learning impoverished) to describe degrees of effectiveness. She characterised stuck schools as having a maintenance mentality and listless staff who lacked attachment to anything or anybody, were self-reliant and resistant to taking advice, and who lacked faith in their leaders. Stoll and Fink (1996) summarised the research evidence that point to several factors of school ineffectiveness: lack of vision; unfocussed leadership; dysfunctional staff relationships; and ineffective classroom practices. It remains to be shown that effective schools "actually deliver more benefits to pupils than does, let us say, a fragmented teaching staff that has few diagnostic mechanisms, few professional interactions, few norms of continuous improvement, a benign but lethargic principal, and so on" (Huberman, 1992, p. 11). In the end, Murphy (1992a) stated that the essential principles of school effectiveness and school improvement were: all students could learn; outcomes were the focus; schools were accountable for students' progress; and schools should be tightly linked organisations with attention to consistency across classrooms. Above all, the main criterion for the effectiveness of schools was their outcomes and this was essentially the same goal for school improvement (Creemers, 1996a).

Of significance to the study is the idea of backmapping to examine student outcomes within a school's context (Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996) as a way of determining quality in schools. Once students' progress is identified, a school planning task should be to backmap the students' progress to learning styles and processes promoted in classrooms, teaching strategies used by teachers, and school organisation, structures, management, and climate that support the progress. Reynolds and Stoll (1997) believed that:

> It is increasingly clear that an audit of existing classroom and school processes and outcomes, and comparison with desired end states, is a vital part of improvement for effectiveness. Collecting data on students' current achievement, progress and social development can give a school indications of areas that need improvement. (p. 4)

Ainscow et al. (1995) further suggested that "the mapping approach is a way of developing research techniques that capture the perspective of those involved in the change process in organisations such as schools, but do so in a way that is more ... penetrating in terms of the quality of the data" collected and analysed (p. 76).

Implications for the Study

Whilst the literature in school effectiveness and school improvement provided foundations for the course of the study, Fink and Stoll (1998) reminded us that there are other trends in schools which researchers need to heed. First, there is now a view of more holistic approaches to teaching and learning. Cross-curriculum planning and implementation is evident in language and such is the case in WA. Second, learning in schools has an uncertain future for many students. In the Kimberley context, where do students go after they leave school? How do schools change to prepare students for an uncertain future? Will the motivation to change come from outside accountability processes or be inherent in the school's planning processes? Third, leadership in schools has to manage complex webs in the school organisation. School leaders will be successful when they disperse power, control, and resources to others in the school community so that leadership is distributed and shared. In the Kimberley schools, especially the very small remote schools, this was a point of interest for the study. Fourth, teachers' lives affect how they react to change. In the Kimberley schools teachers face stress in their personal and professional lives. Change that ignores these lives will not be successful. Some teachers will accommodate change because they are ambitious and want to influence school planning. Other just want to get on with the job. In the Kimberley schools this tension was a source of interest for exploration. Finally, Slee and Weiner (1998b) cautioned that comparing successful and failing schools can be seen as taking a pathological gaze of schooling. This does not mean that schools should not have some form of accountability about their work but it is about finding appropriate ways to determine that accountability. Reynolds and Packer (1992) believed:

> It is clear that the international school effectiveness and improvement movement has major intellectual and organisational tasks ahead, and some of the omens are disturbing. In certain countries school effectiveness has already become associated with a narrow, 'back to basics' orientation to the teaching of basic skills and has therefore become much criticised. There are also unresolved tensions between those who have an 'equity' perspective and who believe that effective schools should help disadvantaged populations particularly, and those who see the drive for effectiveness as something that should extend across all social categories. There are also issues concerned with the definition of effectiveness that wait lurking in the wings to cause dissent and disagreement. (pp. 184-185)

Thus the premises for the investigation into the schools involved in the study were threefold. First, the conceptual framework of the study was significant. Any evaluation of

the schools in the study could be separated from neither the macro sociocultural context of schools, discussed in chapter two, nor the micro level educational implications for marginalised students, discussed in chapter three. Second, the well-established correlates of school effectiveness, the five-factor model illustrated in Figure 4.1 (Edmonds, 1979) and its extension (Sammons et al, 1995), were starting points for investigation in relation to the schools in the study. In addition, the model depicted in Figure 4.2 (Scheerens & Creemers, 1989) was useful in organising the collection and analyses of data according to the sociocultural context, school environments, classroom settings and student achievement. Furthermore, the classroom factors influencing the education of culturally diverse students (illustrated in Figure 4.3, Cummins, 1998) and the framework to explore school improvement processes (illustrated in Figure 4.4, Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996) were useful to guide the research process in the case studies at the school and classroom levels. The idea of backmapping students' progress (Ainscow et al., 1995; Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Reynolds & Stoll, 1997) as a way of determining quality in schools would be a cornerstone in the research design. Finally, the overarching direction for the study was, as Slee and Wiener (1998b) suggested, to explore what constitutes successful schools and for whom? It was important to find out what was going on in schools, who was benefiting, who made the decisions, and how might it be otherwise.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COURSE OF THE STUDY

Choosing Ways to Make Judgements about School Success

This chapter is concerned with explaining the course and research design of the study. The general research question was: What are the successful ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes? Specifically, it was important to investigate how people interacted in their sociocultural contexts and influenced the ways schools worked. A particular focus here was on whether the school development planning strategy was a driving force for change in schools. Furthermore, it was of interest in the study to ascertain how student achievement in the Kimberley schools best was measured. These questions were challenging, therefore, I considered that a developmental and longitudinal study, conducted over three years, and using an interpretive model of research was an appropriate methodological framework for the study to address the research questions.

Three distinct and chronological phases evolved in the study. During each phase several judicious decisions were made to guide the study because the Kimberley region was remote and my resources to visit the area were minimal. Therefore, careful decisions were made about how the study should progress to best address the research questions. My journeys to and from the Kimberley region were by air and, within the region, by road from school to school. I travelled nearly 35,000 kilometres, mostly alone, during the three years of the study. The distances by road were very long, often physically exhausting, but constantly awe-inspiring in terms of the landscapes traversed. Some parts of the study were conducted during the "dry" season and often colleagues quipped that I was "merely having a holiday". It is the time when most tourists visit the Kimberley. Other parts of the study (the exploratory phase and some schools in phase three) were conducted during the onset of "the wet" season when tropical storms were forewarned with spectacular lightning. The humidity was oppressive and the threat of torrential rain was a concern because flooding rivers and creeks would cut a community from the outside world. During my road travel my constant worry was how I would cope if my vehicle broke down in the "middle of nowhere". I did not have the lone physical strength to change a tyre on a 4X4-wheel drive vehicle. (Fortunately, I never faced this problem, and I felt more comfortable working in the field on the welcomed occasions when my nominated District Office liaison person, my husband, or my supervisor accompanied me on some of my road trips to schools.)

Over the course of the study, I visited each school for four or five days and in phase three, up to 10 days at a time. During those times I shared accommodation, meals, and social and professional experiences with many people in school communities. On one adventure, accommodation in one small school was so stretched that my supervisor and I were allowed to turn the staffroom into our "home" together with several hundred daddy-long legs (spiders)! Sleeping on the floor for eight nights caused us to think "hard" about educational research! It is notable for me to remember such contingencies in the study. They create the substance of one of my life stories and much of the unwritten aspects of the study. Of necessity, however, this chapter describes the general course of the study. I have structured the chapter first, to reveal my understandings of the interpretive model of research, the related ethical issues, and the design of the study. Next, according to the three phases of the study, I outline the significant aspects about purpose, data sources, data generation and collection techniques, and how data were analysed and represented.

Working within the Interpretive Model of Research

Ontological Assumptions

The reasons for my selection of an interpretive model of research rested with the broad nature of the overarching research purposes and questions. These were surrounded by the far ranging sets of evidence and arguments featured in chapters two, three, and four. The diverse Kimberley school contexts shaped by economic, social, cultural, political, and historical influences present fluid social day-to-day realities to investigate. Within schools, the decision-making processes, the implemented curriculum, and the ways in which students learn and achieve in varying school settings were considered too complex and layered to investigate in a purely school effectiveness approach. Thus, the study drew from the ontological assumption described by Denzin (1989). "Social reality as it is sensed, known, and understood is a social production" (Denzin, 1989, p. 5). People hold their own local and constructed realities of their social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; 1998) because they are capable of shaping their own behaviour and the behaviour of others (Denzin, 1989). Multiple realities exist because humans interact with one another by manipulating and negotiating symbols, language, and meanings. Often "these multiple realities will invariably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding (*verstehen*) can be achieved" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 37, emphasis in original).

The intent of the study was not to find generalisable results in terms of student achievement, although this is a notion central to the school effectiveness research field.

The quality of student outcomes in the Kimberley was known. Student performance overall was of a poor quality. Rather, the strength of the study was to seek out school successes, successes against the odds, particularly in relation to how schools worked and changed to improve student outcomes. I wanted to make judgements about everyday school life at first hand by looking at and qualifying the meanings people associated with their macro and micro contexts. The assumption I made in the study was that I would take a symbolic interactionist perspective. The implications of symbolic interactionism in social research, as described by Woods (1992), are that reality is layered, there must be an appreciation of the culture being studied, and one must try to learn and understand symbolic meanings (the language, gestures, looks, actions, and appearance) of the participants. Also, the researcher must try to define, through the lens of self, the context in which social interactions are situated and how people construct their social reality. Therefore, my explanations of the context of the study would be subjective. My explanations would be in relation to my own emotions and reactions to the context thus the advice of Jansen and Peshkin (1992) and Agar (1996) was important. A researcher's responses to context must be checked for irrational bias and justified.

Epistemological Assumptions

As espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1994), my epistemological belief was that a transactional and subjective relationship needed to exist between the would-be-knower (me) and the knowers (those who participated in the study). I needed to gain understanding about a social setting from participants as they went about their lives and encounters with those around them. As the person who collected data from the field, I was responsible for critically reflecting on the research process and the data that were collected and analysed for interpretive purposes. I had to make choices about when to be involved with participants or when to keep my distance; when to create opportunities for interaction or when to stand back from events and actions; and when to question my possible spurious explanations. The study, therefore, was value-laden. Eisner (1988) stated that "how we come to see the world, what we think it means, and eventually what we believe we can do about the world are intimately related to the technologies of mind we have acquired" (p. 19). Bruner (1986) believed we are not trying to establish truth but verisimilitude in interpretive research because a study represents truly conceivable experiences. Giroux (1988) also reminded us that any educational researcher must recognise the centrality of politics and power in the educational research act.

The study impinged on the politics and power structures of the school communities in conjunction with my own belief system about schools, their communities, and how I

envisioned studying a social world. I understood that the macro and micro contexts of the schools were intricate, I held my own perceptions of the research problem, I made choices about the research design, and I drew upon the range of theoretical views discussed in previous chapters for explanatory purposes. The interpretive model of research was used to guide the several methods for data collection, analyses, and representation. It provided me with the capacity to gain the detailed, context-bound information necessary to understand first, the various ideas that people held about their contexts from their own points of view, and second, the potential to make my own personal judgements about the schools. The interpretation of ideas was central to the study. Wolcott (1992) suggested that ideas enable researchers to position themselves in a study and to plan their studies strategically. He further offers that inquiry is idea driven through theory, concepts, or problems.

The study of school success in the Kimberley did not aim to generate new or grand theory. There is no theoretical chapter in this thesis. However, the many theoretical aspects of the conceptual referents that are discussed in chapters two, three, and four provide the conceptual framework to position the study and the research problem for investigation. Because the literature guided the study, I did not consider the study to be purely grounded in the sense used by Glaser and Strauss (1967). But the data were grounded in a specific context but were analysed not just in descriptive terms, or how things happened, but also with the attempt to say why things happened. I recognised that there was the chance to be overwhelmed with qualitative data gathered in the study and the difficulties in relying on description and story telling in the interpretive model of research. Therefore, the iterative nature of the study was vital in reducing the data and gradually building judgements about the quality of schools in the Kimberley. At the same time, based on the contention of Borman, LeCompte, and Goetz (1986) and LeCompte and Preissle (1993), I was not deterred from exploring the possibilities of translatability and comparability of findings in the study.

Methodological Assumptions: Borrowing Techniques from the Ethnographic Method

A methodological question, as elaborated upon by Guba and Lincoln (1994, 1998), is how best to pursue the research purpose. What strategies are used to collect and analyse data to underpin interpretations? In the Kimberley study, it was important to investigate what participants believed and expressed about their schools in terms of success and how they went about trying to make their schools more successful. Educational ethnography, while traditionally rooted in anthropology (Agar, 1996; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Spindler, 1982; Spindler & Spindler, 1992; Wax, 1971; Wilcox, 1982; Wolcott, 1992, 1997), was chosen as an appropriate method to

investigate the Kimberley educational setting. Geertz (1973) described ethnography as a hermeneutic process, a search for meaning, that the researcher, the outsider, pursues to learn about and interpret the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others within their own world. It is a process to study human life in naturalistic settings (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Scholars such as Clifford and Marcus (1986), however, argued that the problem in ethnography is how much of whose reality is portrayed. The researcher is not an aloof observer. Researchers bring a set of values to the research process and they can only make interpretations about what they have learned as they move from the field to writing a text for a reader (Denzin, 1998). Geertz (1973) suggested that by using thick description the researcher differentiates between the external appearance of an event and an interpretation of that event.

> A thin description simply reports facts, independent of intentions or circumstances. A thick description in contrast gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organised the experience, and reveals the experience as a process. Out of this process arise the text's claims for truth, or its verisimilitude. (Denzin, 1998, p. 324)

Thus, the ethnographic text provides the outcomes of what the researcher and the researched negotiate as shared meaning. The negotiation is based on the notion that the insider in a culture holds the expert knowledge about the culture and it is the task of the outsider to find ways to understand the culture (Goodenough, 1971). Wolcott (1992) further pointed out that many forms of qualitative research have been termed as ethnography but it should be clear how the ethnographic techniques are used, modified, and combined to achieve a research purpose. Wolcott cautioned that researchers must be alert to whether they are "doing ethnography" or "borrowing ethnographic techniques" because ethnography is all about cultural interpretation (p. 23).

Wilson (1977), Wilcox (1982), Spindler and Spindler (1992), and Wolcott (1985, 1997), for example, have shown how ethnography can be used in educational research to portray diversity in settings. Educational ethnography aims to discover what is going on in an educational setting as constructed by its participants, to assume that which is everyday is nevertheless extraordinary, to look at the relationship between the setting and its context, to know that "something is up here", and to use one's own knowledge and theory to inform observations made. Ethnography is the research method where participant observation and interview are predominant data collection techniques. Ethnography also can adopt confirmatory survey methods (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Traces, document analyses, and the collection of artefacts also provide useful substantiation for a researcher's

interpretations. Ethnography is a process in which the researcher considers the observed, the observer, the tale or story told, and how the reader might reconstruct the story (van Maanen, 1988). The story creates for the reader the real world that was studied (Denzin, 1998).

I felt the huge responsibility bestowed on me as a researcher using the ethnographic approach to maintain the rigour of the research process. "So much depends on what one sees and hears that much rests on one's power of observation and listening" (Woods, 1992, p. 371). Eisner (1991) believed that in qualitative inquiry the personal style of the researcher should not be a liability just because the style is not easily replicated. Instead, the personal stamp placed on their work by qualitative inquirers is a strength. I believe the method I use in the study borrows heavily from the ethnographic field, bears my own personal style, but, in the strictness of definition, may not be considered by some readers as an ethnography. Indeed, the story told and the author's authority can always be doubted (Denzin, 1998). Notwithstanding, the choice to use the methods of ethnography in the study posed several ethical dilemmas for me.

Ethical Issues

Deyhle, Hess, and LeCompte (1992) and Howe and Moses (1999) described different ethical theories and the way that these shape fieldwork. Deyhle et al. (1992) suggested that most research in education is applied because education is a delivery system. However, different ethical theories can inform the work of educational researchers according to their changing positions in the research process. Ethical positions may vary because of the issues involved in a study, the context of the study, or the participants in a study. Howe and Moses (1999) claimed that all educational research is about advocacy and often about vulnerable groups of students. Thus for me, there were many intellectual and moral responsibilities to consider in the study. There was the need to retain a balance between personal interest and care about participants, forming friendships with individuals, crossing boundaries between opposing groups, and maintaining professional distance through the entire research process.

There were particular issues that required serious thought. I needed to abide by the *Policy and Guidelines on Research in Government Schools* (Ministry of Education, 1992). This policy gives the responsibility to schools to decide whether they participate, or not, in small-scale research. It was my role to ensure that the schools I visited were informed and consented to participate in the study. Participants needed to understand the nature and purpose of the study and anyone who provided me with information knew why they were

doing so. I needed to be cognisant of the ethical guidelines established for research concerning indigenous peoples (now formalised in NBEET, 1999a) regarding informed consent, privacy, appropriate use and publication of research results, protection of materials, and involvement of and benefits to communities. It was imperative no potential harm was unwittingly generated by inappropriate interpretations and inaccurate portraits of schools, students, and their communities. My advocacy role as both an outsider and insider to the school communities required consideration. As an outsider, it was important to document and describe as fairly as possible what I observed. It was important to look at variability rather than generalisability of information in the school communities that I visited. As an insider, I needed to understand the lives and points of view of participants in the study. At the same time, I did not believe that this study could speak for Aboriginal people in school communities. It could only represent how schools worked to succeed in their unique sociocultural contexts. Participants were continually asked to review and critique the interpretations I made. In all communication to schools I endeavoured to make clear the time and effort that would be required of participants, how the data would be collected, and that participation in the study was voluntary. The benefits of the study were explained as providing a research basis for how schools were gaining success given their sociocultural contexts. These successes needed to be shared by other colleagues in the Kimberley Education District.

Brickhouse (1992) warned that differing reactions to researchers are to be expected, especially if participants are unclear about how the study may be of reciprocal benefit to them. I had to be conscious of the persona I presented to people involved in the study. My access to sites progressed smoothly but I needed to preserve access to schools for fellow researchers. Importantly, I could not pretend I knew nothing about schools. I had a long history with government schools in WA. In each personal encounter with schools and individuals I reiterated the purpose of the study and clearly outlined my professional background in education. To my knowledge, and there was no direct feedback to me to the contrary, I did not upset schools. Indeed, there were several individual and public acknowledgments of my work within the schools by the people in these schools. In all schools there were difficult goodbyes because of the bond that had been developed between others and myself on the study. People in isolated communities like to see friends.

The main dilemma for me in the study was when I began to write the findings down. The representational aspects of the study were significant. I was responsible for producing any documents associated with the procedures and representation of the study. At the time of conducting the study, there were only 21 government schools in the Kimberley. I was conscious in such a small sample of schools that anonymity of participants and their

communities and schools was to be closely guarded. When anonymity is guaranteed, participants are more likely to express their ideas and feelings more openly (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). Names, not even pseudonyms laden with imagery, were used to represent settings, people, or specific events in the study. While schools and their communities were isolated from one another, the "bush telegraph" was reliable in transferring information across schools. Most teachers knew each other well through District professional development sessions and most knew, to some degree, about all schools in the region. I did not wish to betray anyone's confidence or add to the grapevine communication amongst schools. I have protected the confidence of those who wished to remain anonymous and safeguarded personal and sensitive information divulged by participants to me that was not associated directly with the study (although the information was valued by me because it spoke about the deep feelings associated with intimate and professional lives in the schools). Those participants who required recognition, as Shulman (1990) alluded to, have been acknowledged. The study was conducted so that no harm was intentionally done to any individual or school even though in the end I made some final judgements about the quality of schools and their practices to improve. I accept responsibility for these judgements that I made with a gazing eye. Nevertheless, I feel confident that these judgements are based on my consistent and systematic recording and analysis of empirical data. I have not intentionally shamed anyone. Instead, I have used impressionistic tales, descriptive statistics, and stories to present scenarios of what I learned about government schools in the Kimberley.

The Design of the Study

A Developmental and Longitudinal Design

The planning and preparation for the study was challenging because the design of the study was both developmental and longitudinal. The study was developmental because it was conducted over three years in three developmental and distinct phases. Over the three phases, data were collected about schools, communities, classrooms, and students using a combination of interviews; observations of settings, events and people; a questionnaire specifically tailored for the study; and collections of documents, artefacts, and samples of students' work. The developmental aspect of the study explains the way I went about the addressing the research questions in an iterative way, research questions which attempted to interpret interactions, and the consequences of these interactions, between parents, teachers, administrators and students within their sociocultural contexts. Thus, the study moved from an initial exploration of a small number of schools commenced in 1995,

broadened to gathering information from a larger number of schools in 1996, then refined the research process to a few school cases conducted in 1996 and 1997.

The study was longitudinal in the sense that the schools for case studies in phase three were selected from those used in phase two, on the basis of the results in phase two, and data were collected from these schools at two points in time, one year apart. Also, 150 students in the case study schools were tracked in the assessment process at the same two points of time. Working hypotheses were developed for each phase to gradually focus the data gathering process. These hypotheses also allowed me to deepen my analysis and interpretations of the data.

The Quality of the Study: Trustworthiness, the Hermeneutic Process, and Authenticity

Guba and Lincoln (1985, 1989) defined the quality or trustworthiness of interpretive research. It is the "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" of the data generated and how they are analysed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 43). The trustworthiness of the methodology in the study was safeguarded on several premises. The data were collected and analysed by me in close liaison with people in their natural and familiar environments. The credibility, the internal validity of the study, was heightened because the research methods used in the study were triangulated. The chosen methods also allowed me to develop continuous contact with several school sites, persistent observations, member checking of multiple realities, and to collect a variety of reference material (documents, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs and student samples of work). Also, I kept many records during the course of the study as an audit trail which included the raw data collected, data analysis results and reductions, data synthesis products, and process notes such as my reflexive journal. The journal was constantly used in the data collection periods during the study and expanded as an analytical log and reflective tool when I made ongoing notes about the research questions. I knew the Kimberley region well in terms of its political, economic, social and cultural circumstances. I had practical and professional knowledge of schools and classrooms, similar to the idea described by Clandinin and Connelly (1996), especially in underprivileged communities. I was able to observe at close hand, seasonal and cycles of events in schools over a period of time to recognise the meaning and flow of events as proposed by Wolcott (1997). I constantly tested my interpretations of the qualitative data within my own framework of experience in schools. Peer debriefing with my District liaison person and my supervisor also was a valuable process to clarify my interpretations. The dependability of the study was concerned with the triangulation over three years. Triangulation, the procedure where data are collected and analysed from several perspectives, is amply described in the literature

(Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Jick, 1979; Mathison, 1988; Stake, 1998). Time, methods, and data for validation triangulated the study. Also, there was some investigator triangulation because my supervisor was able to accompany me on one fieldtrip in 1997. The developmental aspect of the study added to the confirmability of the interpretations made in the study. Using the survey method to confirm interpretations across a larger sample of schools fostered the transferability of the findings, that is, the external validity of the study. The survey also allowed me to audit any of my own and other's interests, biases, and motivations in the study. While the study relied significantly on the interpretation of social settings based on qualitative data collection techniques, the procedure of combining the qualitative with the quantitative data also increased the transferability of results.

The hermeneutic process was a strong feature of the quality in the study to ensure that the collection and analysis of the data were confirmed for goodness (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) claimed that "data inputs are analysed immediately on receipt" and that the interpretations made "may be 'fed back' for comment, elaboration, correction, revision, expansion, or whatever" immediately to those who provide the information (p. 244). This dialectic approach was used particularly in phase one and three of the study when the fieldwork relied on inquiry, observation, and collecting artefacts. Interviews were confirmed immediately, observations were checked with people where and when events occurred, and documents and students' work samples were validated with relevant people. I believed it was essential to ensure that my interpretations of all the qualitative data collected in the study were acceptable to participants, that their views were being construct by me in a believable way, and I was making fair judgements about schools, classrooms, and students.

Authenticity was addressed in several ways in the study. Stakeholders in the study were represented across several groups, parents, students, teachers, principals, and District Office personnel, and the data that these stakeholders provided were fairly analysed and interpreted. Many participants were able to reconstruct their own views about their schools and classrooms because they participated in the study but this is not claimed universally for all participants. For example, some teachers requested that I provide feedback for change in their classroom operations after I observed them in their classrooms. In some situations the study became a catalyst for change in terms of a developing a new school policy. However, in this study I chose not to become involved in negotiating change. This was not part of the design of the study. The next part of this chapter provides a more detailed description of the three phases and how the quality of the study was developed.

Phase One: Commencing the Fieldwork

Gaining Access to the Field

The purpose of the first phase of the study was to acquaint myself with the daily operations of schools within their sociocultural context. I had a long association with schools in hard-pressed communities across WA except with those in the Kimberley. While I had visited the Kimberley many times for historical research purposes, and worked with principals of schools in the Kimberley on a consultancy basis away from school sites, I had not been into any of the Kimberley schools to observe them closely. Therefore, my working hypothesis was: The macro sociocultural contexts of schools affect the ways schools work. During phase one, information was generated from four schools during a four-week fieldtrip through participant and non-participant observations, structured and informal interviews, examining documents, and collecting artefacts. The data were recorded in a set of notes about each school, a personal journal, and transcripts and summaries of interviews,

The sample of 21 potential schools, with 310.4 full-time equivalent staff (P. Green, personal communication, October, 1996), for investigation was naturally bounded by their location. I could not assume, however, that all schools in the Kimberley Education District would participate in the study. One of my first tasks accomplished was to gain communication with the schools to conduct the first phase of the study. The District Office had endorsed the study so my protocol for entry into the schools during phase one was closely linked to the District Office procedures. I believed it was essential to abide by this protocol. I wished to maintain positive working relations within the District especially in the light of my previous consultancy work with principals. More particularly, most of the 1995 school year had been clouded by industrial action in government schools. Part of the action by teachers was to work to rule. They would not participate in any professional work beyond normal duties. As a matter of course, my plans were at the mercy of others. The work of Brickhouse (1992), Delamont (1992), Merriam (1998) and Minichiello et al. (1990) reminded me that the power and control of events should remain with the participants, especially those who are the gatekeepers of information or those who are suspicious of a researcher's intentions. Further, I was constrained by my obligations as a student researcher. I was nearly a year behind in getting into the field due to the industrial action in schools. The fact that I was able to initiate the exploratory work during the industrial turmoil, even though late in the year, was a sign of the goodwill shown to me by the Kimberley District Office and the schools. My liaison person in the District Office conducted the initial contacts with all schools in the District. She was able to gauge their

interest and willingness to participate in the exploratory work of the first phase and to secure their informed consent for their involvement. In the political and practical sense, it was the best way to go.

The aim, at this point in the study, was to select representative schools using a purposive sample meeting certain criteria (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Merriam, 1998). I eventually selected, in collaboration with my liaison person, four schools based on size of school, location of school, and school enrolment. Small and larger remote community schools and more urbanised schools were chosen to gain a feel for different sociocultural influences in communities. Also, schools were selected from locations across the western, mid valley, and eastern parts of the Kimberley. Across these schools, K-10 students were represented. Johnson (1990) provided insight about the selection of key informants. In the larger schools key informants were self-selected. In the smaller schools all staff were informants. District Office personnel, community people, parents, and students were self-selected for informal conversations because they identified themselves to me. Not only was this my first journey into unknown school settings, it was also a journey to meet and talk to people mostly unknown to me. I was unknown to community people, teachers and students in the selected schools although several principals previously had worked with me. I experienced a range of feelings. My thoughts were captured by van Maanen's (1988) words. "Fieldworkers it seems, learn to move among strangers while holdings themselves in readiness for episodes of embarrassment, affection, misfortune, partial or vague revelation, deceit, confusion, isolation, warmth, adventure, fear, concealment, pleasure, surprise, insult, and always possible deportation" (p. 2). I wanted to built rapport and trust with the selected schools during the exploratory phase so that I could work more independently from the District Office in the future. In such a small potential sample of government schools in the Kimberley I could not afford, and nor should I, offend people in schools. I was confident that the communication networks, "the bush telegraph", between schools in such an isolated area would transmit messages very quickly about the study and me as a person and a researcher. These messages needed to be positive.

Generating Data though Observations

Data were generated from participant and non-participant observations. Observations were recorded in a set of school notes where I recorded events and behaviour that helped me to describe and interpret any of the data I collected. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) pointed out that the ordinariness of everyday life in educational institutions is evident to those who have an intimate knowledge of them. I faced the danger of only recording the unusual events I observed but I consciously worked at becoming a participant and non-participant

observer of the every-day activities in communities, school settings, and individual classrooms to provide the substance for my interpretations and descriptions. In the community setting I was usually a non-participant observer going about my daily business, such as organising accommodation, shopping for essentials, and re-fuelling my vehicle. Occasionally, a social conversation was struck up with locals. It seemed to me that I was seen merely as a tourist, detached and neutral, nobody really important to those in the community, and someone who didn't need to be spoken to.

In the school settings I tended to become more of a participant observer. I was welcomed into staffroom conversations and rituals. In classrooms, teachers seemed to be most comfortable with me in their room when I worked as an assistant teacher with the children. Teachers really did not like being directly observed. Wolcott (1990) explained the different kinds of observations a researcher makes. I noticed how my observations differed in nature and timing. On entry into any new situation, my observations were broad and sweeping. I tried to look at everything from the setting, people, activities, interactions and subtle features such as non-verbal communication. I directed my observations to who was in the scene, what was happening, and when and why such interactions occurred. Once the setting, situations, events and people became familiar to the point where I could describe them, my observations began to take on more of a looking at "nothing in particular" approach to wait for the unusual to happen. At the same time, my observations began to search for paradoxes and the problems faced by the people in the schools. These types of observations became more frequent as each visit extended and teachers became more used to my presence in their world.

The data gathered relied on my sensitivity to the setting and the people themselves. Further, my ability to watch, listen and pose timely, worthwhile questions became important. Not always, I might add, did I succeed in these skills. I was an outsider and it took time to pick up on the subtleties of a community's and school's unique codes and rituals. As time passed during my visit to each school, I began to observe events repeatedly. I began to recognise very quickly what was familiar to me from my own experience in schools. The most noticeable change in my own thinking was that I became intensely interested in the strange and unfamiliar, always trying to make some sense of the differences I perceived from my own knowledge of schools. Different observations made me constantly work through the biases I brought to the observations so I worked to ensure that repeated observations confirmed interpretations. All different observations were noted at the point of occurrence as unobtrusively as possible but always with the permission of the observed or participant in conversation. Records were kept in a set of notes I compiled about each school. Much of the information was crosschecked with informants face-to-

face and observations were confirmed by asking several people about my interpretations so that my ideas could be confirmed, modified or discarded. At the end of each day I wrote my jottings, thoughts, and reflections into my journal, made plans for the next day about other questions I might ask, and noted my reactions to events I needed to confirm or disconfirm. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to these jottings as marginal remarks that help reduce data for future coding. I also noticed, as time went by, that after initial observations were made and confirmed, I tended to enter only significant new and different information into my journal. In the same journal, although the process is described as an analytical log by Minichiello et al. (1990), I commenced highlighting or noting ideas as they emerged about the research question.

Generating Data through Inquiry

I generated information through many interviews. One strategy was by interviewing key informants. Another strategy was informally conversing with as many people as possible. The talking and listening processes facilitated my interpretation of different people's meaning and the understanding of their community and educational settings. I listened to the different stories people had to tell me to gain, as van Maanen (1988) explained, significant impressions from the field. All conversations were recorded in a personal journal. However, as van Maanen suggested, one's whole memory or intellectual activity is unlikely to be found in daily notes. "The great dependency commonly claimed to exist between fieldnotes and fieldworkers is not and cannot be so very great at all … the heavy glop of material we refer to as fieldnotes is necessarily incomplete" (van Maanen, 1988, p. 118). Moreover, Geertz (1973) is encouraging with his words that it is "not necessary to know everything in order to understand something" (p. 20). It was important not to predetermine participants' responses through the type of questions posed. Spindler (1982) discussed that informants in a study are the ones who hold, although at different levels of articulation, the emic and cultural knowledge of their environment. Throughout the study as I arrived in each school, it was obvious that teachers had been clearly informed about my presence in their school. There were no surprises about my visits. Principals knew that I wanted to talk about their schools and the roles they carried out. Teachers knew that I wanted to talk to them and observe their classrooms. They were obliging in their efforts to schedule time for me to talk to them individually for in-depth interviewing. I had a sense that a cooperative spirit prevailed across all the schools I visited.

The categories that guided the interviews were based on the Scheerens and Creemers (1989) multi-level model of school effectiveness (see Figure 4.2). I acknowledge that Janesick (1998) believed that it is not the accepted practice to commence collecting

qualitative data with preconceived ideas about categories. However, I wanted to evaluate whether the Scheerens and Creemers (1989) model was a helpful way to observe schools. I made a judgement call that the categories in the model represented the nested nature of schools and were broad enough to hook on to a range of grounded data. Also, in compiling the guide ideas for questions, I used the Edmonds' (1979) five factors of schools effectiveness (see Figure 4.1) and the factors which engender success in culturally diverse classrooms (see Figure 4.3). The guiding broad questions posed in the interviews are listed in Figure 5.1.

CONTEXT LEVEL	SCHOOL LEVEL	CLASSROOM LEVEL	STUDENT LEVEL
What are your views about this community? How do your think this community views the school? How is the community involved in the school? How do you think income, location, access to goods and services influence the way this community works? In what ways do these issues relate to the school?	Can you suggest if and why this school is successful? What does this school add to students' lives? Can you describe how this school works? What are the resources like in this school? What makes you stay (or want to leave) this school?	How would you describe your classroom? How would you describe your arrangement of the curriculum? How would you describe your teaching practices? What is the level of access that you have to resources for your classroom? What sorts of problems do you encounter in the classroom? Do you have autonomy with support to innovate in your classroom?	How would you describe the students at this school? What is the potential of students in your classroom/s? What are their aspirations and goals? How would you describe the students' achievement, particularly in the basic skills? How are students assessed in this school and is the process frequent? How is their progress reported?

Figure 5.1.   List of Guide Questions for In-depth Interviews

During the four-week period in phase one of the study, nine people were interviewed formally for approximately one hour, and often longer, to orally generate text about what was in their minds, specifically about their communities, schools, classrooms, and

students. The key informants were selected by me to represent principals, teachers, parents and District personnel. The interviews were taped but each person was guaranteed confidentiality. Any text used from the audiotapes in a public way remained anonymous. The order of posing the questions changed with different respondents, as did the amount of time spent on pursuing each of the questions. Each respondent took control of how and where the interview went except that I tried to guarantee the listed questions were asked of each respondent. I made a conscious effort to mostly listen, prompt when necessary, and tried to remain non-judgemental as suggested by Merriam (1998) and Minichiello et al. (1990). The questions were posed so I could elicit information about how respondents perceived their school community, the way the school and classrooms worked, how they believed their students reacted to teaching, and the nature of student achievement at their school. An example of one transcribed interview and its summary log is contained in Appendix A.

To address the issue of standards in the interviewing process, I orally summarised at the end of each interview what I believed the teachers had informed me about. This made a neat closure to the interview, seemed to be met with responses such as "I did have something to say", and left the door open for me to pursue follow-up conversations. The process provided immediate member checking of my interpretation of what people were saying to me. Where any ideas required clarification, I noted the inconsistencies in my journal. Inconsistent interpretations were few because, more often than not, clarification of ideas occurred during the interview. I noticed that my interview style was particularly conversational and based on a recursive model of interviewing, a model described by Borman et al. (1986) and Minichiello et al. (1990). The model relied on the natural flow of conversation to direct it and continued until the guide questions had been addressed. In the interviews the respondents often elaborated on one or two of the categories because of their strong opinions about specific issues.

The formal interview questions also guided the informal conversations I constantly engaged in with over 30 other consenting participants during the four-week period. The difference was that not all questions were asked of each informant. Engaging in informal conversations with some of the participants, however, was not all smooth going. It seemed that when teachers were asked questions to elicit reactions and feelings about the school and how people worked at the school, there was some reticence to be forthright. People who knew little of me were reluctant to be open. At first, the different participant reactions appeared to be more about individual suspicions about the questioning rather than my inability to make communication links with them. Observations about these conversations were noted later in my journal with my musings and reflections added. Great care was

taken to safeguard the teacher participants from feeling threatened in these informal conversations. I avoided toting a note pad and pencil. As my time in each school extended, however, I became more attuned to the idea that teachers' hesitancy in conversations and interviews was more to do with underlying tensions in individual schools rather with the data gathering technique or some interpersonal failing on anyone's part. As time went by in each school, those who initially were constrained in their interactions with me became more relaxed in informal conversations. Many teachers made comments along the lines of:

> It was good to talk to an outsider. Nothing will change here because I have talked to you but it was interesting for me during the conversation to put some people and events into perspective. It shows we don't have objective people in these schools that we can go to with our problems. (Record of Individual School Notes: Teacher comments, 30/11/95)

Given time, most participants freely entered into conversations with me and made unreserved comment. In particular, these same teachers were less hesitant to talk about their classroom practices, students, and parents. Teachers seemed to talk freely about what they had control over and knew best. Parents and community members were more than forthcoming with their comments, both positive and negative, about schools and teachers. The principals and District Office personnel were able to be more circumspect with their comments and made more sweeping observations about communities and schools. They tended to provide "bigger picture views" of school contexts. However, people's different agendas usually emerged in the way they spoke about other people in schools or the District Office in connection with their personal situations. In some situations, where teachers found their workplace untenable, the interviews and conversations usually became a disclosure of their concerns, frustration, anger, and disappointments. Comments along these lines were not "held back".

Generating Data by Examining Materials

I sought out several relevant documents for perusal associated with School Development Plans, school profiling, priorities for planning, and strategic plans. I realised that these documents were not produced for the study's purposes but, as Merriam (1998) suggested, school documents contain data already gathered which add to the bank of information to be analysed by me as the researcher. Records about documents, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), were kept according to description, type of contact, summary of contents, and significance of the document to the study. These documents, such as School Development Plans, provided objective non-reactive information for analysis and

grounded the day-to-day operational issues that schools and teachers faced. Conversations and interviews with people in schools enabled me to return to these documents to follow and analyse the key ideas and pursue new leads about them to understand the community, school, classroom and student categories more fully. I also collected numerous photographs of settings, events, and interactions between people. Collecting live data reveals the immediate and natural behaviour of participants (Spindler, 1982). These records reminded me of where, why, and how I made interpretations. Photographs have not been included in this thesis. They too easily identify where I was, to whom I spoke, and the people I observed. Furthermore, sometimes photographs may have been taken inadvertently without people's real informed consent. Therefore, the photographs were used for data confirmation not data representation purposes.

Making Sense of the Information: The Fieldnotes, Interviews, and Artefacts

As with all ethnography, at the end of four weeks I had gathered a substantial set of qualitative data spread across taped interviews, a personal journal, school profile notes, and artefacts such as documents and photographs. The purpose of my analysis of information was to reduce the complexity of the data as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994). I wanted to systematically order the data to identify the patterns and themes of influence within the categories of community, school, classroom and student levels that suggested any connections between the meanings given by different individuals about the categories in different settings and contexts. As Borman et al. (1986) suggested, any initial analysis examines each item that defined objects, events, and people. The next level establishes patterns that make meaning and how these meanings are connected. From the patterns I noted my emerging substantive thoughts about the research problem and questions. These notes were sometimes sentences, paragraphs or a few pages. Strauss (1990) referred to these types of notes as memos to oneself which attempt to develop propositions about what the data might be saying. This process was used throughout phase one but also at later times as "sudden flashes of inspiration" about the research problem occurred. The memos exemplified my meta-cognitive processes as I grappled with what the data might be revealing to me and became the reflective aspect in my journal.

The Fieldnotes

I first worked with my fieldnotes. I began sorting the data by coding each separate item noted from my participant and non-participant observations. I coded according to community, school, classroom, and student categories. The coded ideas were extracted from the journal for each school and entered into a computer file as key sentences. The

information at this stage looked like the framework of a four-part descriptive account about an individual school and its community. Immediately, the process reduced the considerable number of text pages to a more manageable text. The noted informal conversations and school profiles were treated in the same way and merged with each school file. Four separate computer files, one for each school, were produced in this process. Merging the four school computer files and re-grouping the key sentences into the four categories into one macro-file was a straightforward process. I produced a composite framework for a collective account. What was interesting in this process was that when the separate school files were merged and each category, such as community, was sifted through again, the key ideas, for the most part, were repetitive. That is, what I observed in one school was the same or different in some way, even the opposite, in another school. I knew that the data could be entered into a computer program for analysis but I took the lead from Wolcott (1990) and LeCompte & Preissle (1993). I manually analysed the data so that my strategies for reasoning and logic remained transparent and self-conscious. The technology associated with qualitative data analysis programs tends to mask the analysis process (Wolcott, 1990). Computers cannot analyse data but they do efficiently organise and quickly retrieve masses of data for interpretation (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). What became apparent at this stage of the analysis was that within the community category, home-school relationships emerged as another significant category of interest. This meshed with the ideas discussed in chapter three concerning home-school relationships. Furthermore, the school level category interestingly sub-divided into variables about leadership and school climate, two of the factors identified in the five-factor model of school effectiveness. In addition, school culture and change associated with school development planning, issues highlighted in the school improvement research, became variables of interest. At the classroom level, teacher efficacy and teacher practice became the two significant variables. At the student level, student behaviour and their achievement emerged as the two important variables. The following Figure 5.2 is a small extract from the home–school relationship category that illustrates how one key ideas was chunked and collated.

Home -School Communication

Community days for Aboriginal culture occur in the school. There are some very positive moves getting Aboriginal parents to the school; they are not always visible but if we want them for anything they will turn up. Parents mainly come to the school because they are called up; not really involved in classrooms. Parents really don't know what the school is doing (eg. topics of study in class) other than school concerts and the like. There is a small parent group that is visible but it is hard to gauge who they go back and talk to. Parents don't really come and talk to us. Asking parents questions needs time; they need to go away and talk about it amongst themselves then come back; if you do it the white way they think "you're not really interested in us".

Figure 5.2.   Example of Extracted Key Ideas from Fieldnotes

The Interviews

The taped interviews were transcribed and summarised as a log for each different item of information from each informant (see Appendix A). This procedure represented a change from the informant's language to my language but I constantly checked that the summary logs retained the essence of meaning each respondent intended, as suggested by Minichiello et al. (1990). Quotes of significance made by the informants were also highlighted for direct use. The logs provided a quick and reliable way to check information when required. Each item of information in the log was then coded for key ideas. To build on the analysis of the fieldnotes and school profiles, the categories and variables that emerged in that analysis were used: community [coded 1]; parent-school relationship [coded 2]; school [coded 3 - leadership (3.1), school climate (3.2), school culture and change (3.3)]; classroom [coded 4 - teacher efficacy (4.1), teacher practices (4.2)]; and students [coded 5 - behaviour (5.1), attitudes (5.2), achievement (5.3)]. Each category, including the split categories, from each interview log (see Appendix A; Part 3 for an example) was merged into one computer file. The merger was then blended with the developing descriptive account from the fieldnotes. The product was long but the text was categorised. It was the nucleus for a several impressionistic tales.

The Artefacts

The analysis of documents was carried out using a summary form indicating: document name; contact with the document; significance of the document; summary of document contents; and the ideas suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994). The summaries were then coded using the same categories as the interview logs and placed into a computer file. This file was then merged with the developing accounts grouped according to themes. The photographs were sorted into the categories to serve as reminders for any interpretations that were made from the texts.

Putting Together an Account to Describe Emerging Themes

The way in which a descriptive account is written, the literary devices used by the writer, shape the portrait of a culture in a particular way. "There is no direct correspondence between the world as experienced and the world as conveyed in text, any more than there is a direct correspondence between the observed and the observer" (van Maanen, 1988, p. 8). However, the account was a means of representing the interpretations I made. The process of merging all the text into a computer file had created the framework of a jointly told tale, the term used by van Maanen (1988). The account was figured out by converging

what I thought fitted together and what participants clearly indicated fitted together. The account, constructed from the collective knowledge of the participants and my observations and collection of materials, gave a shared voice of authority to the participants and me. To produce the account, the task was to look for patterns and convergence in the categories in the merged computer files. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the patterns should summarise "themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and more theoretical constructs" (p. 70).

Thus, the account was supported by the interview data, observational notes, the school profiles, and artefacts. The representation of the account was woven into a series of short episodes to highlight the themes that emerged during the first part of the study. Thus, the account became a series of impressionistic tales (van Maanen, 1998) which were attributed to anonymous characters but based on the real lives of those people I encountered in the field. The voices of those in the study, the "knowers" and the "would-be-knower", were used. Where possible, the exact words of any informant were used by referring back to notes and interview transcripts. However, the impressionistic tales are not exact quotes from interviews. My District Office liaison person, a school psychologist and the only person who knew which schools I had visited, read the tales for verification. She was most familiar with each school's context and setting. In our collaboration on the impressionistic tales any doubtful ideas were crosschecked by referring back to the data for affirmation or rejection. I consider that the impressionistic tales form an account, not a narrative in the literary sense with an introduction, development, and resolution as outlined by Carter (1993). They provided a realistic insight into the contexts and settings that I visited. The impressionistic tales are the substance of chapter six in this thesis.

Phase Two: Developing a Broader Picture

From the first phase of the study I was satisfied that the macro sociocultural contexts of schools were characterised by their isolation, the cultural groups that resided in these areas, and the lack of economic independence of concentrations of people. Parallels of the evidence reported in chapter two were readily found in the Kimberley context. At this point in the study a clear decision was made. I chose not to further any investigation into the macro sociocultural context of schools to provide community descriptions in the study. This is not to deny the importance of sociocultural context in schooling but the study turned more to investigating how schools responded to their community contexts. Several of the bigger social issues in communities were mostly beyond the control of the school. These issues for the study were taken to be consistent with the literature previously discussed and not

really the point of the investigation. Therefore, I was guided by a working hypothesis in phase two that looked more closely at describing schools within their contexts. The working hypothesis was: Detailed information about the home-school, school, classroom, and student levels in more schools will deepen interpretations about their operations.

Gaining Access to More Schools

In the second phase of the study I was concerned with quantitative data collection, using a confirmatory survey. The purpose of the survey was to twofold. First, there was a need to confirm or disconfirm information about schools, classrooms, and students generated from the small sample used in the first phase of the study. There was a need to ascertain the transferability of the information across schools in the Kimberley. Second, there was a need to deepen my understanding about how schools worked in response to their macro sociocultural contexts. According to Johnson (1990) and LeCompte and Preissle (1993), a confirmatory survey is valuable when a large number of participants cannot be interviewed individually. This was the case in the Kimberley. Also, Miles and Huberman (1984) noted that in qualitative research there are "three good reasons to resort to numbers: to see rapidly what you have in a large slice of data; to verify a hunch or hypothesis; and to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias" (p. 215). The kinds of data that I wanted to collect from the Kimberley schools had not been collected before and I judged that it was important to examine their richness by using the survey approach.

For the second phase of the study I was given the go ahead from the District Office to communicate directly with all schools in the District. The first practical action was to ascertain which of the government schools in the Kimberley would participate in the study for the second and third phases. A letter (Appendix B) was sent to the 21 schools in the district (including the 4 schools that had participated in the exploratory work) to gauge their interest in participating in the study in some way. The purpose of the expression of interest was to identify schools, or staff within schools, who did not wish to participate in the study or who would agree to participate in the study by responding to the confirmatory survey, being a case study school, or both. The response to the expression of interest was that: 106 teachers across 15 schools indicated they would be willing to respond to the questionnaire; and 40 of the 106 teachers across 6 schools indicated they would be willing to respond to the questionnaire and then participate in case studies. During the time the information to gauge interest to participate in the study was collected, collated, and organised, a study-specific questionnaire was designed (see Appendix D for the questionnaire) to administer to schools to gain the broader base of information required.

Designing the Study-Specific Survey

There are different typologies offered in the literature to frame questions in surveys (de Vaus, 1991; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990) but generally survey questions should try to find out what respondents do, think, react to, and know. The items used in the questionnaire were arranged in categories similar to the categories of the guide questions used for the interviews conducted in phase one (see Table 5.1). The responses to items in the categories used a 5-point response format (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) to rank responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The ordinal variables were not intended either to represent how much respondents differed or to show an equal relationship between each item in a category or between categories. Rather, the numbers in each category were intended to report the intensity of respondents' beliefs about parent-school relationships, the school, their classrooms, and their students. All items were annotated with a numeral code to facilitate data entry into using the computer program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for statistical data analysis. Information also was gathered using nominal variables such as sex, age, and years of teaching of respondents.

The process for framing the items as statements was double-pronged. First, I began with a concept map using the categories and sub-categories that had been identified from phase one. All the data gathered from phase one were revisited so that any references to the categories were itemised as key words to form possible questions. Second, I referred to the survey used by McGaw et al. (1992) in their Australian Effective Schools Project. From these two sources statements were devised. The initial drafts of statements were checked at the face level of understanding by three of my doctoral student colleagues. Another doctoral student colleague then checked any changes and modifications to statements to ensure that the essence of the items remained. Once I reached a level of satisfaction with the items, the statements were formatted into the questionnaire protocol. There was no attempt to make items "positive" or " negative", but to write them unambiguously, and this was checked in the field-test. This process was time consuming and took approximately eight weeks to complete. The questionnaire was field-tested in a school outside of the Kimberley region to test its construct validity (Jaeger, 1997). The macro sociocultural context of the trial school was similar to the Kimberley schools in terms of isolation and poverty and served a community with a high proportion of non-indigenous people. The questionnaire was field-tested to avoid what Henerson, Lyons Morris, and Taylor Fitz-Gibbon (1987) highlighted as the negative affects on potential respondents to a questionnaire. Surveys should not offend the professional and personal beliefs of teachers. Ten teachers responded to the draft questionnaire. The teachers noted items that were ambiguous, those items that were not clearly understood, and

typographical errors. These types of concerns were accommodated in the revision of the questionnaire.

The main comment gained from the respondents concerned the length of the questionnaire. It was too long. This response posed a dilemma for me. Did I need all of the information or not? I sifted though the items again and deleted those items I thought were unnecessary and then asked two principals from the Kimberley for their opinion on the questionnaire length. These two principals acknowledged that some teachers might see the questionnaire as lengthy. However, they believed the questionnaire would gather worthwhile information and suggested that I should persevere with the length of the survey. I followed this advice but I realised some teachers might not respond because of the time constraints and lack of interest that the questionnaire might imposed. An overview of the different categories contained in the questionnaire and the number of items associated with each category are outlined in Table 5.1. Throughout the questionnaire protocol there was space available for respondents to note down any additional comments.

Table 5.1.   *Questionnaire Categories and Number of Items in Each Category*

Main Categories with Sub-Categories in the Questionnaire	Number of Items
Personal Details	11 (nominal variables)
Parent Level	
Perceptions of parents	8
Parent involvement	6
School actions to involve parents	8
School Level	
Resources available to the school	10
Effective use of resources in the school	12
Decision making in the school	10
Leadership in the school	11
Achievement orientated policy in the school	12
Orderly and caring atmosphere in the school	12

(*table continues*)

Table 5.1.   (continued)

Main Categories with Sub-Categories in the Questionnaire	Number of Items
Classroom Level	
Preparation and planning for teaching	8
Classroom learning environment	10
Classroom behaviour management	12
Organisation of curriculum content in classroom programs	8
Teaching practices in classrooms	12
Monitoring students' progress in classrooms	7
Student Level	
Students' background experiences	10
Students' motivation to learn	10
Students' language development	11
Students' achievement	12

Gathering Data through the Survey

Using the advice of Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) an explanatory covering letter (see Appendix C) accompanied the questionnaire with a stamped addressed return envelope. Communication with schools was managed through a database specifically set up by me for the study. I considered it very important to have a reliable and quick way to keep track of communication with schools to project an image of efficiency and professionalism as a researcher.

From the responses to the expression of interest letter, the questionnaire was mailed to the 106 teachers across 15 schools who expressed their willingness to complete the questionnaire. In the end, even after a second reminder letter and several telephone conversations, the numbers of respondents to the questionnaire totalled 76 from across 14 schools. Thus, there was approximately a 72% response rate in relation to the number of expressions of interest. No particular reasons were given by individuals in the 14 schools about their inability to complete the questionnaire. The principal commandeered the questionnaires sent to the other school, where there could have been several respondents involved. The school was, at the time, embroiled in internal strife, community riots, and a departmental inquiry.

The details about the number of respondents and the types of school they were in are detailed in Table 5.2. The classification of schools is according to ABS population definitions contained in Chapter 2

Table 5.2.   *Number of Respondents to the Questionnaire According to School Type*

Number of Respondents (town schools)	Number of Respondents (small remote schools)	Number of Respondents (larger remote schools)
4	2*	11
4	2*	5
18	3	6
	2	8*
	5	
	4*	
	2	
TOTAL 26	20	30

Notes: * indicates total teaching staff in a school.

Analysing and Reporting the Data

The information gathered from the returned questionnaires was statistically analysed to gain a picture of several schools in the study. The data were analysed to derive frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each of the items. Individual item responses were used in the analysis because collapsing data within the categories lost information (especially in an essentially qualitative study). These kinds of data had never been collected before and I judged it was important to preserve them. The items in each category were not intended to be unidimensional because the categories, as defined in phase one, were based on themes which were not themselves unidimensional. The data analysed also were reported back to the respondents and teachers particularly appreciated leaving data at the item level. For each school, the school means of the items were plotted against the means from all teachers across the schools. In an accompanying letter, respondents were asked not to over-generalise the information. Teachers were asked to consider their school information in the light that teachers' responses came from schools ranging in size and location, and teachers would have interpreted the questions differently. The letter and an example of school feedback is contained in Appendix E. If a school requested the results for their specific school, this feedback was provided in terms of the means of the school's responses to items plotted against the means for all the

schools' responses to items (see Appendix F). In addition, each respondent to the questionnaire was provided with a letter of acknowledgment to add to his or her curriculum vitae (Appendix G).

Data are reported as histograms for each item in chapter seven. The method of displaying the results through histograms, while repetitive, gives an easy overview of the pattern of results in each category which provided more information for the purpose of the interpretive aspects of the study, than would have been gained from the mean scores on constructed scales. Detailed numerical data are reported in Appendix H. The analysis for each category in the questionnaire is discussed and the interpretations made are explained. Reflection on the working hypothesis for phase two and the research questions are provided. At this point of the study the key ideas from the impressionistic tales developed in the first phase and summaries of findings from the second phase were drawn together. The synthesis was a way to reduce the amount of data and analysis to a manageable level. Furthermore, the synthesis provide direction for closer investigation of five case study schools selected from the survey sample (although the selection was constrained because only six of the 14 schools had expressed an interest in being part of the case study work). The synthesis provided both consensus and divergent opinions to provide directions for investigation in the case study schools.

Phase Three: Looking in Schools

By selecting case study schools, I aimed to look more analytically at schools to search for best practices in the way schools used their resources, the way school processes were developed, and to investigate alternative ways to assess the quality of student outcomes. My working hypothesis for this phase was: There are effective practices in schools and classrooms that improve students' learning outcomes. I believed that the work by Brown et al. (1995, 1996), the Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) longitudinal study, and the Garcia model (cited in Cummins, 1998), as mentioned in chapter four, provided some direction about the characteristics of school effectiveness and school improvement in income-deprived communities. Based on these works, I wanted to examine whether schools deliberately alienated parents and placed a buffer between the school and parents to offset negative influences in the school. Also, these studies guided some of my observations and interviews to investigate schools in terms of what type of goals they set, the tension between reducing the curriculum to concentrate on basic skills rather than offer a wide range of content, and how principals worked with classroom teachers. Identifying the type of teachers that best fitted into these schools and how student

performance was celebrated was important. Moreover, classrooms practices associated with student collaboration within family-like settings, integrated thematic curriculum, and language learning and literacy development were important to explore.

Selecting the Cases

Following the analysis of the questionnaire, five case study schools were selected from the 14 surveyed schools to be involved in the third phase of the study. Given the limits of the schools who expressed interest in being involved in the case study work, the criteria for selection of these schools were similar to the sample in the first phase: size of school and location of school. Importantly, the schools selected showed variation in some way in their responses to categories in the questionnaire. Statistical analysis of the responses to various items in the questionnaire for specific schools identified these variations (see Appendix F for one school example). As an illustration, teacher perceptions of school leadership varied from one school to another and, because of the codes assigned to schools and respondents, I was able to examine each school's overall responses to different items. Choosing cases that vary is termed negative-case selection, discrepant-case selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), the search for outliers (Miles & Huberman, 1984) or the search for rival hypotheses (Deyhle et al., 1992). Four of the selected cases also represented the entire teaching staff in the three small schools (School A: 4 staff; School B: 2 staff; School C: 2 staff) and the one larger remote school (School D: 8 staff). In the case of the selected town school (School E) 18 members of the total staff participated in the study. Students from kindergarten to Year 10 were enrolled in all of the selected schools. The enrolment in schools in the remote locations was entirely Aboriginal students, apart from teachers' children. The enrolment in the town centre school was both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal on an approximate 1:3 basis.

Generating and Analysing Data about the Cases

The data were generated from parents, principals, teachers, and students and were analysed to make interpretations about the success of schools in terms of the best outcomes students achieved and the best school level and classroom level practices that fostered these outcomes. During this phase the school improvement research field was useful to examine school operations and school cultures. Through the school's development planning processes, teaching and learning in classrooms were examined, the management of the change process was explored, and organisational conditions that supported continuity in school operations, even in the face of great

difficulties, were evaluated. I was able to observe schools and classrooms in terms of their day-day operations and the nature of the school culture that supported their work to become more effective. At the same time, the assessment of students' skills was conducted to make judgements about how schools boosted their students' outcomes. The data in phase three of the study were generated in the same manner as detailed in phase one of the study. There was a reliance on observation, inquiry, and examining or collecting artefacts. The description of these approaches is not repeated here because they are amplified in phase one of the study. Several significant differences, however, are noted that provided added depth to the data that were collected and analysed in this phase of the study.

Observations in Phase Three

First, time was an important component in the data collection and analysis processes. One aspect of the time dimension was that the data were generated at two distinct time points, approximately one year apart. Another was that many days, up to 10 days at a time, were spent in each of the five case study schools. This meant that over the year, schools were observed for up to 3 weeks. During the follow up visit a year later, I was able to recheck my observations (and interviews and documents) to look at the issues of change and continuity in school life.

In this phase particular emphasis was placed on observing classrooms and classroom operations of the participants (34 teachers in the first visit and 24 of these teachers who remained in the case study schools in my second visit). Three strategies were used for this purpose. First, observational notes were made in my journal about each teacher's relationship with parents and the teacher's view of students. Second, a structured observation schedule about classroom operations was used to observe teachers working in their classrooms. I was a participant or non-participant observer according to each teacher's preference and observation periods ranged from one lesson to half a day. The categories used in the observation schedule were the same as the classroom level categories in the questionnaire: preparation and planning for teaching, classroom learning environment, classroom behaviour management, organisation of curriculum content in classroom programs, teaching practices in classrooms, and monitoring students' progress in classrooms. In my observations I tried to particularly focus on ideas from the literature reviewed in chapter three in relation to language learning, worldview, social relationships, learning interactions, and students' learning style. The notes made by me on the observational schedule were discussed with each teacher to negotiate that my observations were a realistic commentary of the teacher's classroom practices. An example of these classroom and teacher observations is found in Appendix I. From each observation

schedule, and combined with the two formal interviews conducted with teachers during my school visits, teachers' stories were developed to portray each participant's working life (see Appendix J for one example).

Interviews in Phase Three

In the first visit to the schools, besides the continual informal inquiries pursued, the many observations made, and the numerous documents reviewed, 34 participants were formally interviewed. These interviews were transcribed and summarised similarly to the one illustrated in Appendix A. As noted, only 24 teachers remained in their schools on my second visit and valuable follow-up interviews were conducted with them. These teachers were able to read their summary interviews and comment about whether their intent had been faithfully recorded, changes that had occurred within the year, and aspects of school and classroom life that had not varied. These interviews were taped but not transcribed, only summarised. Any significant comments were noted on the original summary log by me at the time of the interview and reviewed when I listened to each audiotape. The summary logs, and noted comments, were drawn together to create overall summaries for each school. The interviews tended to be more personalised school stories about what had happened during the past year and drew attention to change and stability in school and classroom operations.

Certainly the broad categories of context, school, classrooms, and students were identifiable, but, as Casey (1995) claims, often researchers need to suspend their qualitative methods because coding of texts becomes difficult. Casey believes stories form their own coherent category with their own internal patterns of priority. I believe these interviews formed their own internal priority. I rarely asked a question of participants in these interviews. Rather, I heard a story about life in a school told from personal perceptions. An interesting aspect of the stories was that storytellers took up similar themes, or emphasised one part of school life over another. The taped stories and annotated summary logs were used to develop a written story for each interviewee. An example story is included in Appendix J and was woven from the teacher's interview summary log and observation schedule mentioned previously.

Collection of Artefacts in Phase Three

The collection of samples of students' work during phase three of the study formed a concentrated aspect of data collection. These samples and their analyses will be described

in more detail in chapter nine. Permission for students to be involved in the study was gained from students' parents. The permission was gained in different ways. In each school I negotiated with the principal the way to approach parents (and not each way was necessarily my preferred option although, at this stage no student was lost from the selected sample due to lack of parent consent). In the large town school a letter (see Appendix K) was sent to non-Aboriginal parents per favour of the students for approval to be involved in the study. The AEWs in the school delivered the letter to Aboriginal parents and worked though any queries that they had about giving their permission. The 50 parents in this school gave permission for their children to participate in the study. In two remote schools letters (also see Appendix K) were composed for Aboriginal parents in a very plain way to ask for their permission for their children to be involved in the study. In one of these schools the AEWs delivered the letters and answered any of their questions. In the other school, the principal accompanied me to visit the parents in their homes. In this situation I was a visitor, a stranger, to the community who was introduced in a polite and appropriate way. In the remaining two remote schools, the principals informed the parents about the study and asked whether they were concerned about their children being involved. In Table 5.3 the number and ages of the 150 students included in the 1996 sample (the first year of phase three) for the assessment process are illustrated.

Table 5.3.   *Numbers and Ages of Students Included in the 1996 Sample*

School	5 yrs	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs	13 yrs	14 yrs	TOTAL
School A*	3	3	4	5	3	2	1		1	1	23
School B*	6	5	2	3	1	3					20
School C*	4	1	3	2	1	2		1			14
School D	6	6	6	6	5	2	5	4	3		43
School E	7	7	4	6	7	5	2	4	8		50
TOTALS	26	22	19	22	17	14	8	9	12	1	150

Note: * denotes whole student population in the school.

Children's samples of work were collected by me working with students on familiar classroom tasks and on familiar curriculum content. The assessment tasks are contained in Appendix L and mainly revolved around aspects of literacy. Conventional testing was not

useful to assess students' progress so I developed tailor made tasks in negotiations with participating teachers in the study. The aim was to choose assessment tasks that matched what teachers believed they were teaching in their classrooms and to provide students the best opportunity to show what they knew in skill areas that were agreed to be important. The samples formed the analysis of progress students made from one year to the next.

The design used for students' assessment, as termed by Denzin (1989), was a one-group pretest-posttest approach. There were two sets of repeated observations, approximately one year apart, were made on the same group of students across the five case study schools. However, there was no randomisation of the student sample, no control group, and no investigator control over experimental variables. The sample was purposively selected. In the three small remote schools the entire student enrolment was included in the assessment process. In the larger remote school, the entire staff of eight teachers selected up to five students according to their perception of how the students were performing (above expected grade level; at expected grade level; and below expected grade level). In the town school the teachers, even though some were not formally involved in the study, nominated students from their classrooms in a similar way.

The difficulty in this part of the research design was making inferences about the progress of students and whether any academic progress was attributable to the invention of the schools. Confounding variables were many, including maturation factors, even the different number of students across year levels and gender imbalances which could not be controlled for. One specific variable of interest considered was the attendance patterns of students during the two assessment points to ascertain the amount of time students in the sample attended school within the year. While a comparison group was not included, I believe that my experience in assessing students across the year levels was helpful in providing a standard for judgement. Examples of three students' assessment profiles, that were based on the two work samples collected for each student, are found in Appendix M. Part of the student's profile was his or her attendance record between the two assessment points. Each student assessment was discussed with classroom teachers to ascertain whether the students had performed as they might in the classroom and that their assessment task and my judgements were fair and reasonable. In the few cases where some students were thought to have under-performed on the day, classroom samples of work were collected to modify any assessment made by me.

While criticism can be directed at the looseness of the design of the student assessment process, the main thrust of the student assessment was to find examples of students' progress. Once progress was identified the task was to backmap student progress to

learning styles and processes promoted in classrooms, teaching strategies used by teachers, and school organisation, structures, management, and climate that supported the progress. Backmapping (Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996) is a way of determining and securing quality in schools. Student achievement could not be judged by some external and standardised method in schools in the Kimberley. Instead, the student assessment method that I proposed, individualised and negotiated according to curriculum content taught, was to identify student progress and investigate school and classroom practices that best supported the progress. I believed the process would allow me to make judgements about the success of schools which I then could confirm with two key informants, my District liaison person and the District Superintendent.

Representing the Cases

"Case study does not implicate any particular approach ... but can be most appropriately regarded as an outcome or format for reporting qualitative/descriptive work" (Wolcott, 1992, p. 36). Stake (1998) agreed and saw case study as the choice of object to study, not a methodological choice. However, in qualitative research approaches, the representation of accounts and stories, such as those evolving from case studies, has faced a crisis of legitimation and authority (Denzin, 1998). The rules for the authority of interpretations have become unclear. How is sense made of the data? Who is represented in the text? How legitimate is the text? What will be written and not written in the text? Casey (1995) outlined the emerging problematic of narrative research and suggested the paradigm is especially fluid. Like any problematic the problem is "internally complex and contradictory and is often loosely held together" (Casey, 1995, p. 216). The question of subjectivity is important. Representing the five case study schools was contrived in two ways. First, a narrative as an illustrative example of the case study schools, is portrayed in chapter eight. This case was selected from the five cases because it was one that most represented many ideals in school and classroom operations. This case study confirmed the positive aspects of school and classroom operations identified in the survey. Neuman (1997), stemming from the work of Max Weber, referred to using an ideal type for the purpose of comparison. There is a problematic, however, in choosing an ideal type. I was subjective in selecting the case study school for descriptive purposes to allow the ideals to be explored. To address this issue, a metaphor of harmony is used to portray the school story. The school story was checked with participants in the study and changes were made to reflect more appropriately their perspectives. One of the greatest difficulties in this process was providing a realistic story about issues such as classroom practices, school

operations, and home-school relationships. The potential here to cause harm to people and a disruption in a school's life was ever present.

I arrived at the second way to represent the case study schools by working through several ethical issues and using the backmapping process. The issues were related to confidentiality, personal relationship complexities in remote schools, over-hearing information that was highly sensitive, being told "confessional" type stories (even to the point of imploring me to help with some problems), and seeing events that probably I was not meant to see. Several researchers in the school effectiveness and school improvement fields often highlight the difficulty of investigating schools that are not working successfully, the unwillingness of school participants to engage in the research process about ineffective schools, and the ethical choices that face researchers. To overcome these dilemmas the backmapping process was another fruitful way to represent the case study schools. More to the point, the whole research endeavour was about finding the successful ways that schools worked and, as Slee and Weiner (1998b) cautioned, comparing successful and failing schools can be seen as taking a pathological gaze of schooling. The backmapping process is contained in chapter nine along with an analysis of students' work samples collected during phase three of the study.

Summary of the Research Design

In the design and conduct of the study I constantly grappled with many conceptual, methodological, and ethical issues. The study was borne from my passion to understand how schools worked in the Kimberley to make a difference for all students. I learned that bringing passion to the research process does not necessarily transcend into smooth going. I had to make decisions about the study in an ongoing manner; about how I should collect data, who should be involved in the study, how to manage finite finances and time, and in the end, how I should best represent my interpretations. In chapters six, seven, eight, and nine I elaborate upon the way I represent the findings of the study. The developmental nature of the study is summarised in Table 5.4

Table 5.4.   *The Developmental and Longitudinal Design of the Study*

Design Aspect	Phase One: 1995 Commencing the Fieldwork	Phase Two: 1996 Developing a Broader Picture	Phase Three: 1996-1997 Looking in Schools
Working hypothesis	The macro sociocultural contexts of schools affect the ways schools work.	Detailed information about the home-school, school, classroom, and student levels in more schools will deepen interpretations about their operations.	There are effective practices in schools and classrooms that improve students' learning outcomes.
Method	Exploratory investigation	Confirmatory study-specific survey using a mailed questionnaire	Case studies of schools and a concurrent pretest-posttest design to examine student progress
Sample	4 schools	14 different schools	5 schools selected from the 14 schools
Procedure	4 weeks fieldwork	6 months for design, distribution, collection, and analysis of questionnaires	1 month fieldwork, at two separate points, in each year
Data Sources	Literature; interviews; observations; documents; and artefacts	76 respondents to questionnaires	Interviews; observations; documents; and samples of 150 students' work
Data Records	Personal journal including and an analytical notes; taped interviews, transcriptions and logs; school profile notes; document and artefact summaries	Questionnaire responses and codes for all questionnaire items	Personal journal; taped interviews, transcriptions and logs; school profile notes; document and artefact summaries; and students' work samples
Data Analysis	Coding for key categories and merging computer files based on categories	Statistical analysis using SSPS to show frequencies and means	Coding to typify setting, events over time, interactions, people, and points of tension
Data Representation	A series of impressionistic tales based on key categories of analysis	Tables, reports, and summaries of consensus and divergence of opinion found in the data	A narrative about one case study school as an ideal type linked to an analysis of students' work samples and backmapped to other schools

CHAPTER SIX

PHASE ONE: COMMENCING THE FIELDWORK

A Glance at Schools in the Kimberley: The First Journey

This chapter features the initial phase of the study and I relate impressionistic tales, the term developed by van Maanen (1988), about my first research probe. The exploration phase of the study was based on a working hypothesis: The macro sociocultural contexts of schools affect the ways schools work. Thus, the purpose for my initial actions was to describe and interpret cultural behaviour in different school settings. Like any visitor to a new place, I have synthesised what I saw, what people told me, and the material I collected, in an attempt to interpret a social world that was different in many ways from my prior experiences. Despite my background knowledge of the contextual issues associated with the Kimberley, it was critical for me to gain some sense of the realities faced by the schools so I could make informed interpretations about their work. In representing the work of schools, I have tried to balance description and interpretation by building an account based on several impressionistic tales to illustrate the themes that emerged. The tales are woven in different ways. Using the themes that arose from the aggregated data and analysis, I have returned to the raw data to choose illustrative examples of the themes. Some of the impressionistic tales are related to individual people and others are composed from several people's views. The text of the tales is a fusion of participants' words, although not always exact quotes, which are placed in the context of my observations. I have tried to authenticate each tale by giving voice to the participants and each is credited with the data source origins.

The Portrayal of Emerging Themes

The Context

The Community: Contrasts, Tensions, and Divisions

Most often, the first topic of conversation for a visitor to the Kimberley concerns the different communities one encounters. In the study, much of what people said about their community, even across different locations in the Kimberley, was related to me by those interviewed and was confirmed by my observations. One Aboriginal woman, connected to

a school in a town community, talked about her community in an open way. Her tale, or yarn as the Aboriginal people might say, was illustrative of how an Aboriginal person might describe to a white person some aspects of the community where she lives.

You know, people in our community worry about the old and new cultures meeting. Law [rituals associated with rites of passage referred to as men's business or women's business] is not always strong. It depends on the families. Some are keen to keep their culture. Others are happy to be like the Whitefella. But you don't understand us. One of our big problems is about money. There are no jobs for us. Paid work is a laugh. No-one wants to work for no money. There are some jobs but Aboriginal people aren't hungry for money. We are happy with the way we live but the community is poor. Asking parents for money for school things is too hard. Everything costs a lot here. Some people in the town have money. They are people like the teachers. Some Aboriginal families manage very well. Some families are worse than others. Sometimes there is nothing for the kids; no breakfast, no food, no clothes, especially on rainy days. We only have woodfires in most of our homes. But we all suffer when some families have trouble because family is really the whole community. Our hospital is good. So is the community nurse. A lot of our people get sick. Alcohol is a big, big problem, and cigarettes, and gambling. Some families fight a lot. Some of our young people are getting into drugs and families are worried. Many of the girls have their babies too soon before they grow up. This is a good homeplace but there isn't much for the families to do. We have some sports in the town but there is not much for the kids to do. They don't have much of a chance to do school work at home. We have homework classes at church and parents can join in. We know that education is important, to learn to read and write, so our kids are just like the others.

New teachers don't know much about us when they come here. Some get to know some things and learn some language from the children and the AEW. But they don't really know much. They are not close to the community. They have learned things from books, like totems [An association between a local group and an animal or plant species with which they believe they share descent. The obligations of the group is to care for sites that ensure the species continue to exist], but they don't really know what it means for us. We want teachers to come out into the community to get to know us but they don't. Teachers don't get involved with us. They don't listen to our stories, they don't listen to what we have done, what we do. One teacher did spin a yarn once with us, have a talk, have supper, sit with us and really got to know us. We like to have a joke. But this doesn't happen much.

There is a division, racism, discrimination in this community. Parents are not happy with our school. It is good to have the school with good buildings but the kids are not learning. They need to be taught properly, how to read and write like we were. We were made to do it. We had to go to school. The kids here muck around in the class and the teachers always tell them to get outside. They don't have a quiet word with the Aboriginal kids or get the AEW to talk to them away in a corner. They just say get out and the next minute they have nicked off or are in the office. And that is why the Aboriginal people in the community are complaining about the school. The school is all right but it is just the teachers. ...... Anyhow you come with me. I'll show you where I live with my family. I'll show you where all the different families live in different places. You can see for yourself how we live. ...... Now you tell me about your family.

(To illustrate the theme, this episode is woven from a taped interview conducted on 4.12.95 with an Aboriginal mother associated with a large remote school and observational notes recorded in my journal 30.11.95 - 6.12.95.)

The tale told by the Aboriginal woman also was embedded into a long informal conversation that I had with her while she guided me around her community. We looked at and talked about how people lived and the challenges they faced. This Aboriginal woman was matter-of-fact about her community and its school, as if she described "how it really was here". Like many Aboriginal people and children I met, the woman was intensely interested in me, who I was, where I came from, and who were my relatives. Person and place were important to the woman. She, and the other people she introduced me to in the community, were not so interested in what I was doing. That could be observed and weighed up by them and, besides, they knew about my visit so there was no need for unnecessary talk.

The Parents: The Real Problem?

As I moved into schools, teachers told me about how their schools worked and often their first concern was about parents. Many teachers spoke of the problems that they perceived some parents caused for their children's learning. The issues, usually termed problems by the teachers, were similar to those mentioned by the Aboriginal woman but the emphasis was different. The teachers' concern tended to focus on how their teaching task was made more difficult because of the significant way some parents influenced school and classroom life. The following composite tale exemplified many teachers' perceptions of parents in terms of the care parents provided for their children and the level of support they showed for the school.

Some parents value the school and see it as important but it all depends on how cohesive the families are in the community. They send their kids to school every single morning, they have pride in their heritage and want the best for their kids, just like any parent, so they come and chat to us and they come to family days and cultural events at the school. Other parents just leave their kids at home because they don't want to go to school. Some parents see school as important, others don't and how they think of the school is reflected in their attitudes to their kids attending school. Many parents are concerned about their children but there are different levels of care of kids because different families access and manage money better. Some kids are left to fend for themselves and others come to school hungry or they survive on junk food. Some kids are abused because there is a lot of domestic violence in some homes and many of them come to school very tired and yawning because they have watched videos all night.

All the kids are looked after even if it's by other family members such as a granny or someone from another skin group [Skin group refers to the particular moiety within one clan to which an Aboriginal person belongs. Traditionally, relationships between moieties are complex. Rules about these relationships refer to aspects of life such as those whom one can speak to or marry]. You can tell the kids who are well cared for by the way they are dressed, whether they have had breakfast or not, whether they come to school, and the amount of sleep they have had. It is a moral dilemma in trying to make parents responsible for their children. Principals or teachers picking up the kids for school, just so they come to school, are paternalistic. Perhaps there should only be Aboriginal teachers in the school who are trained in a sense of knowing what these kids need to learn to lead a lifestyle within standards set by the community.

Some families are supportive of the school. We have community days for Aboriginal culture in the school and they come along. There are some very positive moves getting Aboriginal parents to the school but they aren't visible all the time. If we want them for anything they will turn up and there is involvement of some community people through LOTE [Languages Other Than English]. There is a small parent group that is visible but it is hard to gauge who they go back and talk to. Parents don't really come and talk to us. Parents mainly come to the school because they are called up for a particular reason but they're really not involved in the school and they don't help in classrooms. Parents don't know what the school is doing like topics of study in class and don't come to the school other than for concerts or

NAIDOC [National Aboriginal (and Torres Strait) Islander Day Observance Committee] week.

Parents are the problem. Some see education as valuable but don't see it as a way of changing lifestyle. These kids don't have a positive attitude to the school or value education. Most parent role models are about living on welfare money - and you don't have to finish school to drive around in a Toyota - so many kids have no aspirations for the future. Others have their career planned and they work hard in class and they have a good attitude to school because of their aspirations. We do have those who succeed like the police aide, but there is a great need for role models in the community. Working to get a job has no value for the kids because there aren't too many jobs to get. Lack of role models is a concern and talking about aspirations is difficult. Role modelling is strong from one generation to another so blending home and school values is not necessarily a good choice. There are so many problems in some homes that kids come to school to feel safe.

Any bad experiences with the community overrule the good ones and as a teacher you withdraw from the community. Parents are unhappy when the teachers do not get out into the community and take part. Parents don't like the constant change of staff but teachers need commitment from the parents to encourage them to stay at the school for longer periods. Getting to know the parents or asking questions about the community needs time. Aboriginal people need to go away and talk about our questions amongst themselves, often for several days, then come back with some answers. If you do it the white way - here's the problem quick lets get it solved - they think you're not really interested in them. Everybody has to have his or her say to come up with a decision. Getting Aboriginal people organised for meetings, for example, can be difficult. Aboriginal people here plan on a day to day basis and that is not how schools plan. But we have to try and work in with the community to have success.
(To illustrate the theme, this composite episode is drawn from taped interviews conducted with three teachers in remote schools; one on 30.11.95 and two on 4.12.95 and my observational notes about schools recorded 30.11.95 - 6.12.95.)

A critical issue is highlighted here in the tale. Some schools did not seem to communicate effectively with their communities and teachers made no visible efforts to become linked to the lives of Aboriginal people. At the same time, teachers assumed parents did not understand how mainstream schooling worked. I wondered about this assumption because Aboriginal people love to yarn to one another about events which would include those

happening at school. From a school level perspective often a judgmental attitude was taken about communities and the way people lived their lives. Many parents were disrespected because they could not live up to imposed expectations; presenting their children neatly and cleanly clothed, fed, and ready and alert for learning. Whether this problem was school personnel and location specific remained to be examined.

The Schools

A Successful School: A Climate of Trust, Ownership, and Involvement

While parents and teachers held their points of views about communities and the relationship between home and schools, teachers were invariably clear about what they thought depicted a successful school in the Kimberley. Some of what they said would describe a school in any location. The following view, however, placed an emphasis on the way teachers needed to perceive their parents and students. One principal described the characteristics of his school and what he believed worked well in the Kimberley.

> We think here in our school that a successful school is about the kids, lots of happy kids, with happy teachers doing things that are for the kids not for the teachers. Kids are involved in the education program at school so they feel comfortable with themselves and they feel comfortable in their own culture within the school. A successful school for these kids is one that provides them with options and a place where they can practice the white code. We must respect the kids and provide them with life skills and enterprise skills so that they can help their community later on. We need plenty of resources for the kids because the curriculum must be student-centred. Learning must be about negotiating goals with the kids. Our community has a strong ownership of the school. Vandalism is very rare. Parents take an interest in the school. They have an input into what happens in the school and attend assemblies and open days. We talk a lot informally with the parents although this can eat into the school day. But we need to get as broad picture of what is going on in the community and we need to get plenty of feedback about what is perceived as happening at the school. We have many informal social occasions such as sausage sizzles so we are not just meeting parents when it is time to tell them something or ask them for something.
>
> Educational decisions must be made around and for the kids. There needs to be open trust in communication and we must trust that the parents are doing the best for their kids. At this school there is community involvement in decision making and parents

support the school in the ways that they know best. Meetings are organised spontaneously because this is how the community makes decisions. All families are represented at meetings. We get a balance of men and women at meetings but gender issues influence how decisions are made in the community. Doing things at school is women's business. They take information home and come back with the decision men have made. It works well for our school.

We have a nice bunch of kids and our school is effective for them because they know the place is safe. They learn, interact with one another, communicate, share and have choices in their work at school. This is a good school because kids like coming to school and they stay around after school. They don't have anything else to do other than watching TV or videos so school and the playground is the place to go to play. Some will help and work in the classroom. Others just play. The school is certainly a feature of the community. People are here all day long to see what is going on. Most of the time groups, mainly women, sit around in the shade and gossip. There isn't much for them to do after they've done their chores. We have clear expectation of kids' behaviour and their work and we keep very regular routines to provide stability and consistency. We constantly report to parents about kids' progress often on a daily basis if we are have some trouble in class.
(This episode is woven from a taped interview conducted on 6.12.95 with a principal of a small remote school and notes of my observations of the school over two days 5.12.95 - 6.12.95.)

This principal saw the successful school as one that responded to its sociocultural context. The school was central to the day-to-day routines in the community, although the principal was unconvinced that his school was having an impact on making a contribution to the community's economic viability. My observations at this school confirmed much of what the principal said. Parents were visible in the school, coming and going freely, as if the school was an extension of family life. Several parents worked in the gardens and cleaned classrooms. The school was a happy place for students. This school portrayal contrasted with the ones presented earlier in the tales.

School Planning: The Key to Success

Principals and teachers all spoke of the joys and frustrations they experienced in school planning and most school leaders (those principals and deputy principals interviewed) saw it as a way forward to achieve student success. One principal thought that sticking to the school plan would ensure that teachers would respond to a school's sociocultural context.

However, some teachers, especially those with only a few years of teaching experience, were less than enthusiastic about school planning. It did not solve their day-to-day realities of teaching in classrooms. One deputy principal spoke about school planning in this way.

Innovation is a sign of a successful school but taking up innovative ideas has to be because they are good for the kids so the School Development Plan has to be real. We have to write down exactly what is happening, and then what should happen based on our shared goals. The Plan is not something flowery for the superintendent. The school must have common goals which are linked to school planning. In this school the Plan has a focus on society and culture looking from an Aboriginal perspective and we work as a team so we all know what is going on. We know our own part in the school plan and work on the school priorities in our classrooms. We also work to keep a good level of resources up in the school. The strength in this school is monitoring and assessment to identify the kids' needs. The monitoring and assessment part of the school plan is very regular. We are accountable for what is happening in the school and what the kids are learning.

Written reports are sent to parents but whether they are read is a different matter. Reporting is best done on a day-to-day basis as parents wander in and out of the school. Talking to parents about their kids' progress is always best done face-to-face. Some parents don't really understand the written reports we have to give out. (This episode is woven from a taped interview conducted on 4.12.95 with a deputy principal of a large remote school and placed in the context of my interactions with the Aboriginal mother from the same school.)

This vision for school planning in Kimberley schools was positive and reiterated in essence by all principals I spoke to. However, whether such a vision was an operational reality for all school leaders was contested. There was some evidence from my observations, interviews, and informal conversations to suggest that not all teachers shared the same enthusiasm for school planning as did their leaders. And whether school planning was improving the outcomes for students was disputable. The interesting point about this episode is that it was derived from the school spoken about by the Aboriginal mother. She painted a rather negative picture of the home-school relationship. Perhaps good school planning, whilst a function of an effective school, did not substitute for positive relationships between parents and teachers. Perhaps good planning in these schools must include deliberate strategies to improve home-school relationships so that everyone, not just the teachers, shared some common understandings about what the school was doing.

Many people spoke about the barriers within schools to the school planning vision. One principal was clear about how schools could be effective but at the same time spoke about the many problems that had to be addressed on a continual basis. Often when one problem was considered solved, it would re-emerge as a greater issue than before. Some problems did not go away. Principals and deputy principals who were interviewed thought that managing a school was about dealing with crises on a day-a-day basis while trying to edge forward, albeit slowly and painstakingly. One principal, with a long experience in Aboriginal education, spoke about schools in this way.

> Effectiveness in a school means what people do; the kids, their parents, and the teachers. Do the kids want to come to school? Do parents feel comfortable in the school? Are teachers involved with parents? Are teachers enthusiastic about their work and professional development? Do they have a zest for what they are doing? Teaching here is not just a job it has to be a whole way of life so teachers have to look at a kind of program that isn't chalk and talk because if it's boring at school the kids won't turn up. As a principal, I consider our school is effective because of the degree of community involvement and the programs the school sets up to address the inadequacies of students. The School Development Plan has an emphasis on numeracy and literacy because we have to improve these learning areas especially with "at risk students" who are transient or do not attend regularly. The budget is tied to these priorities. The priorities have been determined from our MIS [Management Information System].

> However, school planning is still early in its evolution with regard to this process. We still have a long way to go. One of the big problems is getting our MIS up. It is not good enough that the Administration makes a policy then doesn't monitor what's happening in the classrooms. We monitor kids through a variety of strategies based on priorities identified in the school development plan. Testing for MIS, such as maths, shows some surprises. Kids have not got the basic number facts but finding the right way to report this back to parents in friendly language is a problem. Often we are reporting informally in the most obscure places. Another problem is that inappropriate, irrelevant testing material [as used statewide] is useless in this school. Measures don't show how much kids have progressed. In classroom monitoring we are strongly focussed on the students taking control for assessment but not all teachers can come to grips with this approach. We are only just getting to more informal evaluation like collecting samples of work into student folders.

In this school the staff are reasonably effective but we have to work around uncooperative staff. We have policy, processes, and procedures in place based on collaborative decision making. Things would not work if this did not happen. Debate is healthy but there comes a point when sometimes I have to say this is how it's going to be. Trying to get teachers working on the same vision is quite difficult. Part of the vision in this school is looking at what is not in the curriculum but should be. We need to ensure that these kids are accepted in the wider society. But there are a lot of differences in teachers' practices in classroom in respect to similar goals, sharing a vision, and commitment. Difference in teachers is related to their creativity, the skills they have, and willingness to learn new skills.

Yes indeed, our curriculum is a real worry. There are few curriculum documents written that are appropriate for Aboriginal kids. Aboriginal Studies need to be in the curriculum rather than paying lip service to reconciliation because racism does exist in the school. There is no real depth of understanding of Aboriginal issues. More experienced staff have the agenda in regard to Aboriginal issues but new staff find it difficult to work out. It is good to have a structured school for Aboriginal kids where they know they are going to be safe, there is going to be order, and where there are going to be expectations. If we understood the complexity of teaching a sociocultural appropriate curriculum we would be more effective but when such an issue is discussed at professional development sessions, people's social agenda and personal attitudes take over. Constant change of staff is a problem in this school. There is lack of continuity in vision, commitment, the kid's learning, and for any on-going program.

Resources in this school are very good in terms of finances for materials but experienced personnel are a real problem, especially for second-language teaching. Turnover of staff is caused by a lack of resources in the town such as houses and where they are located. Teachers become disheartened with the community's attitude towards the school and education so they move out.
(This episode is woven from a taped interview conducted on 27.11.95 with a principal of a town school.)

In this episode the term school effectiveness took a particular definitional shape. According to this principal, effectiveness was not about outcomes; it was about what people do, the processes in a school, so that students' learning and progress could be measured. In this episode the quality of a school was not framed in terms of students

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meeting benchmark standards. The principal who told this tale was clear about an effective school.

> Do not judge our schools on the fact that many of our students fail. Judge our schools on how well we meet the many challenges we face so our students do better. Good principals manage how we meet the challenges. Overcoming racism is but one of the challenges. (Direct quote from a taped interviewed conducted with a principal on 6.12.95.)

Leadership: The School Works if the Principal Fits

Teachers saw one of the main issues associated with successful schools as the ability of a principal to lead a school. From the composite view of many teachers, the principal was seen to be a multi-skilled person. The principal needed to manage the sociocultural realities of school life to deflect influences which destabilised school and classroom operations. The principal was cast as a super hero.

> Schools are different here because of their isolation, their distance away from resources, and the expense and time needed to accommodate everyone's immediacy of needs. The kids have urgent needs and the staff requires professional networks and professional development. Leadership is crucial and it has to prioritise real issues which means the principal has to evaluate the school critically. A great leader is needed for inexperienced people so the principal has to be a person who can support teachers so they don't give up. Cliques within the staff are a real problem and the principal is the one who must break down these barriers otherwise new staff feel left out of things. Leadership is crucial with a young staff in a Kimberley community. Leadership in a school has to be active although there is pressure on a teaching principal in these schools to carry out the leadership role but it can't be escaped. The principal can't be authoritative. Everything, but everything, has to be discussed. The staff need to know what is expected and what is going on. Staff must be mentored individually and it's not just with the new teachers on probation. Collaborative teaching has to be strong but often we are just left on our own. Poor leadership in the school causes too much stress. Lack of support from administration people creates an unsatisfactory workplace because coordination is inconsistent and there is no trust between staff. Strong leadership brings out the positive attitudes of staff towards a different culture in the community and this is a must because some teachers' attitudes are highly questionable. Some staff are blatantly racist and are disrespectful to the kids and their parents. This situation is made worse when the principal is a racist. We

have to be very positive and make the little things count. If the administration team, which is really the principal, is a problem then parents won't send their kids to school. The principal must have regular meetings with community people to try and solve problems like absenteeism. We feel helpless to change situations such as absenteeism and truancy but these are seen as a bad reflection on what the school is doing. Poor communication in the school leads to these problems.

We do have a problem with professional development [PD]. The system is shirking from its responsibility because there is limited money for our PD but there are great expenses involved for us with a limited access and range of courses on offer. We have to try and relate our PD to a school priority but we all have individual needs which usually means that our professional interests are in conflict with school interests. District office people are mainly supportive but some are a bit out of touch. We need experienced teachers of Aboriginal kids in these positions and in all curriculum areas. We are cynical about the Education Department. For example, they put a lot of effort into First Steps [a language program] and before we know it, then comes Student Outcome Statements [curriculum reform]. The rug was pulled out from under our feet and this was devastating for us. We are caught in political change between centralisation and devolution so we have become wary of taking risks. The principal has to put everything into perspective for us. If this doesn't happen the reasons for staying in the school disappear.
(This episode is derived from taped interviews conducted on 4.12.95 with four teachers associated with small and large remote schools.)

From this tale it was evident that the principal was pivotal to a school's success in the Kimberley. Moreover, teachers held the principal responsible for leading them through change and upheaval. The principal was like the elder of the school; always in the know, always taking action, always sensitive to everyone's needs. When the principal condoned racism in the school, many teachers were disillusioned about their efforts to create success for their students.

The Classrooms

Teacher Efficacy: Teachers Like to be Considered as Professionals

Teachers also spoke openly about the problems they faced in their classrooms. One new teacher to the Kimberley region spoke about her feelings towards her teaching post. Her

comments typified those made by several inexperienced teachers and even those with several years of teaching behind them.

Appointment of beginning teachers without experiences of another culture is difficult. When you come here the first year is about disbelief. The second year you just live to get out. The Remote Package [workplace agreement] may improve things in the short term but in the end people will just sign for the extra money and teach in the school for as short a time possible. Change of staff is constant in this school. There is no real commitment to the school, the community, or the kids. Only about a third of teachers want to be where they are but this needs to change. The first year is about finding out how things work before you really can get on with the job. You have to work out who has the power, the real power. You learn to work through the AEW which is easier to do in smaller schools. A happy teacher will be more effective than an unhappy teacher. Most of the teachers in this school will only stay for two years then move out. We need professional freedom but as beginning teachers we require support strategies to come to grips with our classrooms. Beginning teachers just survive and don't have a great repertoire of life skills or teaching skills. We have great enthusiasm, new ideas, and a readiness to accept the kids for what they are, but external factors provide the pressures for us. Industrial issues, housing, workplace agreements, and teaching all come together at once and the situation can be overwhelming. It's a nightmare!

The management and organisation issues are overwhelming. If you are placed in a support role without your own classroom like I am it takes longer to establish oneself. Setting tone and cooperation with these kids takes a long time. It isn't good enough when a first-year-out is put into a support role without a classroom just so the principal can take time for administrivia. New teachers are dealing with too many year levels and can't establish continuity of classroom planning, discipline, or establish authority. There is no ownership of a class although in a support role you do get to see other teachers and classes working but you can't get to terms with it on your own ground. I am always working with someone else's framework.

As new teachers we have to compromise our teacher training. We can't do a whole language approach here so to cope we get smart. What I write in my program and teach don't necessarily run hand in hand. One of the big problems is blending different points of view in a small school. We know each other very well and live with each other. We socialise together. But when we come to school we have to be different. We have to negotiate things to make the school work so at school we play

the game for the institution and the principal. We do what is wanted. We have to go through performance management but we think it's based on the wrong priorities for the teachers. A good school is about communicating and everyone having their say. Teachers have to be treated as professionals with knowledge. We need collaborative conversations and sharing and more peer mentoring and demonstrations as part of our performance management so we can learn. Teachers need more support. The principal is always out of the school with outside requirements and committees. Our paper work is too high. This needs to be cut down to allow us to get on with the job of teaching. Organisational structures in our schools need big changes too. We need to know that our colleagues, parents, and students value our work. We must let parents in often to see how the program is working and we need to give time to meeting parents on their own grounds. The principal should be getting out into the community and liaising with parents so we are supported in the classroom.
(This episode is derived from a taped interview conducted on 30.11.95 with a teacher in a small remote school. She was in her second year of teaching. The school was her first teaching appointment.)

While this teacher spoke about the hurdles in her novice teaching experiences, experienced teachers saw many of the hurdles in a similar light. New teachers to a school needed to be in a classroom practising the basics of their craft for their positive self-esteem, professional development, and for betterment of student learning. Any decisions to place young teachers in support teaching roles appeared to be misguided from teachers' perspectives. All teachers interviewed spoke of the frustrations of not having enough time to actually teach and work with students' parents. Too much of their time was taken up with being involved in school planning and decision-making. It appeared teachers were unable to reconcile their responsibilities at the school level with those at the classroom level. They felt that the teaching was valued less than school planning, which in many cases, did not seem to be related to what needed to happen in their classrooms. In a culture of school reform, many teachers appeared unhappy with their profession, their leaders' decisions, and the disruptions to their daily practices. Teachers were saying that if they were left to teach in their own way they would get better results from their students especially if their principal was out actively strengthening the links between home and school.

What Works with These Students

Others teachers who had survived their initial encounters with a Kimberley school had come to realisations about what worked best in their classrooms. Many teachers spoke about their classrooms in the same way as this teacher.

I need to be more than a teacher. I have to provide affection, talk to the kids a lot and even feed them. Many teachers do care about the kids like I do but not all. The kids have to see teaching coming from inside me and that I'm not doing it because I have to. I have to show respect to kids to expect their respect but it takes a long time to gain their respect. Teachers who don't capitalise on students' autonomy run into trouble but I have to draw the line on some issues like the cultural way of teasing. Family affiliation in the school is close, just like the community, and most of the kids are related in some way. They bring their family relationships into the classroom so I need to work out how to discipline the kids or they just run away. In a mixed-age class the older children are a very strong influential peer group which impacts on school behaviour. The kids are very perceptive about people and know their power so I have to establish a good student-teacher relationship so I can get on with teaching. The type of behaviour of kids influences the educational program I can teach so I have to make this work for me. Keeping kids on task is hard work, especially after lunch, but the kids work better for some teachers than others because of the respect issue.

I need plenty of reward systems especially extrinsic ones for the students in the beginning of the year. Competition is not enjoyed by the kids so I need to reward kids quietly and often privately. There is the cultural shame factor I have to work with all the time. It is shameful to stand out from your peers. We need to teach the kids how to compete against themselves through student-centred learning. For this reason class cohesiveness is difficult to foster, especially if some families are feuding. The management issues are a constant strain every day. Negotiating teaching and learning strategies is hard to get going in multi-age groups because I need to get the group working cohesively first. Kids need to see a purpose to school and need goals to chase. There must be high expectations for kids' behaviour in the classroom and high expectations for academic learning but high expectations must be ones that are realistic. The kids need high expectations to get somewhere in their community or to get out of town.

It is very frustrating teaching a great range of abilities in the basic subjects such as reading and maths. Developmental learning must be a premise for programs because learning occurs in very small steps with these kids. Learning must be in small steps so they can achieve. It can be frustrating and I need to be able to measure the small amounts of learning that occurs much better with assessments that are appropriate for Aboriginal kids. The best teaching strategies are modelling what I want and teaching from a clear purpose with clear language objectives for any aspect of the

curriculum. I have to present comprehensible chunks in the curriculum. Oral language has to be the emphasis across the whole curriculum. I have to tune into the Aboriginal way of learning which is look, see, listen, and meditate. I have to talk about things constantly so there must be flexibility in structuring time in the timetable and during the day. There must be repetition, demonstrations, watching, modelling, students instructing other students, peer tutoring, all day every day. The repetition must be in different ways. Busy work like a worksheet doesn't work and some teachers I know have resorted to misusing computers to keep the kids busy. I have to be very explicit about what I am teaching and provide constant open feedback to the kids especially about the social aspects of language.

I need to accept that the kids speak another language and the values that go with the language. I don't think I really have come to terms with teaching second language learners, that is, a whole class of second language learners. The language they use is Kriol but it is also very important they learn what is appropriate at school. In the classroom Kriol and SAE [Standard Australian English] are used but I have to demand when the kids need to switch codes and insist on a change in associated behaviours. Modelling SAE is a real problem in the classroom. I am the only real model of writing and reading in the classroom because it is not modelled in the home. Reading and writing don't have a lot of value for kids. I can't really give the kids homework because they don't have the resources in the home for it. Teaching language is the single biggest hurdle in the classroom .... once I've got them into a learning mode.

Overall, the education program I plan is not dissimilar to something you would pick up in a metropolitan school. Some teachers have their own children in school so you want things to work. However, the educational program in a remote community has an emphasis on practical living issues relating to sex, health, and hygiene education. Dilemmas and moral issues are the best way to approach these topics. There is a lack of understanding of what cultural studies are and we should be doing more about it. It is not just about having cultural days at school when the parents come and visit and show the children about bush tucker. Besides this, the program needs to be relevant and community based such as enterprise studies. There must be cross curriculum approaches. The thing that I have control over is the teaching program. I have very little control over other things in the school. I try not to reduce the curriculum but there is a need for a real curriculum. It just takes longer to do it because we have to work at a slower rate for students to make progress. It is the

slower rate of progress that seems to reduce the curriculum because we spend so much time on reading, writing, and mathematics.

(This episode is derived from a taped interview conducted on 30.11.95 with a teacher in a small remote school. She was in her fourth year of teaching and had taught at other remote schools)

All teachers interviewed restated over and over the ideas that this teacher illuminated. It appeared that the teacher in a Kimberley school had to have a personality and teaching style that blended with students' expectations about adults and how teachers formed relationships with younger people. Teachers who could not adopt a negotiated approach to their classroom practices failed to enjoy the respect of students and often failed to help students learn. Not only did teachers need to be culturally sensitive and held in esteem by students, they needed to be able to provide an educational program that was comparable to the mainstream curriculum, albeit one which was taught at a slower rate. The curriculum had to be driven by both a 'learn the basics' and 'learn for living' philosophy which created a tension for teachers between curriculum equity and quality.

The Students

Great Kids, Poor Outcomes

Those teachers who believed they were working successfully in their classrooms were not disillusioned about the sorts of learning outcomes their students were achieving at school. They saw that the difficulties in blending two cultural worlds within a school and classroom organisation as their biggest barrier. Without exception, principals and teachers expressed that enormous amounts of personal time were expended into their professional work. If they did not work hard they had difficulty dealing with spontaneous or volatile events that occurred on many school days. Often teachers believed that they saw little reward for their work through students' achievement. The following tale about students, composed from two teachers' comments, illustrates how teachers typified students.

Transience and attendance is the real problem for teaching. Some families travel from community to community which means the kids don't attend school. Attendance is erratic and truancy is high. You know that the kids and parents are in the community but kids just don't come to school. We have truancy officers to help with any problems but the kids vote with their feet. If they don't like going to school they won't turn up. We have a student here with the potential to do medicine or law but he is ready to throw in the towel because there is no real support for him. If kids

like the topics of study at school there is no problem keeping them engaged on the task. They enjoy practical activities the most. But lack of continuity, transience, truancy, poor classroom behaviour, and rapid change of staff all combine to prevent good learning.

The kids are hard on resources. They don't see the need to look after material resources such as computers and sports equipment. But the kids are very resourceful. Having money, or not, does not equate with the kids' abilities. In a problem-solving situation some of the kids are very sharp. They are able to get into the problem solving situation quickly and easily. Their spatial skills are very good but basic facts are poor. All kids have potential, they are smart, but they have academic learning problems. We try to focus on performance but kids range in their performance. The range is enormous. If you just look at progress then the kids are moving along but very slowly. We add value to the kids because we show them other alternatives through the educational program. We provide experiences of the wider world through camps and trips away from the community. We give them confidence to work with white people because they learn to share problems with us as teachers. They have to be able to cope with white society so it doesn't continue to totally disregard their culture. We work to give them back their own traditional language through LOTE which also helps to provide a balance between the two cultures. We work to cater for kids to lift them out of the doldrums and we try and show them some options for careers. We give them the opportunity to finish school but they may not necessarily take it.

In the end the kids need to get the basic numeracy, literacy and computer skills to survive and live in the community. The achievement standards of the kids are really poor after seven years of primary schooling so we can't say we are doing very well in terms of achievement but comparing achievement all the time is not helpful. It is very important also to focus on life skills education. The kids seem to get the knowledge but they don't practice it. The adult role models are too powerful so we do lose many of the kids at a young age. The girls become interested in the boys and many fall pregnant. Sometimes they can see female teachers as competition and won't come to school. It is usual for the boys to turn to alcohol and the girls to promiscuity. Most 17-year-olds in this community are drunks because they haven't got any choices and they haven't got the baggage to make the choices.
(This composite episode is drawn from taped interviews conducted with two teachers in a large remote school on 4.12.95 and my observational notes about the school recorded 3.12.95-4.12.95.)

In this composite episode the teachers spoke about the reasons why students did not learn. Students were not denigrated for their lack of performance. Rather, these teachers felt they had little power to change the sociocultural context of their students so that learning at school could improve. Yet, they were compelled to continue doing their best in their work.

Re-affirming the Research Problem

Government schools in the Kimberley Education District did not appear to be successful schools because of the abundant information that said students performed poorly in their academic achievement. The message over and over again from community people, parents, teachers, and even students, was that resources for post-compulsory schooling were scant and most students did not perform at school and those who did, moved away to boarding schools in the south. Teachers who had their own children in their remote schools boosted their educational program through distance education courses. This was a very telling event for me. My feelings about the issue wavered but I always returned to a nagging question. Why wasn't the curriculum in the school good enough for all children? It seemed that teachers, as parents, wanted their own children to experience a full curriculum in order to be competitive, or at least comparable, with other children in the State. There was, however, an overwhelming belief held by teachers in the Kimberley schools that their students had the capacity to learn and it was thought that many students had the potential to attain school success, finish compulsory schooling, and achieve at high levels. This belief concurred with the fundamental notion supported by Edmonds (1979) and Murphy (1992). Thus, I was convinced, at first hand, that hope existed for students' success in the Kimberley schools. Besides, teachers worked exhaustive, long hours in the attempt to keep their teaching programs vital. But how could schools and teachers work in more effective ways to support students?

The working hypothesis for this phase of the study was addressed. The macro sociocultural contexts of schools did affect the ways schools worked so my journey had allowed me to re-affirm the research problem. Therefore, I continued to hold to the original research question posed in the study. The general research question was to identify whether there were effective ways schools worked to improve student outcomes. In this initial part of the study, ideas about the specific research questions were brought to the foreground through my observations, inquiries, and examination of documents. But it was the memos for tracking perceptions, contrasts, comparisons, linkages, and speculations about the research questions, recorded in my journal, which formed new ideas for the further conduct of the study. Based on these ideas, decisions were made about the next phase of action.

The situation in communities was mostly beyond the control of the school but there was benefit in investigating how schools responded to their community contexts starting with the integrity of the home-school relationships that existed. I believed gaining a wider view of schools through a survey approach was feasible based on a working hypothesis: Detailed information about the home-school, school, classroom, and student levels in more schools will deepen interpretations about their operations. With a survey in mind, the broad purpose for a questionnaire designed to suit the study was conceptualised to generate descriptions about the different components in the working hypothesis. A questionnaire that sought responses to these aspects of school operations was a convenient and cost-effective way to gain a broader picture of what many people thought about their home-school relationships, schools, classrooms, and students. The results of the questionnaire are discussed in the following chapter and are the basis for generating more information about school contexts.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PHASE TWO: DEVELOPING A BROADER PICTURE

Looking for Trustworthiness of Interpretations: The Second Probe

This chapter reports on the results from a survey using a study-specific questionnaire. The survey method was chosen to confirm, or disconfirm, interpretations developed in the exploratory phase of the study and was a practical way, due to the isolation of schools in the Kimberley, to gain more information from more people about communities, schools, classrooms, and students. Thus, the second phase of the study was guided by a working hypothesis: Detailed information about the home-school, school, classroom, and student levels in more schools will deepen interpretations about their operations. The working hypothesis provided the broad framework for the specific-study design of the questionnaire and provides the direction for the discussion in this chapter.

The survey was in the form of a mailed questionnaire and was intended to be a confirmatory survey as defined by LeCompte and Preissle (1993). The testing of the reliability of the questionnaire was not part of the study because it was not feasible with the small sample of respondents involved. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter five, there was no attempt to make items in the questionnaire "positive" or " negative", but to write them unambiguously, and this was checked in the field-test. Individual item responses were used in the analysis because collapsing data within clusters or categories lost information (especially in an essentially qualitative study) and when these kinds of data had never been collected before, it was judged important to preserve them. The items in each category were not intended to be unidimensional because the categories, as defined in phase one, were based on themes which were not themselves unidimensional.

Statistically, the analysis described in this chapter is unsophisticated, but the items in the questionnaire were never intended to form scales in order to collapse the data. Further, the data were not suitable for factor analysis because the item response patterns were not normally distributed (in fact the bi-modal items were especially important to the interpretation), and at best the data were ordinal, not continuous as assumed by most factor analysis (or principal component analysis) techniques. It must be remembered that the sample size was 76 and the number of items in the questionnaire totalled 189. The most generous suggestion for sample size required for factor analysis is usually two persons per variable. Clearly the sample was not adequate for factor analysis and as the entire population of

teachers in the Kimberley was 310 (see p. 107) in 21 schools, a large enough sample would never have been achieved even if all schools were sampled.

The method of displaying the results through histograms in this chapter, while repetitive, give an easy overview of the pattern of results in each category which was more information for the purpose of the interpretive aspects of the study, than would have been the mean scores on constructed scales. As stated previously, individual item responses were used in the analysis because collapsing data within the categories lost information, especially in an essentially qualitative study. These kinds of data were unique and it was important to preserve them. In this chapter particular demographic information about the respondents and the results of the questionnaire are discussed.

Some Demographic Trends in the Data

The questionnaire (see Appendix C) was intended to examine and extend the interpretations made in the first part of the study across a greater number of schools than the four schools involved in the exploratory phase. The construction and the field-testing of the questionnaire are described in chapter five. The questionnaire items were basically extensions of the guiding questions (see Figure 5.1), and the sorts of ideas gained from the responses, that were asked of participants through the in-depth interviews in the exploratory phase of the study. The overall goal of the questionnaire was to investigate the trustworthiness of the interpretations made based on a few data sources in the first phase of the study in order to gain verification, or not, using information gained from more data sources in more Kimberley schools. Decisions made in the light of the wider set of information would sharpen the focus for case studies of a few schools in the third phase of the study. It was important to capture information from respondents who would be considered representative of schools in the Kimberley region. Following responses to expressions of interest, 106 teachers across 15 schools expressed a willingness to complete the questionnaire. In the end there were 76 respondents from 14 different schools who returned their questionnaires (26 from urban type schools; 30 from larger remote schools; and 20 from small remote schools. These numbers are tabulated in chapter five (see Table 5.2). The number of male and female respondents to the questionnaire was reasonably balanced, 46% and 54% respectively, but all, except one, were people from non-Aboriginal backgrounds. Different roles taken by people in the schools were fairly represented in the respondents; administrative people, such as principals, deputy principals, and key teachers (41%) and classroom teachers (59%). Respondents in the classroom teacher group indicated that they taught a range of different years of schooling; from kindergarten to year 12. Also, 81% of the respondents indicated that they had been involved recently in some form of cross-cultural awareness in their professional development and 64% indicated they had been involved in professional development associated with

poverty. These results suggested that teachers' professional development had been concerned more with Aboriginality than poverty, although these two issues could have been linked in their courses. The judgement made by me was that people in schools had been exposed to ideas about these issues in relation to their work. Of particular interest were the results from the demographic data collected concerning the respondents across the 14 schools; their age and their number of years teaching experience. The results are given in Figures 7.1 and 7.2.

Number of Respondents
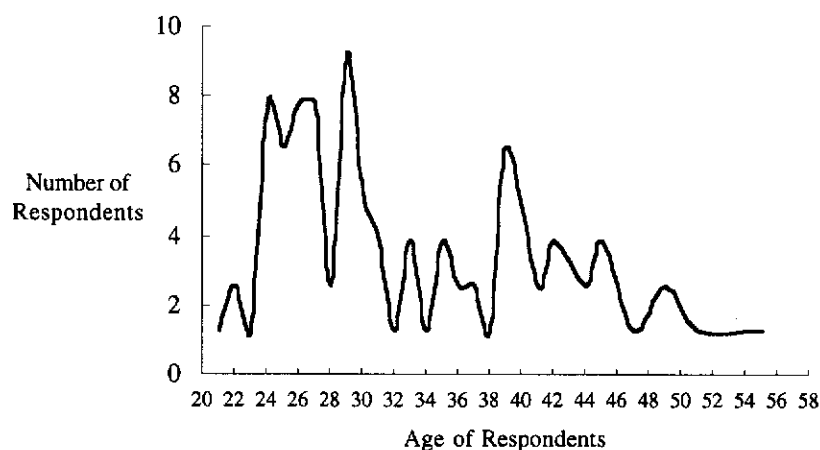
Age of Respondents

Figure 7.1.   Distribution of Respondents by Age

% of Respondents

Years of Teaching Experience
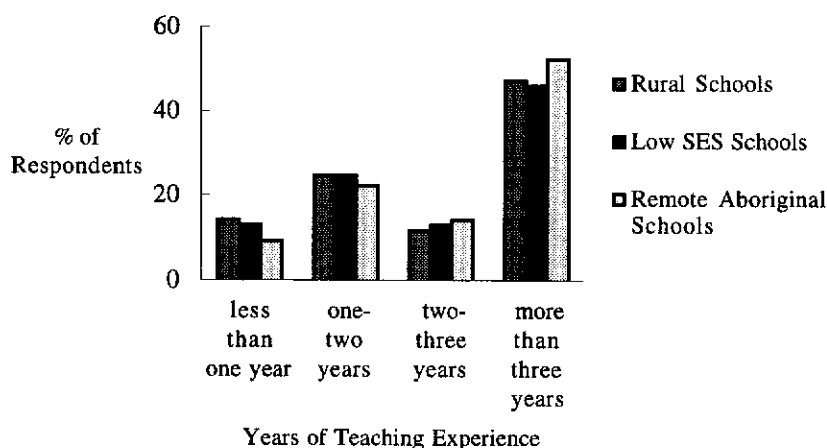
Figure 7.2.   Percentage of Respondents with Teaching Experience in Rural, Low SES or Remote Aboriginal Schools

The average age of the respondents was 32.6 years. Therefore, many of those surveyed brought teaching experience to their work in schools. These results dispel a myth that teachers in the Kimberley schools were inexperienced. Many had several years of experience, and some with considerable experience, teaching in sociocultural contexts such as rural schools, underprivileged communities, or all-Aboriginal schools in remote locations. However, it was apparent in the results that a substantial 60.5% of respondents had only one or two years teaching experience in their current school. These results confirmed a trend in

the Kimberley schools that many teachers only stay in their schools for two years and then move out. These results also supported much of what the literature said about trying to retain experienced teachers in less preferable teaching locations in WA. Inexperienced teachers, such as those whom I encountered in phase one of the study, expressed the concerns they had about teaching without support and chose to move out of their schools as soon as possible.

Examining the Different Levels of Questions in the Survey

Responses related to the items for the home-school relationship, school, classroom, and student levels were placed on a 5-point response format (strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, strongly agree). The responses were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program. In the interpretation of the frequency distributions the "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses were grouped as negative in the attempt to find a clear trend in the data. Similarly, the "agree" and "strongly agree" responses were grouped as positive. The "unsure" responses were interpreted in one of three ways: the respondents were ambivalent about their responses; the question was unimportant to them in their context; or the question was poorly constructed and respondents marked the unsure point. In this chapter the frequency distributions of the responses to each item in the questionnaire are presented in a graphical form for each level of the questionnaire – home-school relationships; school; classroom; and students. The response is: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Unsure; 4 = Agree; and 5 = Strongly Agree. The numerical data (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) are tabulated in Appendix H. The chapter now moves to the discussion of the results obtained for each level of items contained in the questionnaire.

Home-School Relationships across Different Schools

Respondents' Beliefs about Parents in their School Communities

Results shown in Figure 7.3 suggested that respondents to the questionnaire believed that parents valued the education provided by the schools (Item 2). Also, parents held aspirations for their children's success at schools (Item 3) and were receptive to the schools' educational programs (Item 5). In contrast, it was perceived that parents had not experienced successful mainstream education (Item 1), were too busy or distracted with their lives to be concerned with education (Item 4), and required support to meet expectations that the schools set for them (Item 7). These results from the survey confirmed principals' and teachers' views about parents revealed in the first phase of the study.

Item

Item		
1	Most parents in this school have experienced successful mainstream education.	
2	Most parents value the education provided by this school.	
3	Most parents hold aspirations for their children to succeed at this school.	
4	Most parents in this school are too busy with their own lives/problems to be concerned about education.	
5	Parents in this school are receptive to the school's programs.	
6	Harmonious home/school relationships are evident in this school.	
7	Parents in this community require external support to fulfil the expectations set by the school (eg. attendance, homework, nutrition).	
8	Most parents in this school are interested in how the school operates.	

Figure 7.3.   Respondents' Beliefs about Parents in their School Communities

The results showed notable levels in the unsure responses to all items in this category especially Items 1, 5, and 6. Why did many respondents mark the unsure responses? The items, posed as statements, appeared to be clear. My speculation in Item 6, for example, was that respondents were unsure because communication between homes and schools was not a strong feature in school communities. Furthermore, respondents were divided about their perceptions about the level of interest parents showed in schools' operations (Item 8). These issues need to be examined more closely in phase three of the study because the same trend had emerged in the exploratory phase of the study.

In Figure 7.4 there are some clear responses indicated by respondents about parent interactions with their schools. Parents were not involved in school meetings (Item 3), did not help the school (Item 4), did not assist with classroom activities (Item 5), although many did attend major school functions (Item 1).

Response % Patterns

Item		Disagree		Unsure		Agree
		1	2	3	4	5

1   Parents in this school are always involved in the school's major functions.

2   Parents in this school are involved in their children's education at home.

3   Many parents in this school attend school meetings.

4   Most parents help the school in some way or other.

5   Many parents involved themselves as helpers in classroom activities.

6   The knowledge and skills of parents are used in this school.

Figure 7.4.   Respondents' Beliefs about Parents' Involvement in their Schools

Furthermore, most parents were not involved in their children's education at home (Item 2) although nearly one third of the respondents showed that they were unsure of what happened in students' homes in regard to educational activities. This result supported my speculation previously stated about home-school communication. Parent expertise (knowledge and skills) was not used to a great extent in schools although some schools appeared to use the expertise of their parents more than others (Item 6).

Respondents' beliefs about school actions to involve parents are illustrated in Figure 7.5. Overall, respondents to the survey believed that their schools took several actions to involve parents in their schools. They believed that parents could be involved in decision making (Item 1), parents could express views, concerns and complaints (Item 7), and certainly could read about school and student activities through newsletters and the local media (Item 5). Teachers also strongly believed that they reported in formal, and to a lesser extent in informal, ways to parents about their children's progress (Items 3 and 2), often by visiting homes to make contact with parents (Item 8). However, responses to most items showed that different schools varied in their approaches to involving parents in their schools such as organising social functions for parents to attend (Item 6). Several respondents were unsure about some of the actions taken by schools to involve parents such as reporting informally to parents (Item 2) and home visiting (Item 8).

(figure continues)

Figure 7.5.   (*continued*)

Item		Response % Patterns

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

7   Structures exist in this school to deal with parents' views, concerns and complaints.

8   Home visiting is a common strategy for communicating with parents in this school.
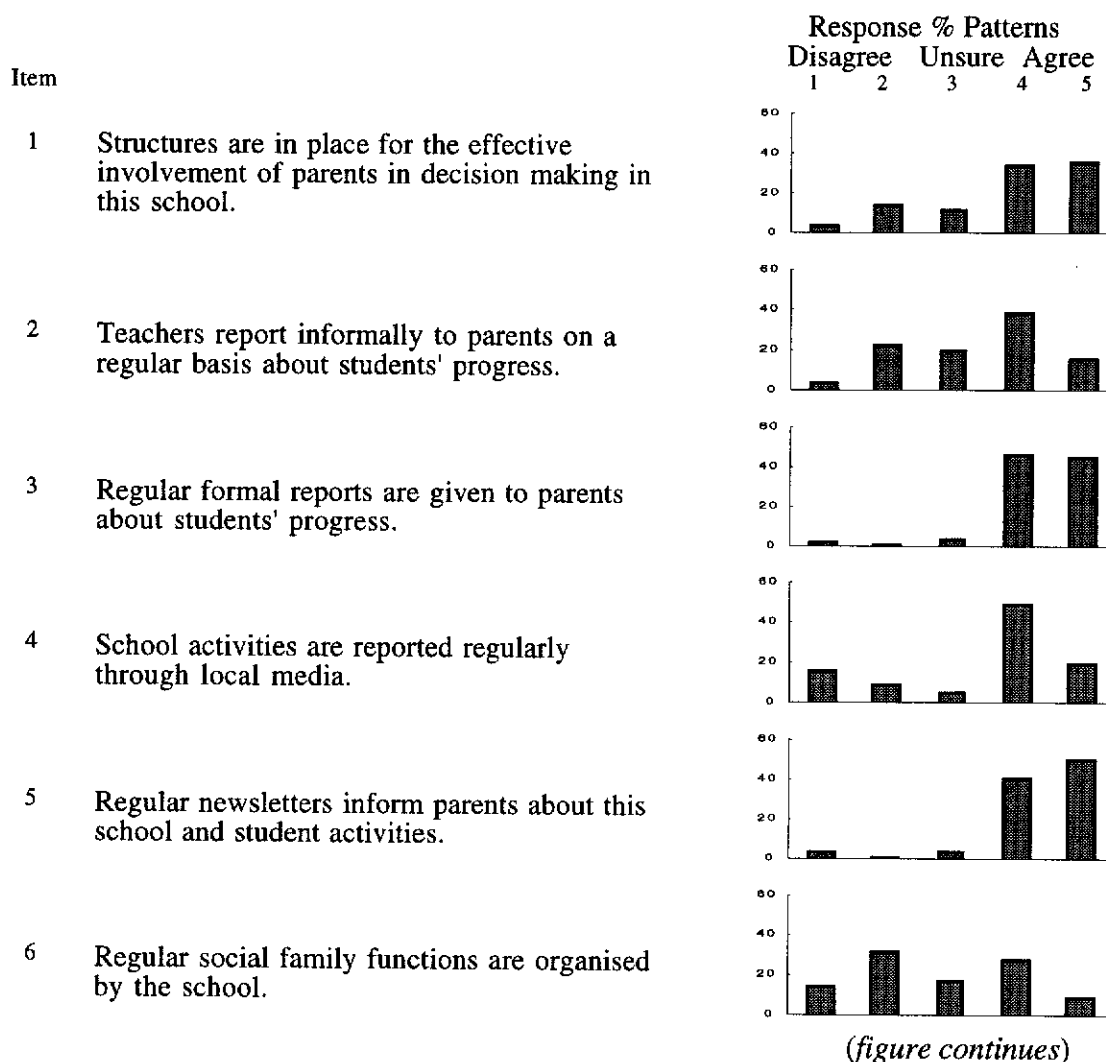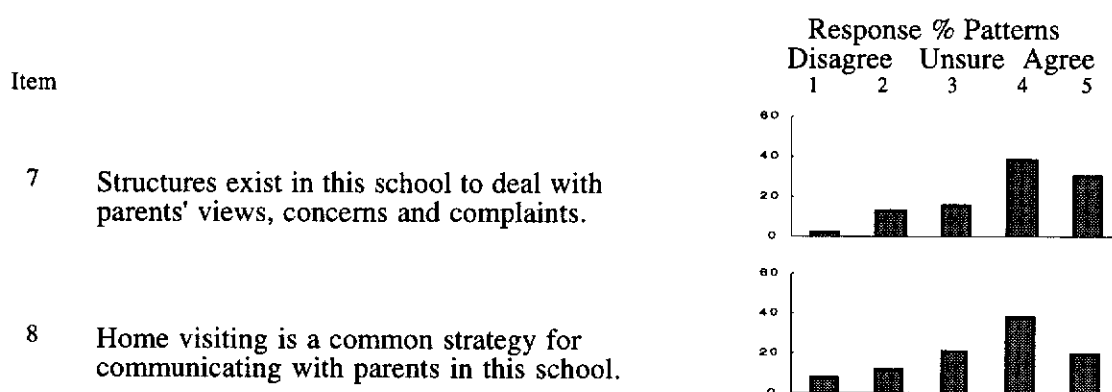
Figure 7.5.   Respondents' Beliefs about School Actions to Involve Parents in their Schools

Summary of the Results about the Home-School Relationship Category

In summary, the results from the survey (shown in Figures 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5) about the various aspects of home-school relationships confirmed what people were saying in the exploratory study about schools. The results also showed that people in schools thought that they were taking some organised action to strengthen home-school relationships. At the same time, parents, more often than not, did not respond to the efforts made by schools. Perhaps school actions were perceived by parents as perfunctory and not really genuine attempts to communicate with them. Perhaps parents were not confident about communicating with schools. The findings in the survey required further investigation in case study schools to establish possible reasons for the trends revealed in the exploratory phase of the study and confirmed by the survey.

School Level Processes across Different Schools

Respondents' Beliefs about Resources made Available to Schools

Figure 7.6 presents several ideas about resources in schools in the Kimberley. In many of the items there was a wide spread of responses, often balanced between agreeing or disagreeing with the items. This balance may be the result of larger schools receiving more resources because, in the main, allocations to schools are based on student enrolments. Smaller schools probably struggle to meet their students' needs with their smaller budgets. The satisfaction with the general allocation of resources to schools from the central level of the education system varied and 50% of respondents believed that their schools should receive more funds in their school budgets (Items 1 and 3). The issue of differential funding to schools is alluded to here in terms of schools with small enrolments not being disadvantaged due to their size. The suggestion here is that global resources need to be allocated in different, new ways.

Item

1 Central Office allocation of staff is adequate for this school.

2 Central Office support for special problems in this school is adequate.

3 The School Grant is adequate for this school's needs.

4 Financial assistance through special programs (eg. * PCAP, PSP, ESL) is adequate.

5 Some innovative programs in this school cannot be maintained because of lack of resources.

6 Some innovative programs cannot be considered in this school because of lack of resources.

7 District Office personnel are responsive to this school's needs.

8 District Office resources to support this school are effective.

9 The parents and wider community are able to supplement school funds.

10 There is a range of community resources for this school to use.

Note: * Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP); Priority Schools Program (PSP); English as a Second Language (ESL).

Figure 7.6.   Respondents' Beliefs about Resources made Available to Schools

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Specialised funding for specific programs was viewed favourably (Item 4) although some respondents indicated they thought such funding was unsatisfactory. The Commonwealth government allocates specific funds for target groups; funding for staff in schools is the preserve of the State government.

The support given to schools by the local District Office was highly endorsed (Item 7) although there was a range of responses about the effectiveness of the resources used by the District Office to support schools (Item 8). Respondents believed that staff were not deployed effectively to schools to meet the needs of students (Item 2) and schools could not rely on their communities for extra financial assistance (Item 9). The survey confirmed that most school communities did not have a range of resources that their schools could use (Item 10).

The survey further showed that innovation, and the capacity to maintain new programs, varied across the schools (Items 5 and 6). Several responses to Item 5 showed that respondents were unsure about the maintenance of innovative programs in relation to available resources. Case study investigations to delve into how different schools developed and managed innovation within their own contexts was worthwhile because curriculum change is associated with the mandatory school development planning process in schools.

Respondents' Beliefs about Effective Use of Resources in Schools

Figure 7.7 shows that the survey results reiterated that schools were staffed by people with expertise. In some schools, however, there was a perception that staff expertise could be improved (Item 1) with 21% of respondents unsure about the degree of expertise of staff to meet the special needs of schools. The results also show that staff were effectively deployed in some schools but not in others (Item 2). There was a high level of satisfaction expressed about schools as workplaces (Item 5), that schools had a significant number and a wide range of up-to-date resources (Items 6 and 7), and that these resources were well used (Item 8). Satisfaction was expressed with the functionality of school buildings (Item 10) and the appropriateness of classroom design for teaching and learning (Item 11). Respondents also strongly agreed that there was a need to keep school grounds in pleasing shape (Item 12). Approximately half of the respondents did not believe that they had easy access to professional development and that their professional needs were not met (Items 3 and 4). Also, a similar level of responses indicated that respondents required more training to make better use of all resources in the schools (Item 9).

The results shown in Figure 7.7 confirmed much of what people revealed in the initial part of the study. Mostly, people enjoyed their schools as workplaces and positively viewed the

resources that they had. Poor classroom design, as seen as a possible concern by me, appeared to be site specific rather than a generalised problem. The initial qualitative data and the survey highlighted that access to professional development, obviously constrained by distance and money for travel, was of concern for those teachers, as was the type of professional development many received, the more they were distant from towns.

Item		Response % Patterns

1   Staff have a high degree of expertise to meet any special needs in this school.

2   Staff are deployed effectively in this schools to meet the needs of students.

3   There is easy access to professional development for staff in this school.

4   Professional development meets the needs of all staff in this school.

5   In this school I am satisfied with my workplace conditions

6   This school has a significant number of up-to-date equipment and material resources.

7   This school has a wide range of equipment and material resources.

8   This school's equipment and material resources are well used.

9   Systematic training for teachers for use of resources exists in this school.

(figure continues)

Figure 7.7. (*continued*)

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item

10   The style of building of this school is functional.

11   Classroom design is appropriate for teaching and learning.

12   It is important in this school that the grounds are beautified.
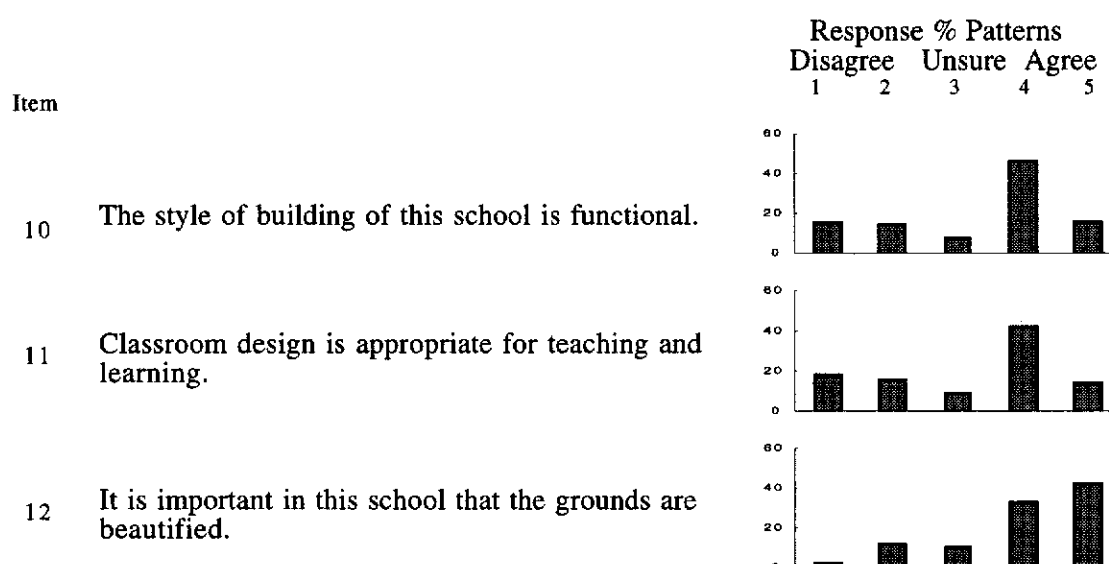
Figure 7.7. Respondents' Beliefs about Effective Use of Resources in Schools

There remained an incompatible point of view about the level of staff expertise in the schools. The exploratory work in the study showed that teachers with greater expertise in teaching English as a second language and Aboriginal students were required in schools. The survey showed that there was a high level of experienced teachers in the Kimberley schools (see Figure 7.2) although this does not mean that long experience equates with the type of expertise required. What was the nature of expertise required? and, Where was the expertise required? This issue called for closer examination as did the issue related to schools as workplaces. The positive survey results contrasted with the negative views of some participants involved the first phase of the study.

Respondents' Beliefs about Decision Making Processes in Schools

Figure 7.8 reports a generally positive response about the range of informal and formal approaches to decision making available to respondents in their schools (Item 1), that larger group decision making was cooperative (Item 2), and staff meetings in their schools were regular, worthwhile, and functional (Item 4). Respondents also believed that their decisions were followed through into actions (Item 3). Figure 7.8 also shows that the way administrators took responsibility for decisions was endorsed by the respondents (Item 9) although some respondents showed dissatisfaction with the way some decisions were reached in their schools. Some people believed that in their schools there were constraints on consensus decision making. The constraints were associated with issues such as their inability to speak freely during the consensus decision making process (Item 5), pressure exerted by cliques on the decision making process (Item 8), and the decrees made by those in power (Item 7).

Item

1   There is a complementary approach to
    informal and formal decision making in this
    school.

2   Formal decision making in larger groups,
    such as a staff meeting, is marked by a sense
    of working together.

3   Decisions from both informal and formal
    meetings are followed through into actions.

4   Staff meetings in this school are regular,
    worthwhile and functional.

5   I feel free to speak my mind during the
    consensus decision making process in this
    school.

6   Teachers in this school work together to
    solve individual teacher problems.

7   School level decisions are mostly reached
    by consensus rather than by decree.

8   Staff cliques operated in the decision
    making process in this school.

9   Administrators are prepared to make and
    take responsibility for final decisions.

10 Students are involved in the decision-
    making processes in this school.

Figure 7.8.   Respondents' Beliefs about Decision Making Processes in Schools

Further, the results showed that cooperation between people in the schools to help
individual teachers was positive (Item 6) but was not necessarily so in all schools. It

was clear from the results shown in Figure 7.8 that students were not involved in decision making in their schools (Item 10), however, 25 % of respondents were unsure about whether this process occurred or not in their schools. School culture and climate required further investigation in the third phase of the study to ascertain why the variations reported in Figure 7.8 occurred and why teachers were satisfied with their workplaces (see Figure 7.7, Item 5). Were these issues resource or culture related?

Respondents' Beliefs about Leadership in Schools

In Figure 7.9 some interesting results are shown. Respondents strongly believed that school leadership was focussed on improving student outcomes (Item 4) but not all were as convinced that school leaders held sound educational visions for their schools which they communicated to their school communities (Item 3). There was a belief that leaders provided good role models in their work (Item 7) and many promoted strong professionalism in their schools because of the trust they showed in their staff (Item 10). Leaders also were seen to take the time to support and counsel those within school communities (Item 8). It must be noted, however, that in Items 3, 7, 8 and 10, approximately 25% of the respondents disagreed with the others. Figure 7.9 also shows differences in respondents' views about other aspects of leadership. It appeared that not all leaders clearly delegated duties (Item 2) and many leaders did not establish clear patterns of communication with staff (Item 1). Nearly 60% of respondents believed that leaders should make some decisions on their own (Item 5), but there was evidence in the results that showed 65% of respondents had little faith, or were unsure about their faith (24%), in their leaders on such occasions (Item 6).

Item		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree
		1 2 3 4 5
1	Clear communication patterns are established between various staff members in this school.	
2	Duties in this school are delegated on a rational, clearly understood and accepted basis.	
3	Leadership in this school is marked by a sound educational vision which is communicated to staff, parents and students.	

(figure continues)

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Figure 7.9.   (*continued*)

Item		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree 1 2 3 4 5

4   Leadership in this school is committed to improving student outcomes.

5   When appropriate, it is expected that decisions in this school should be taken by school leaders without consultation with staff.

6   Teachers in this school have faith in the decisions taken by school leaders without consultation.

7   Leaders in this school set a good example by working hard at their leadership role.

8   Leaders in this school always have time to support or counsel teachers, parents or students with problems or concerns.

9   Teachers are positive in their interactions with one another.

10   There is a high level of professionalism in staff in this school because school leaders trust them.

11   Staff morale is very high in this school.

Figure 7.9.   Respondents' Beliefs about Leadership in Schools

Only 54% of respondents saw that staff morale in schools was high and 20% believed that they were demoralised in their school contexts (Item 11). Interestingly, 17% of respondents were unsure about their beliefs. These results suggested that staff morale in schools was variable, but not dissimilar to those in the *Kimberley Teacher Stress Survey* conducted in 1995 (see Table 1.1). The *Kimberley Teacher Stress Survey* was conducted not long after industrial action in schools had taken place. Possibly the results provided by the questionnaire in the study represented a more realistic view of

teacher morale in schools but there were still schools in the region where teachers were unhappy. The issue required continued examination in phase three of the study because these results and those in Figures 7.7 (Item 5) and 7.8 (Items 5, 6, 7, and 8) point to contrasts in schools. Perhaps more importantly, the results in Figure 7.9 (Item 9) for example, reveal a contradiction to the results in Figure 7.8 (Item 8) concerning staff cooperation and interactions. There was a strong suggestion in the Figure 7.9 results to say that teachers in schools interacted positively but there was some concern expressed in the Figure 7.8 results that staff cliques influenced the way decisions were made in schools. Perhaps at the social level, teachers felt that they all got on together, and must, due to the necessity of their isolation. But when educational matters were involved, possibly school political and power issues swayed how people interacted with each other.

Respondents' Beliefs about Achievement Oriented Policy in Schools

Figure 7.10 shows that a very positive picture about policy in schools was held by the respondents although there was uncertainty whether their positive view was shared with parents and students. Respondents believed that their schools were focussed on planning for student achievement (Item 2). It seemed that people in schools believed they knew what was important in the curriculum for students to learn (Item 1) because it encompassed the full range of students' development (Item 4). Responses also showed that the schools' planning priorities were resourced (Item 9), documented plans were put into operation (Item 7), and programs that were developed met local and community needs (Item 8). It was perceived that programs were planned around quality information about students' levels of achievement (Item 3) because the monitoring of student progress was systematic (Item 6). There was a sense that respondents saw schools as adding value to students' lives (Item 11).

Response % Patterns
Disagree   Unsure   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item		
1	This school has a clear and defensible view about what is important in the curriculum for students to learn.	
2	This school's planning focusses on improving students' learning.	
3	Learning programs from one year level to another are built on quality information about students' levels of achievement.	

(figure continues)

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	Response % Patterns

Item

		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree
		1 2 3 4 5

4 The school's policy on curriculum encompasses the full range of student development - intellectual, emotional, physical, social and cultural.

5 Parents, teachers and students appear to work towards the same goals in this school.

6 Collecting data to monitor students' progress is systematic in this school.

7 This school's documented plans are put into operation.

8 Programs of work developed in this school are relevant to the local and wider community's needs.

9 School priorities in planning are resourced to create improvement in students' learning.

10 Students' life chances are enhanced through this school's policies and planning.

11 This school adds something of value to what students already have in their lives.

12 This school is able to develop in students a commitment to further learning.

Figure 7.10.   Respondents' Beliefs about Achievement Oriented Policy in Schools

The results showed that respondents, however, were not so confident that they shared these goals with parents in their schools (Item 5) and 32% of respondents were unsure about this issue. They also showed that they were unlikely to develop in students a commitment to further learning (Item 12) and not all respondents were convinced that they enhanced

students' life chances through their schools' policies and planning (Item 10). There were high response rates in the "unsure" category in Items 10 (28%) and 12 (32%). Perhaps respondents did not know how, or if, they were connecting with students and their parents. The suggestion in the results shown in Figure 7.10 was that schools go about the business of education with well-supported goals and policies "in-house" but respondents believed, or were unsure, that parents and their children shared the same vision. The survey results and the interpretations made in phase one of the study pointed to a critical difference in the way schools and parents perceived education in the Kimberley schools. A strong connection did not exist between home and school. The results are confirmed in the home-school category of the questionnaire. More to the point, the mismatch between perceived policy intentions and actual student achievement is once again highlighted and invited deeper analysis in case studies of schools.

Respondents' Beliefs about the Orderly and Caring Atmosphere in Schools

The results in Figure 7.11 show that respondents positively viewed the climate in their schools although there were concerns evident in the results about some students' behaviour in some schools. Some actions that were successful in achieving positive school climate were strongly endorsed by respondents such as a fair discipline approach to students (Item 8) and the dynamic displays of students' work in schools and classrooms (Items 5 and 6). Other actions that strongly promoted positive learning environments were the extra effort made by teachers to help students (Item 3), the care shown to students by teachers (Item 7), and the patience shown to students with learning difficulties (Item 9).

Judging by what the respondents believed, schools were safe for teachers and students (Item 1) although approximately 32% of respondents disagreed with or were unsure about this issue. Also, there was concern evident in the results that not all schools had a clear and consistent policy for managing student behaviour (Item 2) and there was a strong belief (46% disagreed or were unsure) that some students were unable to keep school rules for expected behaviour (Item 12). Incidents of teacher and student confrontation in some schools were evident (Item 4). Items 4 and 12 cannot be read along racial lines. There would be varying respondent interpretations about describing school behaviour. Some would see non-compliance to meeting school behaviour as students not following the rules, whereas others might see non-compliance in relation to school attendance. However, race relations in some schools, as perceived by 25% of respondents, were less than harmonious (Item 10). This response may be connected to those respondents from the town school where both indigenous and non-indigenous

students attended the school. The broad theme of student-teacher relationships was worthy of further investigation.

Item

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

1   Teachers, other workers and students feel safe at all times in this school.

2   The school has a clear and consistent policy for managing student behaviour in and outside classrooms.

3   Teachers in this school make an extra effort to help their students.

4   Incidents of teacher and student confrontation are few in this school.

5   Students' work is regularly displayed in this school.

6   Work displays are regularly changed in all classrooms in this school.

7   All teachers in this school care about their students and what happens to them.

8   Most teachers in this school are fair to their students.

9   Most teachers are patient with students who have learning problems.

10 Harmonious race relationships exist in this school.

(figure continues)

Figure 7.11. (continued)

Item		Response % Patterns

Response % Patterns
Disagree   Unsure   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

11   This school has easy access to support
     agencies to work with students' problems.

12   Students fulfil expectations by keeping the
     school rules for behaviour.
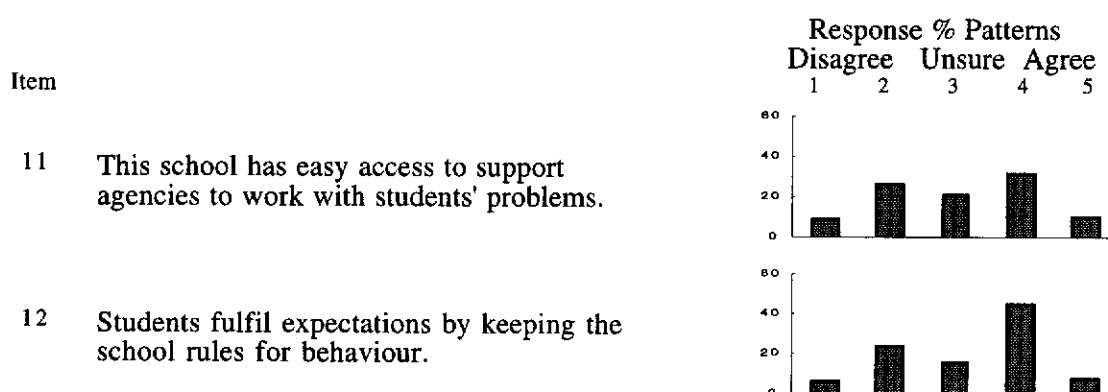
Figure 7.11.   Respondents' Beliefs about the Orderly and Caring Atmosphere in
                 Schools

Respondents highlighted their constrained capacity to access agencies to work with students' problems (Item 11). More worrying was that 21% of respondents were unsure about their school's access to support agencies. This issue was probably magnified the further a school was distant from town centres. In the initial part of the study, the work of community nurses was endorsed so support from other agencies needed to be identified.

Summary of the Results about the School Level Processes Category

In summarising the survey results about school level processes (Figures 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, and 7.11), there was a range of views expressed about the level of resources in schools and how effectively these were used. Respondents were satisfied with their schools as workplaces, the functionality of school buildings and classroom designs, and believed that there was a good level of resources in schools which were well used. However, respondents believed that staff were not deployed effectively to schools to meet the needs of students, staff expertise could be improved, and their professional development and training needs were not entirely satisfactory. Also, there was a perception that program innovation, and the capacity to maintain new programs, varied across the schools. There was a generally positive response to decision making available to respondents in their schools. This was not necessarily so, however, in all schools because it was perceived that there were constraints on consensus decision making. It was clear that students were not involved in decision making in their schools. Respondents strongly believed that school leadership was focussed on improving student outcomes but there were varying responses about some aspects of the leadership in different schools. For example, not all leaders clearly delegated duties in their schools and did not establish clear patterns of communication with their staff members. Many respondents had little faith in some of the decisions made by their leaders.

Staff morale was variable across the schools as was the level of positive staff cooperation and interaction. Overall, respondents had a very positive picture about policy in schools but, at the same time, there was uncertainty whether their positive view was shared with parents and students. Respondents believed that their schools were focussed on planning for student achievement based on documented plans which were put into operation. These plans encompassed the full range of students' development and met local and community needs. There was a sense that respondents saw schools as adding value to students' lives but they were unlikely to develop in students a commitment to further learning or enhance students' life chances. Respondents positively viewed the climate in their schools although there were concerns evident in the results about some students' behaviour, teacher and student confrontation, and race relations in some schools. Further probing of all these variations was required in case studies to ascertain if the trends had a relationship to students' success at school.

Classroom Level Processes across Different Schools

Respondents' Beliefs about Preparation and Planning for Teaching

Respondents expressed a confident view about preparation and planning for teaching. These results are displayed in Figure 7.12 and suggested at the classroom level, teacher planning and preparation was exemplary. Teachers spent considerable time to plan and prepare for their teaching (Item 8) in order to make teaching and learning strategies interesting (Item 3). Teachers repeatedly mentioned in the initial phase of the study that much time, both at and out of school, was required to ensure that their teaching went smoothly.

(*figure continues*)

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Figure 7.12. (continued)

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree

Item		

4   Time allocation is planned to cover all areas
    (or subject area) of the curriculum.

5   Students' learning style is considered in
    lesson planning.

6   Appropriate amounts of homework are
    planned for students.

7   A balance of informal and formal
    assessment is planned.

8   Considerable personal time is spent on
    planning and preparation.
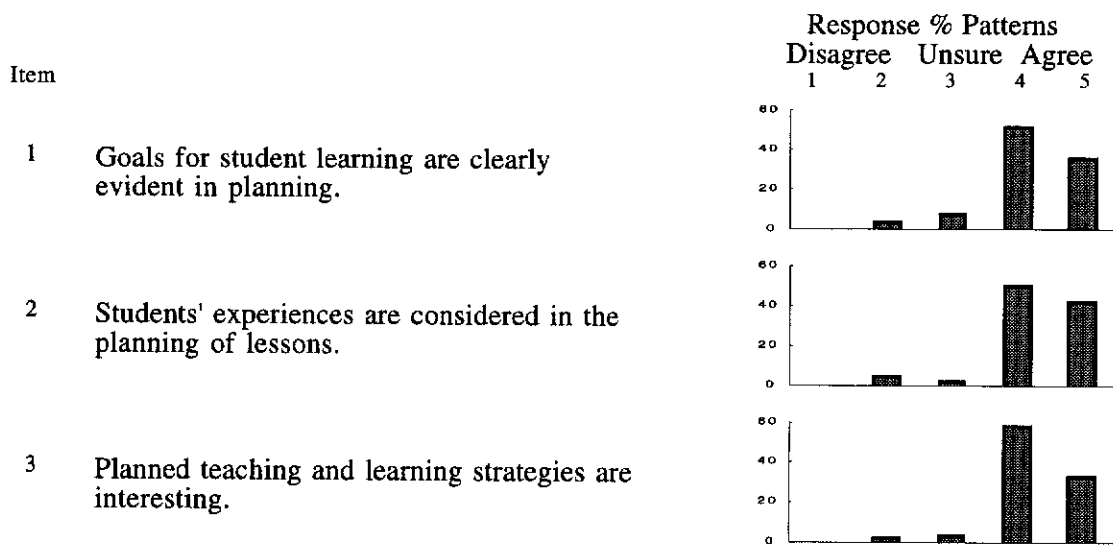
Figure 7.12. Respondents' Beliefs about Preparation and Planning for Teaching

It appears from the survey results that goals for learning were set in teaching plans (Item 1), the experiences (Item 2) and learning styles of students were considered (Item 5), the total curriculum was covered (Item 4), and a balance of informal and formal assessment procedures was organised (Item 7). Unfortunately, student outcomes (see Figure 7.21, Item 12) did not reciprocate the effort of teachers. The lack of students' success at school was highlighted in the exploratory phase of the study.

One variation revealed in Figure 7.12 (see Item 6) was of special interest. There was a range of responses to the level of homework that was planned in different schools. In the initial phase of the study teachers in remote schools suggested that school contexts were not conducive to homework. The survey result shows, however, that some schools set homework. It would be of interest in the next phase of the study to ascertain in which schools homework policies existed and why. Also, what needed to be investigated in the next phase of the study was the link between teachers' perceptions of their work and the reality of their actions in the classroom. Perhaps teachers' spent considerable time, thought, and effort on their planning and preparation but put these plans into operation in ways that did not support students' learning.

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Respondents' Beliefs about Learning Environments in Classrooms

In Figure 7.13 it is shown that teachers believed they engendered a positive climate in their classrooms. The results suggested that most students had fun in classrooms (Item 2), were challenged to fulfil their potential (Item 10), and were interested in learning new things (Item 4). They had a sense of belonging to their classrooms (Item 7) and generally formed strong friendship groups (Item 6) although friendships did not mean that students always cared about each others' work (Item 8). In Items 6 and 8 there were high levels of unsure responses, 24% and 29% respectively, and these issues required some clarification in the next stage of the study.

Not all students were clear about their motives for coming to school (Item 1), many had difficulty in working hard to complete their work (Item 3), and a greater number had difficulty working when left on their own (Item 5). There was variety and uncertainty in the responses about students' attentiveness in classroom activities (Item 9).

Item		Response % Patterns

Response % Patterns
Disagree   Unsure   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

1   Students have a clear motive for coming to school.

2   Students have fun in the classroom.

3   Students work hard in the classroom to complete their work.

4   Students are interested in learning new things.

5   Students would work even when left on their own.

6   Students in the classroom want to be friends with one another.

(figure continues)

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Figure 7.13. (continued)

Item		Response % Patterns

7   Students have a sense of belonging in the classroom.

8   Most students in the classroom care about each others' work.

9   Students are attentive in classroom activities.

10   Students are challenged to fulfil potential.

Figure 7.13. Respondents' Beliefs about Learning Environments in Classrooms

The results displayed in Figure 7.13 suggested that classroom environments were positive but classrooms needed to be structured to ensure that students learn. The structuring of classroom environments was of interest in the next phase of the study.

Respondents' Beliefs about Classroom Behaviour Management

The results in Figure 7.14 show that very high expectations were set for students (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) and classrooms were well routined and organised (Item 10). In the first phase of the study it was found that the teachers needed a classroom manner that was respectful of students. These survey results show that teachers also expected certain classroom actions to be taken by students. Students were expected to attend school, be punctual, and be clean and tidy. Students also were expected to meet classroom rules for behaviour and do their best with their work. Respondents saw that they held high standards for behaviour at school so that most of the time in classrooms was involved with learning activities (Item 7) rather than time spent on telling students what they needed to do (Item 8).

In Item 8, 26% of the respondents were unsure about the Item or, did not know what happened in classrooms about this aspect of behaviour. Other aspects of classroom management were a concern for respondents. Not all students were easily engaged on task (Item 6), although 24% of respondents also were unsure about this Item. Possibly some respondents believed that some students in classrooms were not easily engaged in

activities while others were, so the marked the middle response to the Item to represent their beliefs. However, respondents were clear that students required extra teacher time to monitor and maintain classroom behaviour (Item 12). Perhaps some classrooms had too many outside interruptions (Item 9). There appeared to be many students, or respondents were unsure about the Item, who were unable to self-manage tasks in the classroom (Item 11). In the exploratory phase it was found that some parents believed students often spent considerable "time out" out of classrooms as a discipline measure. The concerns about classroom behaviour expressed by respondents required investigation to ascertain whether the issues were related to particular students or particular types of classrooms and schools rather than providing a general way of describing students.

Item		Response % Patterns

1 Students are expected to attend school regularly.

2 Students are expected to be punctual.

3 Students are expected to have good personal hygiene.

4 Students are expected to meet rules for behaviour.

5 Students are expected to perform to their capabilities.

6 Students are easily engaged on task.

7 Most classroom time is spent on students involved in learning activities.

(*figure continues*)

Figure 7.14. (*continued*)

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item		
8	Most classroom time is spent talking about what students need to do.	
9	Outside interruptions to the classroom are few.	
10	Classroom routines are organised and smooth.	
11	Students are able to self-manage task-related behaviour.	
12	Considerable teacher time is required to monitor and maintain classroom behaviour.	

Figure 7.14. Respondents' Beliefs about Classroom Behaviour Management

Respondents' Beliefs about the Organisation of Curriculum Content in Classroom Programs

According to the results shown in Figure 7.15, respondents strongly believed that lesson content taught in classrooms was interesting (Item 5), encouraged students to learn and use thinking skills (Item 8), and was based on students' background knowledge and experiences (Item 2). It also was believed that curriculum content was taught to reflect viewpoints from different cultures (Item 1) although some respondents further indicated that there was uncertainty about how prejudice was dealt with in the curriculum ((Item 6). Respondents strongly suggested that the curriculum was integrated across or within subjects (Item 3) and that they used the teaching of language to particularly focus much of students' learning (Item 4).

In the exploratory phase of the study it was found that different teachers believed that the curriculum met different purposes. Secondary teachers tended to view the curriculum as one based on a "learn for living" philosophy. Primary teachers saw the curriculum more as "learning the basics". Students needed to know how to read, write, and work with number. What the survey results highlight is that teachers may have

different expectations about the type of curriculum taught to students (Item 7). In this Item there were conflicting views expressed in the results about how much emphasis was placed on whether students should learn knowledge and skills accurately. More to the point, 32% of the respondents indicated an unsure response to the Item.

Item		Response % Patterns

Item	
1	Curriculum content is taught to reflect viewpoints from different cultures.
2	Students' background knowledge and experiences form the starting point for teaching.
3	Links are made across subjects (or within a subject) through integrated topics.
4	The application of language skills taught is prominent across the curriculum (or into subject area/s).
5	Interesting lesson content is provided for students using various artefacts, media and technologies.
6	Students are assisted through curriculum activities to deal with prejudices.
7	Great emphasis is placed on the accuracy of knowledge and skills in the curriculum.
8	Curriculum activities encourage students learning to use thinking skills.

Figure 7.15.   Respondents' Beliefs about the Organisation of Curriculum Content in Classroom Programs

In the third phase of the study the continuity of curriculum practices across the year levels needed to be confirmed especially in relation to how they promoted improved student outcomes. Why was the accuracy of knowledge and skills not emphasised in

some classrooms? This was counter to the literature on the effective schools field where the teaching of basic skills is emphasised. It was imperative also to ascertain how the terms "basic skills", "thinking skills", and "skills for living" were conceptualised by different teachers.

Respondents' Beliefs about Teaching Practices

The results exhibited in Figure 7.16 show that respondents to the survey expressed strong beliefs about the way teaching was conducted in classrooms. Learning was believed to be student-centred (Item 2) with the interests and needs of students accommodated (Item 3). Teaching approaches also involved modelling of skills being taught (Item 4) and socially appropriate language and behaviour to use (Item 8). In the exploratory phase, teachers referred to this modelling as "code-switching". There was a range of individual, paired, small group, and whole group learning opportunities provided for students (Item 9) in their learning and there was a strong emphasis on teaching students questioning techniques as a way to clarify thinking (Item 10). This is an important issue in terms of showing students some differences in cultural ways to learning. There were periods of consolidation planned for students to learn new skills that had been taught (Item 11) and the pace of teaching was very appropriate for most of the students' needs (Item 12).

If these results are to be believed, teaching practices in classrooms were tailor-made for students. But the achievement of students did not appear to reciprocate the teaching practices reported. The under-achievement of students in marginalised contexts is discussed in previous chapters with examples provided by Mortimore (1996) in the wider context, Beresford (1993b), Nakata (1995), and NBEET (1999b) in the Australian context, and Leslie (1996) and the Kimberley Education District (1995b) in the Kimberley context. Perhaps some of the explanations for the enigma can be suggested by Items 1, 5, 6, and 7 in Figure 7.16. Respondents show a relatively high degree of uncertainty about, or actually disagreed, whether students understand the goals for their learning (Item 1) and found difficulty in showing students the application of what they were learning in lessons (Item 5). In many situations, respondents showed that it was difficult to provide models of learners to the students other than those in the school context (Item 6). In some classrooms respondents also showed that students were not always the ones "doing the talking" in classrooms (Item 7). Item 7 presents a contradictory picture to the one shown in a previous Figure (see Figure 7.14). In Figure 7.14 (Items 7 and 8) it is suggested that most classroom time is spent on students involved in learning activities with little time spent talking about what students need to do. It was of great interest in the third phase of the study, therefore, to

ascertain how actively students were involved in the learning process especially in terms of using language.

Response % Patterns

Item		Disagree		Unsure	Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5

1   All students know the goals for achievement for every lesson.

2   Student-centred learning is emphasised in the classroom.

3   Most lessons cater for the interests and needs of students.

4   Teacher modelling of the skills being taught is prominent in the classroom.

5   It is easy to show students the application of skills learnt from lessons.

6   Models of learners are used through peers, teachers, parents and visitors in the classroom.

7   Students are able to do most of the talking during lessons.

8   Socially appropriate language and behaviour are modelled in the classroom.

9   A range of situations for individual, paired, small group and whole class learning are provided.

10   Questioning techniques are taught to as a way to clarify their thinking.

(figure continues)

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Response % Patterns

	Disagree		Unsure	Agree	
Item	1	2	3	4	5

11   Periods of consolidation of new skills taught
are allowed for.

12   The pace of teaching is appropriate for
most students' needs.

Figure 7.16.   Respondents' Beliefs about Teaching Practices

The incompatible ideas revealed in Figure 7.16 are similar to the dilemma which arises from the results in Figure 7.12. Teachers believed they planned and prepared in a thorough way and taught in an exemplary manner but these processes did not match with students' achievement. Once again, there was evidence presented in Figure 7.16 that confirmed teaching practices in classrooms required closer observation to make better sense of the information presented in the survey.

Respondents' Beliefs about Monitoring Students' Progress

In Figure 7.17 the results show that teachers used opportunities for monitoring students' progress with informal assessment procedures (Item 2), especially those that acknowledge students' accomplishments (Item 6) and encourage them to self-evaluate their own learning (Item 4). Respondents confirmed that records of students' progress were carefully maintained (Item 5).

The results also show that the monitoring of student progress was neither strongly supported by regular teacher-student meetings (Item 1), although 22% of respondents were unsure about the Item, nor were opportunities provided for students to be monitored by peers or parents (Item 3). Perhaps peer and parent monitoring of students was seen as inappropriate. Parents may be considered not to have the necessary skills to monitor their children's progress; the cultural way of teasing or the avoidance of competition may influence teachers not to use peer monitoring. These results (Items 1, 3, and 7) contrast with those in Figure 7.12 (Item 7) where respondents believed they planned for a range of informal and formal assessment procedures and, therefore, required investigation again in phase three of the study.

Item		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree 1 2 3 4 5
1	Feedback through regular conferences with each student about his or her academic progress is provided.	
2	Opportunities for monitoring through informal assessment such as games and quizzes are provided.	
3	Opportunities are provided for students to be monitored by peers and parents.	
4	Students are encouraged to self evaluate.	
5	Careful records are kept of students' progress.	
6	Every effort is made to acknowledge each student's accomplishments.	
7	All parents are regularly met, formally and informally, to report about their children's progress.	

Figure 7.17.   Respondents' Beliefs about Monitoring Students' Progress

Summary of the Results about the Classroom Level Processes Category

In summarising the survey results about classroom level processes (Figures 7.12, 7.13, 7.14, 7.15, 7.16, and 7.17) respondents provided a model view of preparation and planning for teaching with teachers spending considerable time, even extensive amounts of personal time, to plan and prepare for their teaching. Homework was not planned universally for students. It was believed that teachers engendered a positive classroom climate in their classrooms although not all students were clear about their motives for coming to school, many had difficulty in completing their work, and a greater number had difficulty working when left on their own. Very high expectations were set for students in meeting classroom rules, attendance, punctuality, cleanliness and tidiness.

Respondents believed that students were involved with learning activities, but not all students were easily engaged on task and many required extra teacher time to monitor and maintain classroom behaviour. Respondents strongly believed that lesson content taught in classrooms was interesting, encouraged students to learn and use thinking skills, was based on students' background knowledge and cultural experiences, and was integrated across or within subjects. The teaching of language was used to particularly focus much of the students' learning. It was not clear what philosophy underscored the content of classroom curriculum content. Was it a "learn for living", a "learning the basics" philosophy, or both? Respondents strongly endorsed their teaching practices as student-centred and modelling what needed to be learnt especially, a range of language skills and competencies. Teaching was well-paced and revolved around periods of consolidation. The progress of students was monitored and their progress recorded and reported even though there were some inconsistencies shown in the responses.

Student Level Characteristics across Different Schools

Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Background Experiences

The results shown in Figure 7.18 confirm that the sociocultural context of students' homes and lives is different from that in the schools. While the financial status of parents did not exclude students from school activities (Item 1), students brought to school experiences that did not allow them to move smoothly into the school context. They had limited experiences with Standard Australian English (Item 2) and facilities at home did not sustain teacher set work (Item 10). Health and emotional problems (Items 5 and 8) disrupted classroom activities as did students' truancy and transience (Items 6 and 7). Respondents indicated, however, that students' emotional problems did not disrupt classrooms to the same extent as they did classroom activities. The difference in the responses to these two Items suggested that students' emotional problems were disruptive to some learning situations but not to the overall running of the classroom.

Respondents were divided, or unsure, about the development of students' interpersonal skills appropriate to their age and situation (Item 3) and 45% of the responses showed that students did not have conceptual experiences associated with success at school (Item 4). The unsure result in Item 4 (42%) was of concern. Why were so many respondents unsure about whether most students had rich conceptual experiences associated with success at school? The two issues, the development of students' interpersonal skills and their level of conceptual experiences related to school success, required unravelling in the third phase of the study.

Item

1   Students can take part in all school activities
    even if parents can't afford to pay.

2   Most students lack experience with Standard
    Australian English.

3   Most students have developed interpersonal
    skills appropriate for their age and situation.

4   Most students have rich conceptual
    experiences associated with success at
    school.

5   Many students have continuous health
    problems.

6   Many students truant from school.

7   Transience is prevalent with students.

8   Many students have emotional problems
    which disrupt classroom activities.

9   Many students have emotional problems
    which disrupt the classroom.

10 Students have facilities at home to sustain
    teacher set work.

Figure 7.18.   Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Background Experiences

Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Motivation to Learn

According to results shown in Figure 7.19, many students in the Kimberley schools had a positive sense of their identity (Item 8), were keen to come to school (Item 1), and had a desire to succeed in their school activities (Item 2). Respondents also indicated that students had interests outside of school (Item 3) but added that students spent considerable time watching TV and videos (Item 10), and did not fulfil homework requirements (Item 9). Once at school, students seemed to lose concentration and attentiveness on their activities (Item 5). Many students saw little relevance in their learning to their lives (Item 4) but respondents varied in their beliefs about the relationship between location and students' aspirations (Item 6). Respondents, however, were more convinced that location adversely affected students' job prospects (Item 7).

It must be noted that several Items in the "motivation to learn" part of the survey attracted some relatively high unsure responses; Item 3 (17%); Item 10 (19%); Item 9 (21%); and Item 4 (30%). It appeared that respondents were unsure about what students might do outside of school hours. Perhaps teacher- student conversations did not make connections about the personal lives of students.

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item

1   Most students are keen to come to school.

2   Most students have a desire to succeed in their school activities.

3   Most students have interests outside of school.

4   Most students see learning as relevant to their lives.

5   Students come to class able to concentrate and be attentive.

(figure continues)

Figure 7.19. (continued)

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item		
6	Students' geographic location limits their aspirations to succeed at school.	
7	Students' geographic location limits their job prospects when they leave school.	
8	Most students have a positive sense of their identity.	
9	Most students fulfil homework requirements.	
10	Many students appear to spend too many hours watching TV or videos.	

Figure 7.19. Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Motivation to Learn

Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Language Development

The results shown in Figure 7.20 are a confirmation about several of the issues associated with students from non-speaking English backgrounds. These issues are outlined in chapter three. In the survey results it can be seen that teachers strongly agreed that time had to be allocated to speaking and listening activities (Item 3) and teaching vocabulary (Item 6), pronunciation of words (Item 8), and specific grammar forms (Item 7) in Standard Australian English. In the next phase of the study it was important to ascertain how much time teachers actually devoted to these types of activities. Most students had adequate fluency with the spoken form of language instruction in classrooms (Item 1) and were able to easily extract meaning from pictures (Item 9) but students found greater difficulty with reading and writing during classroom activities (Item 2) and extracting meaning from written texts (Item 10).

There was a range of responses showing that not all teachers had to constantly clarify students' understandings when they conveyed ideas in Standard Australian English (Item 4). However, there were those teachers who had to consider more closely the poor use of

students' Standard Australian English to grasp what students meant. In the exploratory phase, teachers mentioned the rapidity at which students spoke and it was often difficult to differentiate between their Kriol and Standard Australian English. Students appeared to be able to understand their teachers' use of vocabulary (Item 5) but not all students were confident to ask questions to clarify information (Item 11). This Item linked with a previous Item (see Figure 7.16, Item 10) which indicates that teachers taught questioning techniques as a way to enable students to clarify their own thinking, but it is now revealed, not all students were confident about using the techniques to boost their learning. In the third phase of the study it was worthwhile investigating how teachers went about accommodating the different spoken languages students used in their classrooms. How much leeway do teachers allow students to use their different languages or do they insist on total use of Standard Australian English? Also of interest was the way written texts were treated in classrooms and how the deeper levels of meaning associated with written texts were explored especially in relation to the types of questions teachers posed.

Response % Patterns
Disagree Unsure Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Item		
1	Most students have adequate fluency in the spoken form of the language of instruction in the classroom.	
2	Most students use an adequate level of Standard Australian English in their reading and writing during classroom activities.	
3	Time has to be allocated in the classroom to speaking and listening activities.	
4	Constant clarification of students' understanding has to be considered due to their poor use of Standard Australian English.	
5	Most students easily understand my use of vocabulary.	
6	Vocabulary has to be constantly taught to students.	

(*figure continues*)

Figure 7.20. (*continued*)

Item		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree

7   Specific grammar forms have to be taught to students.

8   Students require practice in correct pronunciation of words.

9   Students are able to extract meaning from pictures.

10   Most students are able to extract meaning from written texts.

11   Most students are confident to ask questions for their clarification.
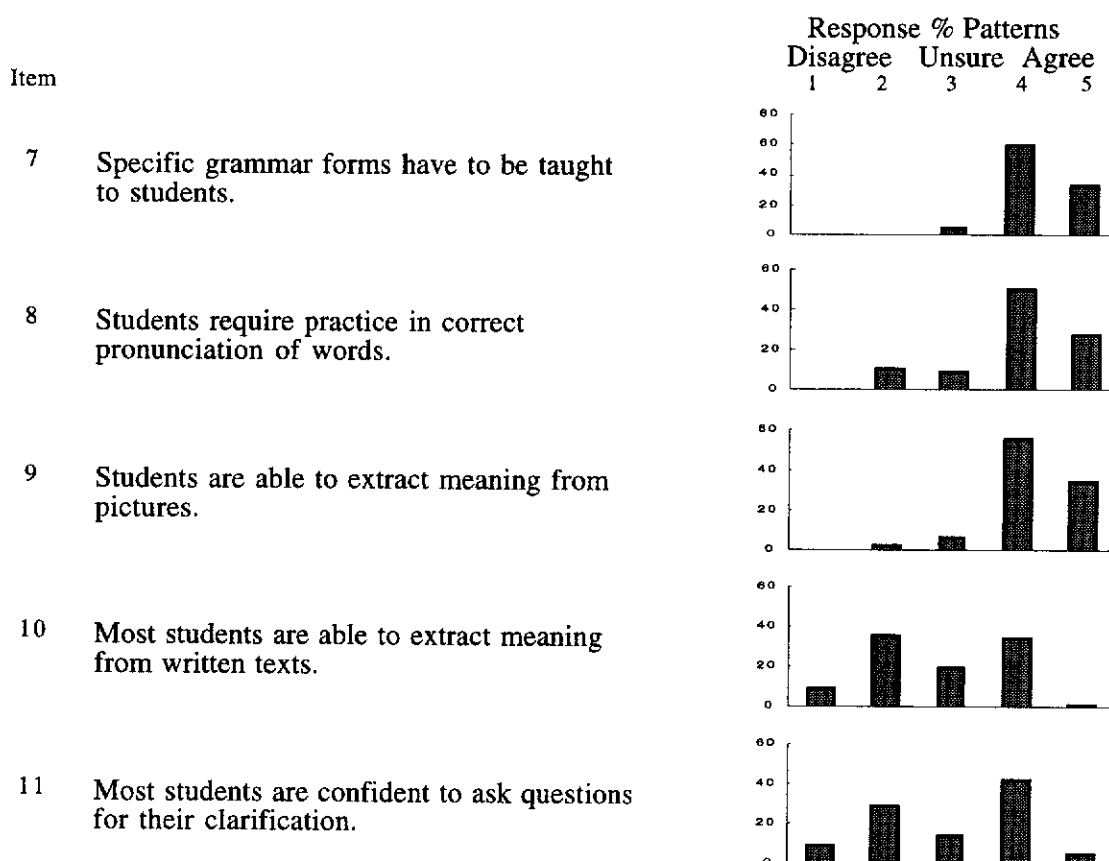
Figure 7.20. Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Language Development

Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Achievement

The results shown in Figure 7.21, while new, do not reveal a change in the picture about students' achievement in the Kimberley school contexts. Most students were capable of succeeding in their school work (Item 5), had great potential to complete secondary schooling (Item 7), were capable of moving on to post secondary education (Item 8), or possessed the capacity to secure a job (Item 9). But few met their expected year level outcomes (Item 12). Moreover, aspirations for many students to complete secondary schooling were low (Item 6) although 36% of the responses indicated that respondents were unsure about whether students aspired to such a goal. Many students possessed artistic and sporting talents (Item 11) and some were academically able (Item 10) but appeared not to pursue their interests. Despite striving to improve their performance in class activities (Item 2), students did not reach benchmark expectations. Many students did not see making mistakes as part of the learning process (Item 4) although others did not have the same fear about mistakes in their work. Also, many students enjoyed competing against their peers in the classroom (Item 3). Respondents were divided about whether student accomplishments received peer approval (Item 1).

It is notable in Item 1 (22%), Item 2 (25%), and Item 3 (20%) that respondents were unsure about whether students feared peer rejection if they improved their accomplishment, strove to improve their performance, or enjoyed competition in classroom activities. These issues required further investigation to ascertain whether it was those students in more traditional communities who did not like to stand out from their peers and suffer the label "coconut" (brown on the outside and white on the inside).

Item		Response % Patterns

		Disagree Unsure Agree
1	Many students fear rejection by their peer group if they improve their accomplishments.	
2	Most students strive to improve their performance in class activities.	
3	Most students enjoy competing against their peers in their classroom activities.	
4	Many students are afraid of making mistakes in their work.	
5	Most students are capable of succeeding in their schoolwork.	
6	Most students aspire to complete compulsory schooling.	
7	Many students have the potential to complete upper secondary education.	
8	Many students are capable of entering post secondary school training or tertiary education.	
9	Most students have the potential to get a job.	

(figure continues)

Figure 7.21. (*continued*)

Item		Response % Patterns
		Disagree Unsure Agree 1 2 3 4 5
10	There are some academically able students in the classroom.	
11	Many students have artistic or sporting talents.	
12	Most students meet their expected year level outcomes.	
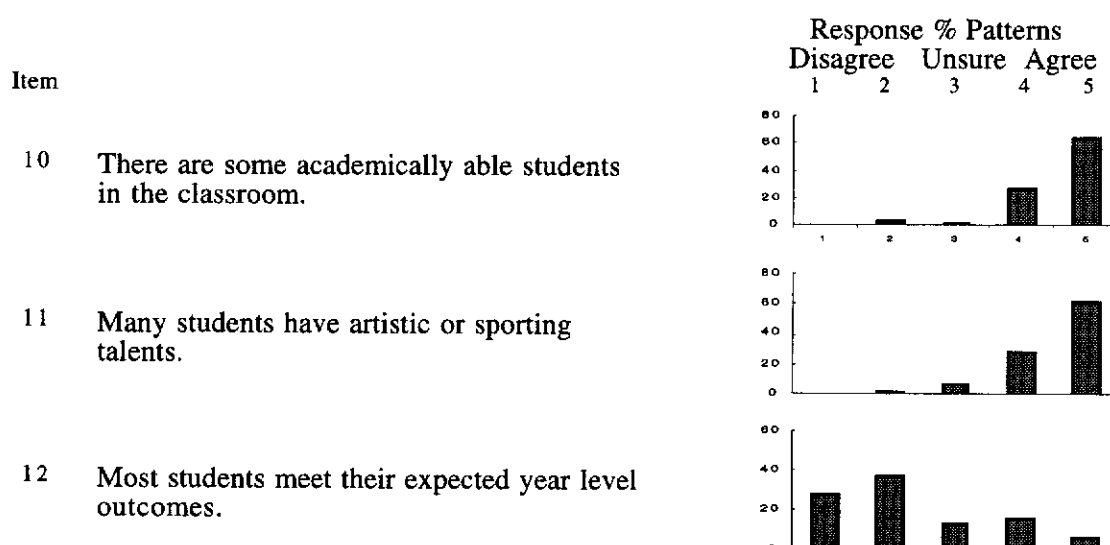
Figure 7.21. Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Achievement

Summary of the Results about the Student Level Category

In summarising the results at the student level (Figures 7.18, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21) the thoughts of teachers about students revealed in the exploratory phase of the study were confirmed. The potentiality of students was highly regarded. However, teachers found working with students' language, health and emotional problems, and their cultural ways of living very challenging in the classroom. These problems seemed to limit students' chances of achieving quality outcomes. These issues were compounded by location circumstance because students see little relevance to schooling. There are no jobs in local communities for most students so learning at school was not significant. If students had fun while they were at school then this was a bonus for them. These types of problems were part of a much larger picture but in the case studies it was important to discover practices that enabled students to gain greater competency with the use of English in their daily lives and how schooling improved their learning.

Synthesising the Information Gained from the Confirmatory Survey

In this phase of the study information was gathered from 14 schools to address the working hypothesis: Detailed information about the home-school, school, classroom, and student levels in more schools will deepen interpretations about their operations. The detailed information gathered by the survey did deepen interpretations about school operations but also revealed differences both within the survey results and between the interpretations made in the survey and the first phase of the study.

Tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 summarise the detailed information gained and are based on a synthesis of the findings in both phase one and two of the study. The synthesis was derived by reviewing and extracting the key ideas from three lists based on:

- the chunked information (see Figure 5.2) generated from the interview transcripts and logs (see Appendix A) in the first phase of the study;
- all observational notes made in my journal and each set of school notes and documents from the first phase of the study; and
- the summaries made about the survey results contained in this chapter.

I manually compiled the synthesis by laying out on large sheets of paper the information in each of the above lists. The sheets were displayed on walls over a period of time to allow me to contemplate what the data revealed. I wanted to ensure that I was matching and mismatching ideas using my own interpretive framework in terms of the working hypothesis in this phase of the study. The three lists were sorted and coded into key ideas about the home–school, school, classroom, and student levels as was the case for sorting the data in both the first and second phases of the study. The matrix formed by the three lists of different data sets at the home–school, school, classroom, and student level categories allowed key ideas across the matrix to be cross-linked. An additional and important aspect in the synthesis process was to differentiate the key ideas into aspects that were common across the data but at the same time were different in other ways. Neuman (1997) described these methods of dealing with qualitative data as a method of agreement and a method of difference.

For each of the common ideas derived from the synthesis of information there were those which uncovered inconsistent and different ideas. The common ideas tended to paint positive pictures about school contexts while the different ideas tended to provide negative images. However, the sets of ideas were not always in opposition. A similar issue was discussed in chapter four when examining the claims of Reynolds (1991, 1995, 1996) who believed that school effectiveness and school ineffectiveness were not mirror opposites. In addition, Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) found that in ineffective schools there was unstable and inappropriate leadership, strained and uncohesive staff relationships, large variance in teaching across classes, an adult oriented school climate, little assistance given to new staff, poor school discipline, and consistently low student achievement. While the terminology may not be the same, these ideas emerged in the synthesis of data in some guise or another. For example, an adult oriented school climate did not emerge as a description of schools but the description—students are not involved in school level decisions—signposted the imbalance of power distribution in schools.

Rather than look at the ideas as common or different, I separated them into two sets showing how some ideas were supported by consensus of opinion by participants in the study and other ideas were divergent in opinion. The identified opinions that had consensus or were divergent were considered to be threads of interest for further investigation based on my sense of the school contexts I examined, the extensive literature that I had reviewed, and my experience of schools thus far in the study. In Table 7.1 the ideas about school contexts in relation to their home-school relationships in the Kimberley schools are displayed. These descriptions were associated with: teacher perceptions of parents; parents' involvement in schools; and school actions taken to involve parents. It was evident that some schools fostered stronger partnerships between home and school than others.

Table 7.1.   *Synthesis of Ideas about the Home-School Level*

Consensus of Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links	Divergence in Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links
Teachers' Perceptions of Parents • Parents value schools and their programs.	• Parents do not value the school and have little awareness of how schools work.
Parents' Involvement in Schools • Parents hold aspirations for their children.	• Parents have had unfavourable school experiences as students and see no future for their own children through the schooling process.
School Actions to Involve Parents • Schools take organised action to strengthen home-school relationships. • Parents attend major social type functions at schools. • Parents will come to the school when directly requested.	• Parents do not respond to school actions to involve them. • Parents do not attend school events that involve decision making or require their assistance or expertise. • Parents lack confidence to communicate with schools on their own initiative.

In Table 7.2 the descriptions related to the school level are presented. These descriptions were grouped according to: resources; decision making; leadership; achievement-oriented policy; and school atmosphere. Again, based on the data gathered, these descriptions contained incompatible elements which provided direction for the case study investigations about school operations in phase three of the study. The survey confirmed that many schools operated in a positive way for parents, teachers, and students. However, school operations varied and the case studies would be valuable to tease out how different schools fostered school planning, innovation and change, a school culture that supported learning, teacher-student relationships, and access to support agencies. In particular, it was of interest to ascertain how leadership impacted

on these aspects of a school's operations especially in terms of how well focussed school planning ultimately became.

Table 7.2.   *Synthesis of Ideas about the School Level*

Consensus of Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links	Divergence in Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links
Resources • Resources in schools are at very good levels and up-to-date. Teachers in schools, in the main, are experienced. • District Office support is viewed favourably. • Communities do not have a range of support resources.	• Lack of funds to address school specific needs such specialised staff (eg. ESL) and maintain innovations. • Professional development of teachers is less than desirable for most teachers in terms of access and type available. • Expertise available in communities is not always used well.
Decision Making • A range of decision making processes exists in most schools that are accessible to all teachers.	• Schools have a culture that constrains decision making due to cliques and power groups. Students are not involved in school level decisions.
Leadership • Leaders support staff which contributes to personal well-being, fosters professionalism and promotes strong staff morale.	• Leaders do not communicate clearly with their staff and do not facilitate collaborative decision making which in turn is detrimental to staff morale and trust in colleagues.
Achievement Oriented Policy • School policies focus on achievement of student outcomes. • Students want to succeed.	• Parents do not share, or are unaware of, school policy goals. • Students are not committed to continued learning.
Orderly and Caring Atmosphere • Schools have a safe, caring and orderly climate with students' behaviour well managed.	• Racial tension exists in schools. • Access to support agencies is limited. • Teacher-student relationships are in conflict.

In Table 7.3 the ideas about some of the ways classroom operated in Kimberley schools are tabulated. The descriptions were about: preparation and planning; learning environment; classroom management; curriculum content; teaching practices; and monitoring students. The analysis of the data showed that these descriptions, once again, revealed some positive and negative features of classroom operations. It became increasingly evident in drawing the analysis together about classroom operations that irrespective of the nature of school level operations, some classrooms were revealed as more positive settings for students that others. I was reminded of the counsel of Huberman (1992) when he proffered that the relationships between different levels of schooling are complex and not conducive to exact measurement.

Table 7.3.   *Synthesis of Ideas about the Classroom Level*

Consensus of Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links	Divergence in Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links
Preparation and Planning • Teachers use much personal time to plan for learning goals, learning styles, coverage of the total curriculum and a range of assessments.	• Teachers are unable to plan for homework to support in-class activities.
Learning Environment • Teachers plan for students to have fun at school, challenge them to think, and to enjoy positive group and classroom relationships.	• Teachers are unable to develop students' understanding about the purpose of school learning. • Teachers are unable to ensure some students show care for their own or others' work. • Teachers are unsure about the self-image of students.
Classroom Management • Teachers expect students to follow rules for classroom behaviour • Teachers prepare well-organised classrooms. • Teachers show respect for students and their cultural backgrounds and express genuine warmth towards them.	• Teachers cannot establish students' independent work habits. • Teachers use much of their classroom time, or student time-out, to keep students on track. • Teachers use too much classroom time for school level processes. • Teachers treat students unequally.
Curriculum Content • Content is interesting, encourages thinking, and usually is integrated around language as a focus.	• The emphasis on primary classrooms is learning the basic skills. The emphasis in secondary schools is learning life skills. • Continuity of learning across the school is difficult to establish.
Teaching Practices • Teaching is student-centred based on students' interests and needs. • Teachers model all skills being taught especially language skills and associated expected behaviour to adopt. • Teachers encourage students to ask questions to support their learning. • Teachers provide periods of consolidation so students learn.	• Teachers do not articulate the goals set for lessons. • Models of successful school-learners are difficult to find outside of the classrooms. • Teachers are doing most of the talking in classrooms. • Teachers do not see students applying what they have learnt to out-of-classroom situations.
Monitoring Students • Assessments mostly are informal, although records are kept and written student reports are issued. • Students are encouraged to self-evaluate.	• Parents are not met on a regular basis (and students do not engage in regular teacher-student briefings) to monitor progress. • Peer evaluation is not prominent in classrooms.

The synthesis of ideas confirmed that many classrooms operated in a positive way for students but there were variations in the ways classrooms worked. Once again, the variations provided valuable starting points for exploration in the case study work.

In Table 7.4 the ideas related to students are displayed. These descriptions were associated with: students' background, motivation to learn, students' language; and students' achievement. The analysed data allowed for these descriptions to be stated in alternative ways. It was confirmed that many students do not succeed at school despite their talents and potential.

Table 7.4.   *Synthesis of Ideas about the Student Level*

Consensus of Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links	Divergence in Opinion: Descriptions of Home-School Links
Students' Background • Students can participate in all school activities irrespective of home finances.	• Students have health and emotional problems that disrupt classroom activities and classrooms. • Students have a high rate of transience. • Students do not have conceptual experiences expected for learning at school.
Students' Motivation to Learn • Students want to come to school. • Students are keen to succeed.	• Students have few interests outside of school. • Students see no relevance for their learning. • Students do not have facilities for homework.
Students' Language • Students are able to communicate with spoken English. • Students spend much of their class time on learning Standard Australian English. • Students have language codes and behaviours that they can use at school.	• Students have difficulties with written English.
Students' Achievement • Students have great potential. • Students do not meet expected year level outcomes. • Students have the potential to gain employment. • Isolation affects students' job prospects.	• Students do not aspire to complete secondary school.

The posed research question for the study remained relevant. The general research question was to identify whether there were effective ways schools worked to improve student outcomes. The specific research questions were:

How does the sociocultural context of schools influence the ways they work?

How are school resources used to support students' learning?

How do within-school environments influence the ways schools work?

How is the curriculum shaped and what are best classroom practices?

How can student achievement best be measured?

The research focus was: In what ways does the school development planning strategy provide a driving force for change in schools?

In this second phase of the study, information addressing the specific research questions and aspects of school planning was expanded. The casting of a net to gather information about school contexts during the first and second phases of the study provided evidence about the influence of the sociocultural context of schools, the level and use of resources in schools, the nature of within-school environments, the type of curriculum that was planned, and how students' achievement was measured. The first phase was about glancing over the field to gain impressions about schools. The second phase was about firming up the impressions gained in one way or another. In the third phase of the study the research questions needed to be addressed closely to ensure that the "how" part of these questions was examined. This phase was about trying to uncover how schools particularly worked. The working hypothesis for the third phase of the study was stated as: There are effective practices in schools and classrooms that improve students' learning outcomes. The purpose of the third phase of the study was to use five case study schools to examine how these schools and classrooms went about their work. One of the case study schools is described in the next chapter using a metaphor of harmony and for the purpose of convenience is termed "Harmony School". In chapter nine this case study school, together with the other four cases, are examined in a backing mapping process associated with student assessment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PHASE THREE: LOOKING IN SCHOOLS

Unfolding the Story: Finding Some Ideals

This phase of the study was guided by a working hypothesis: There are effective practices in schools and classrooms that improve students' learning outcomes. The success of schools was explored in greater depth in this part of the study. Following the initial letter sent to schools asking people to express their interest in participating in the study, 40 (who represented six schools) of the 106 teachers involved in the study indicated they would be willing to respond to both the questionnaire and then participate in case studies. Once the analysis of the questionnaire was completed, five schools, which provided 34 school personnel as case study participants, were chosen to garner more specific and detailed information about schools and their work. Given the number of the schools who expressed interest in being involved in the case study work, the criteria for selection of these schools were similar to the sample in the first phase: size of school and location of school. Importantly, the schools selected showed variation in some way in their responses to categories in the questionnaire when judged against the mean for the 14 schools (see Appendix F for an example of the variation in responses to the resources categories). Visits to the case study schools were approximately one year apart in 1996 and 1997 with the length of time spent in each school varying from three days in the very small schools and up to 10 days in the larger schools. Each case study was based on what I heard, what I saw, and what I collected.

Observational notes were recorded in my journal during each visit on the two occasions to each school. A particular emphasis was placed on observing classrooms. Structured teacher and classroom observations schedules (see Appendix I for an example) and classroom teacher stories (see Appendix J for an example) were used to explore teachers' practices and classroom operations. Students' samples of work also were collected from each school but these are the focus for chapter nine. Interviews were conducted with Aboriginal people, principals, teachers, students, agency support people such as community nurses, school psychologists associated with each school, and key informants in the Kimberley District Office. In the second visit, only 24 of the teacher participants remained in the case study schools due to staff changeovers. In one of the smaller schools this represented a total change of staff; in two other small schools there was a 50% staff turnover; and in the two larger schools there was approximately a 30% change in staff. However, with those teachers who remained in their schools, valuable

follow-up interviews provided school and teacher stories, accounts of what had changed during the year, and accounts of what had remained unchanged in schools and classrooms.

Representing the case studies in this chapter was an ethical challenge. What should be selected for writing to compose the case study stories? The study was not about asking schools to account for the ways they worked but was about finding the successful practices that worked for their students. On this issue I faced a dilemma with reporting the case studies. The survey in phase two of the study had shown variation in several aspects of the home-school connections, school and classroom operations, and perceptions of students but, after much thought, I decided to represent only one case study fully in this chapter. The nub of the working hypothesis for this phase of the study was important. Therefore, a narrative approach has been taken to characterise one of the schools as an ideal type using a metaphor of harmony for descriptive purposes.

I know that the school story, especially the parts about the community and how it works, is ultimately my version of the reality. In portraying the community from my non-Aboriginal perspective I have endeavoured not to be offensive to the Aboriginal people living in the community, nor show them any disrespect, indeed to any person, in the case study schools. I have, however, tried to respect the confidentiality of all people involved in the cases and by representing just one of them in this thesis I avoid unwittingly jeopardising the faith people have placed in me during the study. In the other four cases studies there were school situations which could not be written down because it would identify school locations. Much was known through the bush telegraph about most schools in the Kimberley. Some schools had leadership problems, some had less than favourable relationships with their communities, and some teachers were struggling to manage their students in a respectful way. Not only could I see these problems up-front, but also participants in the cases were relieved to ventilate their feelings about these problems to an independent person. Such issues highlighted the survey variations and provided further evidence about the stresses and strains some schools and teachers were under.

In the case study represented in this chapter there is a celebration of a school working at being successful. The feeling of harmony in this community and school transcended into everyone's daily lives. In the next chapter, chapter nine, all the case study schools are placed in a context which links student achievement to conditions in each of the schools. The backmapping bears out the variations, which were summarised in chapter seven, in the ways different schools worked.

Working in Harmony School

The Sociocultural Context

This story is about one of the most isolated schools in Australia. It takes a very long day's drive to reach the community by heading down a rough road with a cloud of dust trailing behind a 4X4-wheel drive vehicle laden with enough supplies and equipment for a 10-day visit. People who do not need to re-fuel their vehicles do not stop at the community shop and so they do not take notice of the tiny community tucked away behind scrub a short distance from the road. It is immediately obvious that this community is tranquil, peaceful, neatly greened, and tidy but it doesn't take a visitor very long to find out where the school is located. "It's down over there" were my first directions to find the school.

The school is in shady grounds and gardens for outdoor play and activities with beautiful hanging baskets along its verandah. When I first visited the school the building had just been freshly painted and I could not help but be impressed with the orderliness of the school site. I immediately observed that the school was small. There were only three classrooms, an amenities block, two teacher houses, and a one-person donga (small house) tucked away in a corner of the community. During the day the school hummed with the vibrancy and liveliness of staff and children. I found that the three teachers and teaching principal here all had an infinite capacity to be self-buoyant and positively face every new day and any challenges that came along. The self-talk amongst the staff was very positive and reinforced everyone's efforts which included those of the AEW and the few women from the community who led the LOTE (Languages Other Than English) program. School life here was unpredictable. The only thing teachers counted on was that every day brought uncertainty. What will happen today to disrupt the school routine? Who will be here? These were the usual daily ponderings.

Not all was perfect in this school but I could sense a real purpose about what needed to be done. The school pursued its own work because the Aboriginal community was harmonious and busy working to maintain its economic viability. There was quiet but supportive community recognition of the efforts made by teachers for its children. Recently, so pleased was the community with its teachers, that the Principal and one of the teachers were nominated for Aboriginal Education Awards of Excellence. As non-Aboriginal educators they deservedly won their awards. One of the reasons the Principal was successful is because he had a straightforward approach to his work. "Find out what the community expects and get on with it". He believed that:

While there are some things that are different in this community than others, there are more things the same. Schools have different contexts and you must move in and try and find out what everyone wants. This Aboriginal community has to work out its own priorities and what they want from us at the school so we can facilitate that. When we first came we were told you do what you know best in the school and we'll do what we know in the community. Don't tell us what to do. We feel better trusting you to do the right thing. So you find out want they think is needed for their children.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with the Principal)

The Community: Building for the Future

This community appeared less traditional than others. There was no apparent organised effort to pursue tradition in the community, diets were not traditional, and the children did not venture out bush very often to learn traditional ways. There were some Law ceremonies but these traditional times did not interfere with school time. The staff, however, also thought that there was a strong link for people to their mythology and dreaming stories. There were powerful family obligations in the community with robust and protective solidarity between family members. It was obvious that the infrastructure for communal living, such as buildings and roads, were established only a few years back. The homes, which the Aboriginal people had designed, seemed to have a living system that non-Aboriginal people could recognise. Rooms were purpose specific with all the trappings and appliances needed for life in a tropical climate. I noticed that the mundane activities of house cleaning and washing were part of the women's work and everyone pitched in to look after the elderly.

There were many other signs that said the community expended effort to address environmental health issues associated with communal living. Rubbish was collected regularly from bins by the truck, the community was neat, tidy, and litter free, there were no car wrecks left where they last stopped, and the dogs were regularly checked under a veterinary program. This community was self-sufficient with community resources such as homes, aged-care quarters, power and water plants, a community office, a nursing post attended regularly by a community nurse, a telephone box, a shop, the school, and the teachers' houses. Quick access to services such as repairs and emergencies could be slow but everyone seemed to cope as they do in the "bush". Everything worked here. Vehicles ran well, the water plant worked, the power generator worked and everyone looked forward to the plane arriving each week with the mail and any special provisions ordered in by the community and the school.

There were no Community Employment Development Program (CDEP) projects in the community because its enterprise was economically viable. The cattle station continued to function and most of the men did some form of work associated with it. Life was regulated by what needed to be done each season on the station which was capped off by the excitement of mustering time. The older boys would forsake school to go mustering. Tourism was not a real boon to the community because everyone was busy with their own work but the country offered many opportunities to attract tourists. The community was busy yet orderly, calm, peaceful, harmonious, and safe with no violence, reckless driving, or abusive behaviour. The teachers' children played anywhere with the other children and they visited each other's homes to play. Everyone was welcome in homes because everyone trusted each other. One teacher put the feeling like this.

> This is a safe community with no real fences like the razor wire fence around schools in some desert communities. Here, the fences around the school and the one circling the homes are to keep the free-roaming station bulls and the cattle out of the gardens!
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

The community's politics were difficult to understand from my outside view. My Aboriginal associates warned me: "Don't ever think you will understand Aboriginal politics. Even Aboriginal people don't always understand what the agenda is in another group". (Personal conversation with an Aboriginal friend, 13.3.97)

Community and School Accord

The community Adviser [appointed under the Commonwealth government] had been in the community a long time and held a lot of power but the leading Aboriginal elder was a legend in the Kimberley. He provided invincible direction for his people. He controlled the real power and everyone deferred to his authority. He made sure that the children came to school, everyone attended Council meetings, and eased out any tension between families. The principal explained that the school's meetings with the community followed the community norm.

> Every meeting in the school is a community meeting not a committee meeting. This community doesn't work that way. A meeting doesn't have outcomes. You discuss the issues. Then you have a follow-up meeting to make some decisions. Everyone needs time to talk in between. The meetings have to involve food and cups of tea and take plenty of time. The decision making can't be rushed. This is a real problem for me as a

Principal. DEET [The Department of Education, Employment, and
Training is a Commonwealth Department that provides specialised funding
to schools] expects committees for accountability. The District Office
expects to see committees operating so I can be seen to be managing
directions. When we came here we were told emphatically [by the
community leader] that all meetings had to be full community meetings.
Community involvement is not just one or two people, it is everyone and
they are very positive about how they work with the school.

(Taped interview conducted on 4.6.97 with the Principal)

Overall, the school fostered a positive relationship with the community. A mistake
apologised for was usually accepted by the Aboriginal people and the Principal was seen
to be their advocate as well as one for the school. The Principal maintained that:

If there was a real complaint it would get back to us - we haven't really had
any trouble. It's the same with kids coming to school - keep the white people
happy. This is how they do it. There were things in the past, like the kids
played too much basketball, but no-one said anything at the time, it just
came quietly into a conversation after I had been here for a while. On open
days there is a group of parents who will go through all their kids' work very
closely. There is never rage or anger expressed about the school. If a parent
had a grievance about their own child they probably would come and see me
because they trust me. Parents don't come into the classroom to help but
when we actually invite them to come to the school for assemblies, open
days, and the LOTE program they all respond. It would be nice to have them
involved in the classrooms more but most of them are too busy and some are
too old.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.6.96 with the Principal)

The community co-existed peacefully alongside the school and did not interfere with the
school's operations. Everyone knew the scheme of things, how the school worked, how
the community worked, and how the school and community worked together.

The Parents: Supportive of the School's Work

Parental Involvement in the School

Parents did not make complaints about what was happening in the school or classrooms
but the school staff were not always sure about how the community felt about them or

how they worked. They just took heart that parents supported what they were trying to do in the school. There were prominent community people who would come into the school to visit and chat at any time as I learned with a spontaneous visit from one of the community elders who came "to yarn" with me. He wanted to find out what I was doing. He had asked the Principal for days when I was arriving because he wanted to talk to me and tell me about the school and how he was involved in the music program.

The community had a transient population of young adults which worked against maintaining cohesion in homes and the school and creating a youthful vibrancy in the community. A dual system existed on some issues. For example, the community was dry [alcohol is banned] but many young people travelled the very long distance into town to find excitement. Many did not return and, as a consequence, many of the children were without their parents. They lived with a granny or an aunty; but they were very much cared about and loved. There was a missing generation in the community because many parents were in town drinking or they had died from alcohol related causes. From about 15 to 30 years of age many people were living dangerously in the town—drinking, driving recklessly, fighting, and wrecking their bodies. Some managed to survive, change, and return permanently to the community but many had gone forever. The lost generation affected the stability of the children but they seemed to accept it as a part of life. The duality of community life caught some people by surprise.

> When I came here I thought the people in the community had made the choice to get away from town but this was not the reality. This is their country, they like it, but there's more fun in town. They see their relatives, drink, try different food and clothes, watch the fights and brawls, and, of course, the kids skip school.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Some older people in the community have never been to school but everyone seemed to value the school and knew what was happening. The children gossiped at school about life in the community so in this small community if you heard then you knew. Caregivers told the children to go to school and showed that they understood their responsibility to get their children to school every day, well fed, clothed, clean, and to a lesser extent, well rested. Beyond that, there seemed to be "a line in the sand" drawn about family and school roles. Children were not pushed overtly to achieve at school. This was perceived as the task of the school but I was enthralled when I approached a group of parents to show them the samples of their children's work that I had collected during the study. Parents were intently interested in looking at the work samples and were able to detect quickly and astutely the changes in their children's progress from one

year to the next. It was an easily initiated conversation with parents about common interests; the children. The Principal believed that parents supported their children in his school and I could not but agree.

> Parents are very proud of the fact that they are supporting the kids. Some of the older non-readers and writers get other family members to help with homework. With our homework policy we have been amazed how little material has been lost. Parents have to ensure homework bags are unpacked, homework is done, bags are packed to take back to school, and make sure the kids take it to school. Mums are finding that they have a role to play at home in their kids' education. We need to give parents ideas about what they can do. They need to learn the role. Facilitating discussion about how they can support children at school is what we are trying to do but we can't do it all the time. Other agencies need to be involved in helping our parents take on parent roles that support education.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 4.6.97 with the Principal)

There was one family who actively supported their children's school learning. They held aspirations for their children and were proud of their children's achievements. School certificates were displayed at home and the children were encouraged to finish school and then go to Perth to do other studies. It was symbolic for this family to be educated and to stand proud within their community. The tall poppy syndrome could flourish in the community because there was no shame attached to high achievement. Children in this community were encouraged to do better, stand out, and take risks. As one young man from this family said when he came to visit me at the school:

> I need to learn more English. Where do I get help? When I was at school I was just having fun. I was a child. Soon I will be the custodian for this country. I need to know how to understand the "gudia" [Whitefella].
>
> (Paraphrased from the Aboriginal English of a young Aboriginal man recorded in my School Notes, 3.06.97)

From the teachers' perspectives, the parents did not put barriers, in an active sense, in front of the school getting on with the job of teaching. There was some passive resistance, or perhaps it was better to say avoidance, of the school and what was planned. Sometimes there was an event planned between the school and the community but then it was cancelled because another more important event, from the community's perspective, came up such as a stock camp.

School is something that happens between other things in this community. What is done with family is more important than school. If a funeral needs to be attended then off they go ... school will be here when they get back. In our way, other things, like holidays with granny, happen between school. Our families organise their life around work and school. For the Aboriginal kids here, school happens during the gaps in their lives. School fits into life. At least the kids have the school here to do something during the day for five hours; that is when they are here in the community.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.6.96 with the Principal)

The challenge for teachers at this school was to accept that the school was only part of children's lives but at the same time extend community thinking about the extent they wanted the school to be a catalyst for building children's futures in and outside of the community.

Ways to Assist Parents Work with the School

People in the school believed that they did not take a paternalistic approach in their work with their parents. But they did find creative ways to build bridges between different cultural ways. Two ideas, installing heaters and sounding a siren, which the school developed were interesting. First, these moves overcame punctuality problems for the teachers. Second, while the intrusiveness and dominance of the actions into community life could be debated, parents endorsed the school's approaches. The mornings are very cold, often freezing, for much of the year in this country. Campfires are still made outside homes in yards and many people, especially the older ones, spend much of their day around the fire. Often the women gather and play cards (and the children are very deft at playing the games too). They come out near the fire in the sun in the morning but move gradually into the shade as the day progressively heats up.

The hearth tradition is one that remains in the community. It is often hard for the children to leave the cosiness of the warmth, the tea and toast, and the chatter in the morning to come to school. To overcome late arrivals at the school, heaters were purchased for each classroom. The move was a great success. The late arrival for the commencement of the school day now was rare at this school! The school siren, however, still screeched out at 7.00am to say "it's time to get ready for school" and at 8.00am to say "start coming to school now". It had to be a blaring siren so the signals could be heard across the entire community. Homes did not have clocks because time schedules, according to our outside view, were not important in these people's lives. They had different priorities.

The School: Accord and Alliance within a Democracy

Resources: Working for Effectiveness and Improvement

There were four non-Aboriginal teachers, one AEW, one part-time gardener, and a cleaner at the school. There were resource situations in the school that were being overhauled and expanded. It appeared that in the past, there had been a "cargo cult" approach to purchasing equipment such as buying guitars for all the children and amassing expensive physical education equipment. The Principal recalled that:

> When we came, there were plenty of guitars and sporting gear, but no real hands-on stuff for the classroom. Now, the guitars just sit in the garden shed most of the time. ....
>
> We got rid of the junk and got in quality materials. Now we have better management strategies for maintaining our resources like coping with breakdowns of equipment. We can't have equipment being away for three months being repaired. We are getting a dust-proof storage shed soon and this will make our use of space much better.
>
> (Taped interviews conducted on 17.6.96 and 4. 6 97 with the Principal)

There was not an over-abundance of physical room in the school. Storage was a problem; the library operated out of the only small storeroom and the staffroom had been turned into the storeroom, the canteen, the teachers' workroom, a teaching space, and a bedroom for visitors (as was the case when I visited the school with my supervisor). At this school all teachers had access to the chequebook so to speak. There were no constraints placed on teachers when trying to build up their teaching resources. Because the school was small, everyone knew how much money was available to spend and everyone was able to negotiate the budget for their teaching needs.

The staff formula was not flexible enough in this school to make smaller classes because the enrolment fluctuated (and accommodation for extra teachers would be a problem). Any policy changes in the school had to be implemented without extra human resources and this was a problem for any innovative ideas that depended on extra teachers, especially teachers with specific expertise. However, the student-teacher ratios were good and the students benefited from a good mix of teacher experience. Still, the Principal was adamant that they required a more flexible approach to staffing in the school to better meet the students' needs.

If we are going to go out of the school gate more to work with the
community then we need to be resourced better. It's not about being paid
more; it's about more personnel to give us the time to do normal
preparation. We need flexibility in the staffing formula to give us time and
people. And if we could select our own staff to fit into the school's culture
extra time would not have to be used on induction of teachers about working
with Aboriginal communities.

(Taped interview conducted on 4.6.97 with the Principal)

Unity of Purpose: Commitment, Communication, and Connection

When I was at this school I constantly thought "this schools runs like a good school".
The school worked very successfully because all the staff had signed Workplace
Agreements and all wanted to be there. Anyone who did not want to be at the school
would not survive. There was a shared vision amongst staff with a unity of purpose and
a clear view about how they needed to work. The Principal saw his staff's commitment
this way.

We cannot say the community isn't good enough. In this school it is not our
role to question how the community is, only to try and understand why it is.
We are here to deal with the school and the classroom situations and get on
with the teaching. The staff want to be here. We have chosen to be here; we
like the kids; we like the lifestyle. We have a positive view of the kids and the
environment and just want to help the kids learn at school.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.6.96 with the Principal)

The staff communication was purposeful and everyone knew what is going on. There
was good social chemistry between the small staff despite them living and working
together closely. There were regular staff meetings to talk about how the school was
operating. The Principal insisted that all things, even the smallest issues, were brought
out into the open to avoid bigger problems emerging. The approach to decision making
was based on democracy, teamwork, collegiality, collaboration, and support of one
another's effort. It was a "family model" of working together, a family model that
mirrored the community norms in many ways. The power within the school was well
balanced and the Principal had an honest approach to its distribution.

There are some "goodies" provided to Remote Schools such as the school
4X4-wheel drive vehicle. I share with the staff. In some schools it is only the
principal who takes the "goodies". Access to privileges should be shared.

These small points can be become huge in this type of school. It's like
squabbling in families.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.6.96 with the Principal)

The Principal was very easy going, and in his own words, "probably too laid back". He worked very hard alongside his staff and did not make decisions on his own, although sometimes he made executive decisions when necessary in a firm and directed way. When these types of decisions were made the Principal let his staff know immediately about the decisions. His personal integrity was beyond reproach. He believed in being honest with his staff and community which, in turn, engendered great trust and faith in him. He had been in the community three years and planned to stay longer. He supported his staff and his students and was easy to work for. One teacher described him this way.

I can't imagine a remote school with a principal who doesn't work regularly
with the kids and the teachers. How can he really know what is going on if
he doesn't go into the classrooms? He needs to understand what we are
facing each day.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Leadership: Showing the Way to Learning

The Principal was a leading professional. He devolved responsibility to his staff and fostered a participative and democratic approach with them so that everyone owned the decisions and plans that were made. Another teacher positively described the school and how it worked.

We talk a lot. We have plenty of staff meetings. We're all involved in the
Committees at the school and everyone understands what is going on. This is
important for staff morale. Staff are dedicated and no one is a "slacker". We
all work long hours; perhaps too many. Everyone's voice and vote is equal
here with the power distributed evenly. Our teaching Principal gets involved
in the real classroom issues. What is set as policy tends to be put into action
even though sometimes goals have to change because what we planned
doesn't work.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

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The Principal recognised his style of leadership but expressed frustrations about the style. He believed there were tenuous links between this style, a style that everyone endorsed, and students' achievement. He commented that:

> This democratic leadership may not have an impact on student outcomes but is essential to the harmony of the school's culture and teachers' workplace. It's not about squeezing every drop out of the teachers even though they are young and fit. The outcomes of my democratic style are for teachers; there is more enjoyment at work, it's more professional, more power is shared.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 4.6.97 with the Principal)

The Principal encouraged a reflective and action model towards managing staff performance. However, some teachers expressed discomfort about the performance management of staff in small remote schools. One teacher, with five years teaching experience, expressed her reservations.

> How can the principal be a good performance manager in remote schools? The principal has so much control over teachers' lives even to the extent where housing and health issues are under his management. The District superintendent often mixes up performance management of teachers with performance management of the principal. The staff are managed to prove that the principal can manage rather than managing teachers for improvement in their skills. I don't object to performance management but the process needs to be different in different schools. I'm under scrutiny all the time. In a larger school, the management is through a formal visit into the classroom. The performance is managed and based only on the performance criteria.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

There was no formalised mentoring process in the school. There was not that much time left in the day for a small group of teachers to be co-teaching and reflecting on their classroom practices. Nevertheless, I observed that the teachers were always talking about each day, what happened, and exchanging thoughts about events. Any formal approach to mentoring would be contrived in this school. One teacher, however, saw that they needed some form of professional interactions in their work.

> There needs to be more interactions with other teachers in the same situation as ours. Any mentors in these schools have to know these schools well

because there are no solutions that are universal. No-one really knows what works. Teachers need plenty of opportunity and freedom to experiment because it is the way the teacher pieces together her knowledge and skills in this school that is important. Performance management can be helpful especially when the Principal describes to me how I go about my work. Visiting other teachers for two hours in a town school is a waste of time. This school is different from town schools. In this school you discover a lot about yourself and your teaching. The rewards are so small and sometimes you go backwards in the classroom. Most of the time we don't need people telling us how to do it better or the 'right way'.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

School Planning and Managing Change: Evolving and Developing Policies

The Principal believed that he had become more efficient at inducting new staff. The school kept its regular beat with new staff coming in especially if they were experienced in the school type. But teachers had the opportunity to attend network meetings for different groups each term; secondary, pre-primary-junior; principals; but not necessarily with middle primary teachers, an unfortunate gap. Some secondary professional development was in conjunction with teachers taking groups of students to different schools so both students and teachers interacted. The inter-school Sports Day was an exciting calender event for the whole community. Everyone packed up the community truck and vehicles and off they headed. It was cost effective for teachers to be involved in some type of professional development at the same time.

Everyone, parents and staff, although not directly the children, were involved in the School Development Plan to set priorities. The process revealed what parents wanted their children to learn. Perhaps some ideas appeared naïve such as "We want kids to speak good English" because they did not fully understand what that meant for the schooling process. However, there was no question about what they expected from the school. The community had clear goals for its school and it was expected that the school would fulfil these goals. Whether these goals could be transformed into building futures for students was another matter. The school used every opportunity to relate school situations to the School Plan. For example, children were "Master of Ceremonies" at assemblies. On such occasions explicit links to the language program were made. The Principal or the teachers highlighted the community's involvement in the School Plan, and how the school was acting upon it. At this school the planning and set priorities tended to go into action, although there were qualifications expressed by the staff about how the bigger plan moved into the classroom.

School development planning is shared but it's more to please the powers that be. It takes so much time and energy and we end up making it is unrealistic. When we plan as a group, it doesn't take long before we become "airy fairy" and set up a wish list instead of meeting the needs of the children. We really need to know why we want to do something. Time would be better spent with the more experienced staff mentoring other teachers and discussing issues.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

There were few school-based policies in the school. The school met Central and District policies but found District policies were more relevant and more easily put into action such as FELIKS [Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools]. All Central and District policies and initiatives were considered and then the staff decided how and when they would deal with the policy. The Principal believed that had a pragmatic approach to policy development in the school.

We don't need a lot of policies in the school. Because the school is small we address needs as they arise. We discuss situations and decide what to do about issues such as managing behaviour. There are policies on school planning and priorities, finances and resources, and homework as driving forces. The policies are more lived as a family process rather than formally documented and are developed upwards from the classroom operations. The policies tend to be evolving and developing. Other policy can develop downwards, such the support teacher role, led by me if there is a need.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.4.96 with the Principal)

The most tangible indicator of improvement in the school, by everyone's account, was the implementation of the homework policy. The homework policy worked very well and everyone, "kinders" to secondary students, took home some form of schoolwork four nights of the week. According to one teacher, at least one of the outcomes of the homework policy was that the children were developing a great love of books.

My kids do a good level of homework. I'm very happy with their efforts and the way the parents support the policy. I set high expectations and I'm pleased with the kids' progress to meet my expectations. It means I start in the classroom about 7.30 am so as the kids arrive I can mark their homework straight away. I do this every day. The kids love this attention and really try hard to complete their work.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

School Climate: Order, Trust, and Ownership

There was an orderly atmosphere in the school and the physically attractive environs around the school encouraged the children to come to school, even after school hours to play in the grounds. I easily observed the children's love of the school and one teacher captured my thoughts about the children's feelings towards their school.

> This school is good school because the kids feel safe and happy. They vote with their feet and they stay away if they're not happy. However, there are some cultural obligations for staying aware. Since we have the heaters on in the mornings, the kids are here early and stay after school. Sometimes we need to 'evict' them after school because we need a break from them and need to get on with our own chores at school and home. We are never really separated from children's lives in this school.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 17.6 96 with the Principal)

One consistency across the school was that the staff were constantly explicit about liking the children and the work they did. This went beyond being technically expert in the classroom, it was about the teachers connecting with the children and touching their lives each day. Teachers did not insulate their feelings from the children and they used a personally bonding relationship with them as a basis to develop their positive school and classroom climate.

The Classrooms: Accord and Consistency in the Classrooms

Preparation and Planning for Teaching

The staff dedicated much of their personal time to planning and preparing their programs of work. Each teacher in the school worked a normal day but on top of that they had homework to prepare and mark. Teachers estimated they spent at least six hours per week extra to maintain their homework policy. Teachers seemed to work longer hours to get their other classroom preparation organised. There were so many variables that were challenging for teachers, even at the planning stage. Planning ahead to involve community people, such as a community theme in Social Studies, was unpredictable. Often the people were not around when needed. So often the day's lessons would be spontaneous when people became available to come into the classrooms or to take everyone on a visit out into the bush.

Each teacher had a system to plan required resources ahead so that they could be purchased or borrowed from the District Resource Centres or other schools. Forward planning was a priority on these matters. Teachers usually planned their units of work around a theme and planned them over short periods of around two weeks because the classroom situations changed so quickly. Students moved and new ones arrived and often a program was planned without knowing who would be at school. Because the class numbers were small, around 12 students, the units of work were highly personalised for each child. The planning in the classrooms was concerned with very short-term goals with the longer-term goals set in the School Development Plan.

> My emphasis on planning is around short-term goals based on the differing levels and needs of the kids. The AEW works with me on the planning. Our big problem is that the kids are not always here and this impacts significantly on planning. We waste a lot of learning time and making resources such as individual workbooks is a contentious process. The kids keep coming and going. We put a lot of emotion and feeling into our work in our classrooms.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Another teacher also reiterated her thoughts about her short term planning and individualised approach to pedagogy.

> You've got to talk to them individually to understand each child's learning and the level that they at. But there must be intellectual challenge for each child. Each lesson I set goals about "We are going to learn ..." but I keep saying "What we are doing is ..." "What we have done is...." . I talk about the process of learning. "Think about what you're doing". They've got to know that they can learn something. I keep telling them: You're learning that now.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Organisation of Curriculum Content: Integration for Learning

Teachers saw a need to reform the curriculum for their children. Some saw the reform in terms of the content because they believed that the parents did not see the curriculum much beyond reading, writing, and knowing about money.

> We need to make some really hard decisions about what we can do and what we can't. We are trying to do too much. A curriculum framework for these kids should be about what content they need and changing the timeline for

their learning. We must teach them how to learn and access white thinking. We shouldn't expect the children to be formally reading before Year 3 and we need to take more of our primary teaching approaches into the secondary classroom. The curriculum needs to focus on how to be successful and a contributor to this community. The kids need to become confident and skilled to do things for themselves and not rely on a white person to do it for them.

(Taped interview conducted on 17.4.96 with the Principal)

Others saw the curriculum as a framework so that flexibility could be the impetus for planning classroom programs.

A curriculum framework with end-points would be useful for our kids. Perhaps the new Curriculum Framework and the Department's Student Outcome Statements might meet this need. We need to plot their continuity of learning especially when they're so transient. Integration or thematic approaches help make up some of the time issue but integration of the whole curriculum is just too difficult. The organisation of the integration is crucial but fitting the curriculum into the day and week is extremely difficult.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

And the Principal knew the difficulties in teaching the mainstream curriculum to their students.

Integration in the curriculum is a way to rationalise the content but the new Curriculum Framework is overwhelming. There are so many outcomes across all the learning areas that need to be assessed. Of course there are ways to integrate skills, knowledge, and content across the curriculum but it has to be thoughtful and the approach is often beyond the time teachers have. This approach to curriculum planning asks us for a lot of thinking and talking. Each teacher has to think through the integration in their own way so that they know what they are trying to teach. There's so much in the curriculum. We need to find the core curriculum to get to the essentials that these students need to learn.

(Taped interview conducted on 4.6.97 with Principal)

The philosophy of "learning the basics" was fostered for both the primary and the secondary students but one secondary teacher said:

These kids don't get a reduced curriculum as such. We look at science from an environmental perspective like tourism and its impacts and look at different cultures and religions. They are very interested in this type of work. Vegetables and fruit are hard to get hold of in the community because of transport and costs so the school addresses the nutrition issues through the school program. We get the kids to cost, order, and organise the fresh food in via the plane for the cooking program and the canteen [which is really the fridge and the freezer in the staffroom!]. We have started a horticultural program to grow fruit and vegetables. Our cooking program is very helpful in the classrooms and we teach many concepts this way. Some concepts aren't strong with these children, like distance. They will ask questions like "Did I see Michael Jordan during the holidays?" What is really reduced for these students is the time they spend at school and the time they do not use the English language when they are not at school.

(Taped interview conducted on 5.6.97 with a Teacher)

There was a concurrent "learn the basics" and "learn for living" approach to the curriculum in the school. There was a strong belief in the school that a curriculum framework needed to be developmental across the year levels with a whole emphasis on immersing students in oral language. In each of the classrooms every lesson was treated as a language lesson. The teachers believed that there were no universal classroom learning goals or teaching strategies with the children but that each teacher had to work with every child on a one-to-one basis

Teaching Practices in Classrooms: The Centrality of Language

The school integrated the curriculum around the School Plan priority of teaching SAE [Standard Australian English]. Additionally, the LOTE program, spearheaded by the AEW and developed with teachers, was integrated into programs to provide students with awareness and use of their local traditional language. The LOTE learning strategies were activity based and usually conducted outdoors. The traditional language of the community was different from the Kriol used in the community. The teachers in the school were convinced that all their students were Kriol speakers but wanted their students to "make the jump" and understand what it really meant to code switch. The teachers were embarking on a project with a linguist to establish what was going on language-wise in homes. The linguist was going to observe and listen to the children in the classroom, in the playground, and at home to judge how they were code

switching between the languages they used. The Principal was cautious about how much was being attempted in their language programs.

> I think we push language skills too early. The children don't like being corrected all the time for things like 'bin ere'. They just stop talking if you are at them all the time. Why should kids change their language? Language is a cultural form and goes with sets of behaviours and purposes. But we do need to know how well the kids are code switching at home. Parents have to learn to code switch too. Sending them to school is only the first step but the parents need to be involved in some way with language such as the homework. We sometimes have difficulty in really hearing what children and their parents are speaking. We need confirmation about their Kriol use and that they don't speak English in the home. If this is so, we have to use speaking English as a second language teaching strategies. We need to come to terms with the separate language in the community and respect them as complete languages.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 4.7.97 with Principal)

In the classrooms and school activities the teachers focussed on what speakers and listeners did when using the English language. Students were taught how to ask questions for clarification and were shown how to use different cultural strategies when using different languages. For example, the students were explicitly taught how to engage in the learning process and be proactive in trying to learn. The teaching background of the primary teachers was heavily relied upon by the secondary teachers to make judgements about the development of students' knowledge and skills and how to go about teaching students to progress from one point to another. At the same time, the secondary teachers tried to develop students' deeper understanding of the English language, the secrets so to speak. One specialist English teacher had introduced the students to the joys of poetry and students discussed, for example, the use of metaphor, in the English language. Links were constantly made back to the students' own forms of text and the way language is used. The use of metaphor is very significant in the way Aboriginal people use language. This is how the one teacher viewed language teaching.

> In the early years the best I can do is to help the kids want to come to school to do the 'hard core' learning and try and concentrate on their work in hand. Perhaps the first four or five years of schooling should de-emphasise book experiences and be about extending and expressing their conceptual experiences in the English language. These kids will say "Light out the fire" when it should be " Put out the fire". Language teaching has to link form

and purpose so the kids know why they learn SAE. When content becomes more complex children's usual coping strategies don't work anymore so we need to teach them how to interact and engage in the learning process by using learn "gudia" skills as well as their own like questioning, reflection, and having another go at things if mistakes occur. We have to get better with this process because this does not happen well enough yet.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

The children were good at questioning in the classrooms. I had experience with that when they worked with me in the classroom and as I talked with them after school and over the weekends. They knew how to find out information. Where do you come from? Where's your family? What are you doing here? But there were no "why" questions. Each teacher had to work hard with students on this technique and "taking turns" to talk in a group. Aboriginal children tended to all talk at once and it was the individual to take the responsibility to sort out what he or she wanted to hear. The children also spoke very quickly and it took time to understand them. It was their family type gossip approach to talking but it was a cultural way which the teachers handled sensitively in their classrooms.

Classroom Environments: Social Relationships as Trellises for Learning

The learning environments in the classrooms were very relaxed and friendly where children were able to have fun. Building rapport and relationships with the children was most important. The teachers revealed themselves as personalities and school and out-of-school life with the students became inter-twined. But very clear boundaries were set for behaviour and these expectations were communicated clearly and firmly. The children had to learn to switch their behaviours in and out of school. The messages that were given in classrooms were ones of trust, understanding, enjoyment, cooperation, and positive teacher-student relationships. There also were strong messages given about the love of books and learning. The children were afforded rights but they were expected to accept the associated responsibilities.

The main rule in our classrooms is that the children must not disturb others' work. We have a few set rules and we follow through with the consequences, which usually is "time-out" in another part of the room. We cannot miss learning time in classrooms. They need to learn to respond to us as the teacher role in classroom and as the friend when swimming at the gorge. We spend time, like the weekends, with the kids. It's different and it is a positive relationship to be with the kids out of school. The kids get to know us as

people which is very important to them. They get to size us up. Sometimes we have tell them to leave our houses because we need some times for privacy but this is part of being responsible.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Working with Students to Develop Codes of Behaviour in the Classrooms

Each classroom was a democracy within a school democracy. There were negotiated goals for learning and assessment, the children had "jobs" to do in each classroom, but they had control over their individual work programs. Each classroom approach was developed along these lines and the children knew what was expected from them. There was clear and fair discipline with immediate feedback about inappropriate behaviour and the children responded willingly to this transparent system.

The children were in classes with their brothers and sisters and cousins. The family scenes came into the classroom and often there were squabbles and talk about what was going on at home. There were some underlying tensions between families which manifested as teasing and sexual harassment at school and these tensions quickly overturned the calm in classrooms. Teachers in the school were skilled in dealing with cultural tensions in their classrooms and dealt with them quickly. Because children felt relaxed in classroom, they accepted admonishment for their inappropriate behaviour knowing that even when they misbehaved they were still liked. Aboriginal solidarity also was fostered in the classrooms. There were buddy systems between the high school children and the younger ones because the older children had 'father' and 'mother' role expectations in the community.

When children arrived back after being away from the community the classrooms often were disrupted. Families and their children were like re-charged batteries and in the classrooms there was a lot of gossip: "Where have you been? Who did you see? What did you do?" If the children were "outsiders" there could be trouble. The children's minds became totally pre-occupied with the newcomer. It was the same when children were leaving to go somewhere. They were too excited and busy thinking about the trip to be bothered with schoolwork. School took a second place. Again, valuable class time was lost. There was a core of students who were always at school but the number was small and they came from one or two families. One teacher dealt with disruptions in a positive way although lamented the lack of external agency support to deal with transience.

I try not to make a fuss; the kids don't like it. I have news or discussion groups to work through disruptions. Once children came back from being away it takes a week or more to work out where they are: What have they forgotten? Have they learnt something new? Some come back and are too scared to do things because they don't know what your reaction will be. Then you gradually get them into the classroom scene again ... then they're gone again. There isn't anything in the system to support us to cope with this problem.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Preferred Ways of Learning and Learning to Cross Borders

The children liked the structured routines in the classroom especially highly directed activities such as printing from the blackboard and work assignments. These were safe activities because the children did not have to push themselves beyond the routine. Taking risks to learn was very threatening to the children and hence easily perceived as their lack of independence. One very experienced teacher of Aboriginal children explained students' learning in this way.

Kids definitely have the capacity to learn. In their first year they require a lot of training about how to behave at school. It doesn't matter if we adapt our teaching to their learning style and use modelling, imitating, and doing because they still come into this little building to be taught reading and writing. Several of the kids are starting to read quite well. They find the maths more difficult. I try to separate it out from the language. They don't have numbers in their culture so operations are difficult to teach. It is very frustrating when you can only watch as the kids make no headway. Even our homework policy doesn't seem to be having an effect on outcomes.

(Taped interview conducted on 6.6.97 with a Teacher)

While students' preferred styles of learning were well recognised by the teachers in this school and used in the classrooms to full advantage, there was an inescapable issue about the dominance of English texts and how to deal with them the curriculum and pedagogy. I was reminded of Nakata (1995) warning that if the cultural difference agenda for curriculum does not improve student outcomes then something is seriously wrong with culturally sensitive pedagogy. Nakata was clear that indigenous students must be able to work with non-indigenous learning strategies to cope with or access higher levels of learning.

The teachers set very high expectations about finishing work, staying on task, and not wasting time, but never pushed the idea that students were not reaching particular academic levels. Sometimes students took months to cotton onto some specific concepts and if they missed school, the "Aha" experience took longer. Their learning was fragmented and it took many months for students to figure out what they were learning and what the teachers wanted them to do.

> Teaching is as hard in this community as any other but it hasn't really got any easier for me after 20 years in Aboriginal schools. It's still just as tough and the problems are just the same. Perhaps in this school some children have more academic skills but I expect all chores and tasks to be done just like my own kids at home. With the small numbers in the classroom the kids know I'm going to see them some part of they day to check on their output. There are days when I think, What am I doing here? Day by day learning is slow but the children do not need drama and bad temper in the school or classroom. We have to be self-improving in our classrooms but sometimes I feel I can't do anymore. I just get tired of saying the same things day after day after day
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

These children were autonomous outside the classroom and they decided what they wanted to do and when they wanted to do it. They decided when they ate and drank and what they wanted. Teachers in the school recognised the traps they could fall into as I often did when I used my usual repertoire of teaching skills when working with the children. I have video footage of some of the difficulties I encountered when I simply "talked at the children" and looked somewhat flummoxed when they ignored me. One wise teacher knew exactly how to work with the children.

> We run into trouble when we come into the classroom and say, "You will listen to me all day". They have a life of autonomy and we have to work our teaching strategies around this. The AEW is a perfect example of the way we need to work. The AEW isn't trained enough to help with the 'teaching process' in the white way. She teaches as an Aboriginal: This is how it is done, now do it. The kids then choose, or not, to participate in activity. We have to work between the lines, between the cultural ways, to teach the content of the curriculum.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

It did not matter how good the children were at school they still had to deal with the social issues around them at home and in the community. These children knew the facts of life through sex education and disease control but they mostly choose not to take actions. The students loved art and physical education and it was easy for teachers to keep them occupied if they chose to do "keep students busy". It was much harder to tackle the hardcore learning; learning English. The classrooms in this school work well but they entailed solid work for everyone.

Accord and Mutual Understanding with the Students

Students' Background Experiences

Students' attendance was not an issue at the school; it was their transience. The students could be off without notice for kin obligations or special events like a rodeo or a show. It was "big time" for the children to be around the adult world where cultures met so often they lost touch with how to go about working within the school culture. But the students in the school were respected, nurtured, and loved by their families and the teachers. The teachers spoke of the great joy to be found in teaching these children but also bemoaned the effects of poor nutrition, inconsistent sleep patterns, and transience on the children's learning. Teachers tried to ignore the health issues because they had a nursing post in the community and medical supplies that were readily available to families. Many of the children had imbalanced diets but they were not malnourished. As one teacher put it:

> The kids tend to feed themselves so diets aren't particularly good. Fruit and vegetables and fruit juices are consumed mainly from the Canteen at recess time. Meat, potatoes, onions, flour are the diet staples. If the kids are at home when I'm peeling carrots, for example, they'll eat all the peelings. They buy tin vegies; fresh food is not always available and when it is, it is very expensive. They are very fit kids and not overweight. They have money to buy things at the shop and of course they will get lollies and fizzy drinks. What kid wouldn't? They are just kids.
>
> (Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

The staff endeavoured not to let the health issues cloud the educational issues but it was a fine line to be walked.

> It is fine line: Doing things for them and guiding them. I prefer to teach kids about diet and treating their sores but it is very difficult not to provide food

when they love things like fruit. This is why we have our nutrition and

canteen programs at the school which are supported by the parents.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

The teachers were careful not to always typify their students according to their race. Some of the issues with the Aboriginal students were not really any different from those with any other students. Parents worried about them sniffing solvents or getting pregnant just like most parents do. They watched TV and videos but not all the time. The loved playing basketball and the Americanism of life was evident. You only needed to look at the T-shirts and caps they wore to observe current heroes. It was readily observed that some of the older boys were unmotivated and had adopted non-persisting academic behaviour. The older boys, who are considered as young men in the community, appear indifferent in the classroom. Students who have been encouraged to work harder and better seem to lose interest in school around this age. Perhaps the realities of life took hold for the young adults. One teacher was adamant that everyone in the community needed to know exactly how schooling fitted into everyday lives.

We give the wrong messages to kids and their parents. We say you must

come to school because if you come to school you'll learn and be successful.

But in these communities being successful at school does not mean you will

be successful in life.

(Taped interview conducted on 14.6.96 with a Teacher)

Students' Motivation to Learn

In classrooms students were learning to take risks and be comfortable with making mistakes which was alien to their culture. They trusted their teachers. They were motivated to learn by the sheer enthusiasm of their teachers, work incentives, praise, and reward systems; just like any students in the same situations. But teachers had to work hard to move their students from extrinsic to intrinsic forms of rewards. The children were highly motivated by local interests and what was happening in their lives but capitalising on these motivations, achieving school success, and looking beyond school were large learning leaps for most of the students because:

Just being in the classroom doesn't mean learning will occur. Learning

requires effort from the learner. Sitting and listening equals learning for

these kids. It is the traditional way. Tell me and show me. Around about 10-

11 years old they'll start doing things for themselves. Going to Perth to

school for some is important. As a high school teacher here we talk about

aspirations. Kids say they want to run the shop, be the Community Nurse, and work in the Office. Few have aspirations to go to Perth to work. Their families here are the priority. Peer pressure is not a real issue here like the town schools. I talk to the kids about doing my B.Ed units and about life long learning and they understand about going away to get a degree at Broome. They can talk about the future and in the community there is talk about jobs for the future.

(Taped interview conducted on 5.6.97 with a Teacher)

Student Progress and Achievement: The Monitoring Dilemma

It seemed that the students in the school were at either end of the academic achievement scale. They either did well or not very well at all and the teachers saw this gap between as huge. There was no gradual range of learning in the classrooms; it was polarised. There were those who were making progress and those who failed to move. However, most of the students' progress was up and down and did not cumulate in a predictable way. Monitoring this type of student progress was a challenge because it was mostly informal. Teachers relied heavily on their intuitive and professional judgements about their students' progress. Any assessment of students was time consuming because most assessments had to be done individually and often in some oral form to best find out what students had learned. The teachers kept portfolios of written work to provide evidence of what students were learning and the standards they were achieving. Checklists were kept about the knowledge and skills students acquired but in the main, formal and standardised tests were avoided.

An Ideal School in its Sociocultural Context

Harmony School operated in a successful way and there were many processes that operated in the school to ensure this success. The school had a foundation for change. There was quality communication and trust between home and school, amongst the staff, and between the teachers and the principal that built common understandings about the goals for children's education. Parents were gradually becoming involved in supporting their children's learning and were taking an active interest in what was happening in the school so they could look to the future for their children. The school's principal was a strong educational and democratic leader. All staff were included in school decision making, decisions were focussed on teaching and learning, and there was a focus on building collective ideas about school and classroom operations. The staff planned the school's programs in a strategic way and used their resources efficiently and effectively. Teachers initiated and implemented school policy to meet the needs of their students

while putting into action top-down mandated policies and procedures. And in their classrooms they worked to deepen their knowledge and information about their pedagogy. They promoted teaching and learning strategies that blended indigenous and non-indigenous ways of learning to optimise students' progress, progress that could be openly demonstrated.

Using Glickman's (1987) definition, Harmony School was a *good* school. There were identified standards that were evident in both its processes and student outcomes. It also was an *effective* school because there was constant negotiation within the school and with the community for *improvement* in its operations to meet the standard teachers set for the school, themselves, and their students. Because a *quality* school can be considered in two ways, accountable with an emphasis on outcomes or improving with an emphasis on processes (Hughes, 1993; McGaw, 1995), Harmony School presented a paradox. In one way Harmony School was a *quality* school because its processes for improvement were evident. However, students at the school failed to meet year level expectations in their achievement and therefore Harmony School could not be judged as a *quality* school. Students were provided *equality* in their opportunities to learn and their access to programs, such as their language program, that the school implemented. These programs were aimed at providing students with *equality* in their learning outcomes but students were not achieving equally with their counterparts in other schools in WA. On the premise of student outcomes Harmony School could be judged neither as an *equality* nor a *quality* school. Ultimately, while the school worked in harmony within its walls and within the community, the students did not progress quickly with their leaning. Alongside the harmony in this school, there was the concurrent underlying teacher frustration with most of their students' slow progress at school and eventual lack of success with schooling and accountability in terms of meeting "outside" measures of quality.

The four other case study schools have not been described as fully as Harmony School in the thesis. Harmony School, as an ideal type, illustrated the positive features of schools in the study. In the next chapter, the student assessment aspect of the study for all five of the study schools is brought into sharper focus. Also, in chapter nine the backmapping of students' progress to show how each of the five case study schools operated is drawn into the picture of best school and classroom practices.

CHAPTER NINE

PHASE THREE CONTINUED: LOOKING IN SCHOOLS

Student Progress and Absenteeism; Classroom and School Practices that Improve Student Progress

As mentioned in chapter eight, the third phase of the study was guided by a working hypothesis: There are effective practices in schools and classrooms that improve students' learning outcomes. Apart from looking at home-school partnerships, school and classroom operations, and the backgrounds of students, the third phase of the study also examined how student achievement, especially the extent of their progress at school, could best be measured. The collection of samples of students' work in reading and writing from the five case study schools during phase three of the study formed a concentrated aspect of data collection and analysis. Because the case study participants constantly referred to the persistence of high rates of absenteeism, data on attendance were collected for the student sample to ascertain the relationship between absenteeism and student achievement. This chapter contains discussion about three main aspects of this part of the study. First, the conduct and results of the student assessment of the study are considered and the judgement of students' progress is illustrated using figures to show the level of progress made by each student in each case study school. Second, the rate of student achievement is compared to student absences from school to ascertain whether a cause and effect relationship between poor attendance and poor achievement in reading and writing can be established. Finally, students' progress is then backmapped (Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996) to make some judgements about the effective classroom and school practices occurring in each case study school. The backmapping is in terms of students' learning styles, learning processes and teaching strategies developed in classrooms, the organisation, management, and climate to be found in schools, and the home-school relationships that schools fostered in their communities. The conclusion of this chapter examines how the success of the Kimberley schools can be judged.

Considerations about the Student Sample in Phase Three of the Study

Gaining Permission for Students to Participate in the Study

Permission for students to be involved in the study was gained from students' parents but was obtained in different ways according to different school protocols. In each

school I negotiated with the principal the most appropriate way to approach parents. In the large town school, letters were sent to parents of non-Aboriginal students but the AEWs hand delivered the letters to Aboriginal parents to explain the intent of the assessment and respond to any of their queries. I held a briefing meeting with the AEWs to discuss the study and respond to their queries. In the large remote school two AEWs hand delivered letters to the parents. Each of the AEWs came from one or the other of the two main families in the community, and as they had already discussed the study with me, the process worked smoothly. In Harmony School letters were hand delivered by me, accompanied by the principal, and so I was able to meet parents first-hand. In the other two small remote schools the principals verbally negotiated the permission from parents for their children to participate in the study. Permission was sought from parents of a 150-student sample for their children to participate in the study and no parent rejected the idea of their child taking part in the assessment tasks. Appendix K contains examples of the different parent letters used.

Sample Loss: Attendance, Absenteeism, Truancy, and Transience

The 150-student sample was reduced in 1997 by 42 students because they had left their schools for some reason or other. The school location of a few of these students was known. They had moved permanently to another school in the State or the Kimberley and the Education Department notification system between schools had accounted for their movement. Some students were temporarily in other Kimberely schools because their families were in that particular community for kin obligations or other social events. The Kimberley schools had a cascade type inter-school communication system that tagged the mobility of students. However, the whereabouts of others were lost to the system until they "just turned up again" at a school in the Kimberley area or returned to their home-community and thus their home-school. It appeared that these students did not attend any school during their period of absence from their home-community and home-school (the school that was considered to be their more permanent school for the purposes of the study).

In Table 9.1 the pattern of student loss in the sample is indicated with the highlighted numbers showing how many students were retained from one year to the next, when they were one year older. At the second assessment point in the study, 108 students of the original 150 students were involved in the assessment tasks and their absentee rates from their home-school were calculated between the two assessment points. These absentee rates are discussed again later in this chapter.

Table 9.1.   *Student Loss in the Sample: Numbers and Ages of Students 1996-1997*

Age	Harmony School* 1996	1997	School B* 1996	1997	School C* 1996	1997	School D 1996	1997	School E 1996	1997	Total 1996	1997
5 yrs	3		6		4		6		7		26	
6 yrs	3	*2*	5	*5*	1	*3*	6	*6*	7	*5*	22	*21*
7 yrs	4	*3*	2	*1*	3	*1*	6	*5*	4	*7*	19	*17*
8 yrs	5	*2*	3	*2*	2	*3*	6	*4*	6	*3*	22	*14*
9 yrs	3	*2*	1	*0*	1	*2*	5	*4*	7	*6*	17	*14*
10 yrs	2	*2*	3	*1*	2	*0*	2	*5*	5	*6*	14	*14*
11 yrs	1			*0*		*1*	5	*2*	2	*5*	8	*8*
12 yrs		*1*			1		4	*3*	4	*2*	9	*6*
13 yrs	1						3	*3*	8	*4*	12	*7*
14 yrs	1							*1*		*5*	1	*6*
15 yrs		*1*										*1*
TOTAL	23	*13*	20	*9*	14	*10*	43	*33*	50	*43*	150	*108*

Note: * denotes whole student population in the school

In the sample the largest loss occurred between Years 4 (10-year-olds) and 5 (11-year-olds). Further evidence would need to be gathered to ascertain if this was a trend across the Kimberely schools. The other large loss in the sample was between Years 8 (13-year-olds) and 9 (14-years-olds) which could be explained by the fact the many students can legally leave school once they turn 15 years or when 14-year-olds have a job to go to. This loss, however, suggested that few students choose to continue their schooling in the case study schools.

The loss of students associated with each school group is shown in Table 9.2. There was a 28% loss in the sample and there were some slight tendencies in the loss in relation to each school. School B had the greatest loss rate. The small Aboriginal community was notable because of its mobility. Most of the community's extended family connections were in other Kimberley communities so people moved constantly to visit relatives and for kin obligations. However, this did not necessarily mean that students did not attend other schools while they were away from their home-community. School C, a similar community to that of School B, had the lowest loss rate but this community was isolated from others by the difficult accessibility of its roadway to a main road. The results for Harmony School tended to confirm the school's claim about their high student transience rate. In the two larger schools,

School D and E, the loss rates in the sample were comparatively low according to the school's higher enrolments.

Table 9.2   *Loss in the Student Sample in Relation to the Case Study Schools*

School	Size of School	Loss in school group
Harmony School	Small remote Aboriginal school featured in chapter eight	10 students 43.5%
School B	Very small remote Aboriginal school	11 students 55%
School C	Very small remote Aboriginal school	4 students 28.6%
School D	Large remote Aboriginal school	10 students 23.3%
School E	Town school	7 students 14%

The 108 students who remained in the sample at the second assessment point, had varied patterns in their attendance between the two assessment points in relation to their home-school. First, students were absent from their home-school because they were ill or had clear reasons for being absent for short periods of time, usually a few days. Second, students were absent from their home-school because they truanted. The term is taken to mean that the parents thought their children were at school but the children chose to "play hooky" such as swimming at the local pool. Truancy was rare in the small remote community schools because everyone seemed to know what others were doing. Truancy tended to be more related to the town schools. Third, students were away from their home-communities, thus their home-school, but were known to be attending another school in the Kimberley. These students usually returned to their home-school but their absence could have been several weeks, even months. Fourth, students were away from their home-school, but their whereabouts were unknown until they either arrived back at their home-school or enrolled in another school. The period of students' unknown whereabouts, once again, could have been several weeks, even months.

There are three pertinent points to be made here. First, there were many students in the study sample who attended their home-school in regular patterns. Second, there were

other students who were mobile because they were away from their home-school but attended other schools for periods ranging from a week to two or three months. Third, there were students in the sample who missed prolonged periods of any type of schooling and these students often were referred to as "bush kids", a somewhat derogatory term from my point of view. In this study transience was considered to be two-pronged: students were mobile, away from their home-school, but known to be attending another school; and students had prolonged absence from any type of schooling. Importantly, in the study what was considered as absence was the number of days the 108 students who remained in the sample missed from their home-school between the two assessment points. The important educational significance was that students who were transient experienced interrupted learning because they were not participating routinely in a classroom program. Teachers found the interruption, sometimes several periods of interruption over the school year, difficult to plan for and accommodate in day-to-day life in their classrooms.

Transience does not seem to be linked to any particular school in the case studies but to other outside-school influences but this is only an interpretation of the data. The loss in the sample in the reported results can only be teased out in terms of students being in their home-community and home-school at the time of the first assessment but not the second. If student were in their home-community at the second assessment point they were included in the assessment tasks. The 42 students who were not involved in the second assessment had either left their home-school permanently or had been absent for a lengthy period and were away from their home-community. The sample loss offers some empirical evidence of transience. Conceptually, the data are one indicator that supports the claims of teachers involved in the study who often expressed frustration because their students were not in their particular classrooms on a regular basis.

It also must be noted that in all of the case study schools the transfer rate of teachers was high. Not only did students and their families move in and out of the case study school communities, it was customary for teachers to transfer in and out of the communities. The reasons for moving were different but all of these reasons appeared socially legitimate according to each group's perspective. Ultimately, parents hoped that teachers would stay longer in their communities and teachers hoped students would be in class regularly. The teachers transfer rate in the case study schools meant that in all of the remote Aboriginal schools the entire, or a substantial part of the teaching staff, changed over in one year. In the town school there was more stability of staff because several teachers were town residents. However, most younger staff

members only remained in the school for two or three years. All staff in four of the case study schools participated in the study - Harmony School: 4 staff and 1 AEW; School B: 2 staff and 1 AEW; School C: 2 staff (but no-one available in the community to take the AEW role); and School D: 8 staff and 2 AEWs. In School E, 18 members of the total staff and all 5 AEWs participated in the study.

The Assessment Tasks

Designing the Tasks

Because conventional testing procedures were not appropriate to measure students' progress, assessment tasks were specifically designed for the study. The assessment tasks are contained in Appendix L and were mainly concerned with aspects of reading and writing (which included spelling). The tasks were designed for two groups: Years K-2 and Years 3-8. I developed the tasks in negotiations with participating teachers in the study. The aim was to choose assessment tasks that matched what teachers believed they were teaching in their classrooms. One of the significant features of the assessment tasks was the initial task students were asked to complete. This task revolved around the younger students drawing about their family and the older students mapping their community. The purpose of this was to enable students to commence on a task that was very familiar to them and very much a part of classroom work. The themes were part of children's experiences. The drawing task also allowed me to observe students in terms of how they thought about their drawings, the nature of their talk, the monologues they developed about their pictures, how they worked, and the types of questions they asked of me. In addition, the drawings provided me with a way to naturally initiate and engage in discussions with the students about their lives at school.

The same tasks were used for both assessment points even though students had progressed to next year level at their school. For those students who moved from Year 3 to Year 4, a discussion was held with their classroom teachers to ascertain which set of tasks should be conducted with them. Although this represented a change in assessment tasks for some of the students, it was mainly concerned with whether the students drew a picture of their family or a map of their community. The assessment of the students' progress still remained one of making a final judgement about the degree of progress that they had made in reading and writing.

Conducting the Assessment Tasks

Children's samples of work were collected by me working with each student on familiar classroom tasks and on familiar curriculum content. I became the moderating standard in the assessment process. On one occasion during a week-long visit to a case study school, my supervisor was able to observe that I consistently conducted the assessment tasks with each student. This reliability check was carried out in one of the larger schools across 33 students. Each task was directed consistently although when students asked questions, usually due to lack of understanding about the language used or a lack of confidence to get started, I provided prompts to ensure the students demonstrated their best achievement of each task. My analysis of how each student completed the tasks became the judgement about the degree of progress that the students made from one year to the next. Essentially two sets of repeated observations, approximately one year apart, were made on the same group of students across the five case study schools.

Making Judgements about Students' Progress

The difficulty in this part of the research design was making inferences about the progress of students and whether any progress in their reading and writing was attributable to the invention work of the schools. Confounding variables were many, including different home situations which exposed students to Standard Australian English (SAE) in varying ways, students' maturation factors, the different number of students across year levels and gender imbalances in the sample, and the loss in the sample which could not be controlled for. I believe, however, that my experience in assessing students across the year levels was helpful in providing a standard for judgement of students' progress. Additionally, each student's assessment was discussed with his or her classroom teacher to ascertain whether the student had performed as they might in the classroom. In my discussions with classroom teachers I negotiated whether my judgements about students' degree of progress were fair and reasonable in terms of their day-to-day performance in their classroom work. In the few cases where some students were thought to have under-performed on the day, classroom samples of work were collected and examined to modify any assessment made by me. These instances were few. Copies of the assessment profiles were provided to teachers as feedback and most believed the profiles were valuable to them as records of students' progress. Teachers were highly interested in the second profile for each student because the degree of student progress from one occasion to another could be discerned.

While criticism can be directed at the looseness of the research approach to the student assessment, the purpose of the process was to find examples of students' progress. How much progress had students made between the two assessment points and could this progress be attributable to the schools? In WA the focus on outcomes-based education is documented in the *Curriculum Framework* (1998) that provides explicit descriptions for schools about "what is expected for students to know, understand, be able to do, or to be like as a result of their school education" (Willis & Johnston, 1998, p. 123). The *Curriculum Framework* (1998) is composed of outcomes across eight learning areas, one of which is English, that students are expected to achieve. The WA Education Department has expanded this framework into student outcome statements for each of the learning areas according to several levels of sophistication and are documented in the *Outcomes and Standards Framework Overview* (1998a). The whole curriculum reform in WA was just reaching schools, but I was able to use the *Outcomes and Standards Framework: English Student Outcome Statements* (1998b) to make judgements about students' progress in reading and writing. Students were judged on four major outcomes: the use of texts, contextual understanding of texts, use of conventions in texts, and the process and strategies they apply to texts. There are nine levels of developmental progress for each of the four outcomes. The four major outcomes are shown in Table 9.3 to 9.6 with short descriptions for Level F (foundation) to Level 8 (Source: Outcomes and Standards Framework: English Student Outcome Statements, 1998b).

Table 9.3.   *Levels Used to Judge Students' Use of Texts in Reading and Writing*

Major Outcome	Reading: Overall Outcome Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding, and critical awareness	Writing: Overall Outcome Students write using a range of forms and conventions appropriate to a range of audiences, purposes, and contexts
Use of Texts Students demonstrate increasing sophistication, complexity, variety, and control when making meaning from texts.	F. Attends to texts and recognises common objects. 1. Role plays reading and recognises familiar symbols. 2. Constructs and retells meanings from short texts. 3. Interprets and discusses ideas from familiar texts. 4. Interprets and discusses ideas in unfamiliar content. 5. Identifies, discusses and justifies ideas in linguistically complex texts. 6. Uses a range of texts to explore complex ideas. 7. Uses evidence from complex texts to construct meaning. 8. Analyses and criticises linguistically demanding texts.	F. Demonstrates motor skills required for pre-writing. 1. Produces written symbols intending to convey message. 2. Writes texts, imaginative and factual, about familiar topics. 3. Experiments with interrelated ideas when writing. 4. Controls a wide range of texts to express ideas. 5. Uses texts to explore challenging ideas. 6. Uses texts to explore different perspectives. 7. Writes sustained complex texts. 8. Writes convincingly and expressively on complex, often abstract, ideas.

Table 9.4. *Levels Used to Judge Students' Contextual Understandings of Texts in Reading and Writing*

Major Outcome	Reading: Overall Outcome Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding, and critical awareness	Writing: Overall Outcome Students write using a range of forms and conventions appropriate to a range of audiences, purposes, and contexts
Contextual Understandings of Texts Students develop a critical awareness of the ways language varies according to context and how language affects the way students view themselves and their world.	F. Recognises some familiar content. 1. Makes connections between own knowledge and texts. 2. Understands that texts are real or imaginary and constructed by people. 3. Identifies simple symbolic meanings in texts. 4. Recognises that texts are constructed for purpose and appeal to certain groups. 5. Explains various interpretations of texts. 6. Considers various contexts of texts. 7. Considers the relationships between texts, contexts, readers, and the producers of texts. 8. Analyses texts in terms of sociocultural values they project.	F. Responds to written symbols in the environment. 1. Recognises that writing is used to convey a message. 2. Recognises the purpose of writing. 3. Recognises different text types are associated with audience and purpose. 4. Adjusts writing to account for aspects of audience, purpose and context. 5. Selects text type, content, and language to suit purpose. 6. Controls writing for special effects. 7. Accommodates or resists the likely expectations of particular audiences in various contexts. 8. Understands linguistic and sociocultural contexts to make critical choices about writing text.

Table 9.5. *Levels Used to Judge Students' Use of Conventions in Texts in Reading and Writing*

Major Outcome	Reading: Overall Outcome Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding, and critical awareness	Writing: Overall Outcome Students write using a range of forms and conventions appropriate to a range of audiences, purposes, and contexts
Use of Conventions in Texts Students interpret the conventions of written texts with understanding and critical awareness.	F. Recognises some elements in texts. 1. Uses symbols and conventions to make meaning from texts. 2. Recognises basic linguistic structures in texts. 3. Uses basic linguistic structures in texts to make meaning. 4. Identifies how linguistic structures shape readers' understandings of texts. 5. Uses knowledge of linguistic structures to explain how texts are constructed. 6. Compare the linguistics structures in different texts. 7. Identifies how techniques shape readers' interpretations and reaction to texts. 8. Analyse the impact of linguistic technique intended to influence readers' interpretations of texts.	F. Produces marks; some may approximate conventions. 1. Shows use of conventional symbols to express ideas 2. Uses some basic linguistic structures. 3. Controls most basic features of written texts. 4. Controls basic structures and features of different texts types. 5. Controls the structures and features of more complex and extended texts. 6. Uses texts to influence audience reactions. 7. Controls the syntax and structures a range of text types. 8. Manipulates structures and features to convey meaning expressively and concisely.

Table 9.6.   *Levels Used to Judge the Processes and Strategies Students Applied to Texts in Reading and Writing*

Major Outcome	Reading: Overall Outcome Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding, and critical awareness	Writing: Overall Outcome Students write using a range of forms and conventions appropriate to a range of audiences, purposes, and contexts
Processes and Strategies Applied to Texts Students select from a repertoire of processes and strategies when reading and writing by reflecting on their understandings of the way language works.	F. Uses strategies to access content in texts. 1. Uses cues to predict meaning in texts. 2. Uses basics strategies to select texts to make meaning. 3. Uses some strategies to find information in texts. 4. Identifies the different purposes of texts and finds resources for specific purposes. 5. Systematically finds and reconstructs information. 6. Uses a repertoire of strategies to work with extended texts. 7. Uses strategies that enable detailed critical evaluation of texts. 8. Evaluates detailed texts and makes links to the sociocultural world.	F. Recognises that writing tools can be used to communicate. 1. Explores ways of writing ideas using symbols. 2. Shows awareness of planning and reviewing writing. 3. Plans, drafts and reviews own writing. 4. Uses a range of strategies to plan, daft and review writing according to audience, purpose and context. 5. Crafts writing to some extent and complexity for effect. 6. Controls a wide range of strategies to craft writing. 7. Reflects on the crafting of own complex writing for purpose and subject matter. 8. Critiques and deliberately applies processes and strategies within a sustained crafting process.

In the *Outcomes and Standards Framework: English Student Outcome Statements* (1998) each level of progress is documented with associated pointers to outline the type of reading and writing behaviours students should achieve at each level. To make judgments about students' progress, once they had completed the assessments tasks, I followed three procedures. First, I produced a profile of each student's reading and writing behaviours according to the level they were working at during the first assessment point. This was conducted with the original 150-student sample. Second, I conferred with classroom teachers to discuss and confirm that the profile of each student's progress concurred with his or her professional judgements. Third, I provided classroom teachers with the profiles of their students' progress. This threefold process was followed again at the second assessment point with the remaining 108 students in the sample so that each of these students had two profiles of progress for comparison. In Appendix M profiles for three students, representing different age levels, are illustrative of how students were assessed, although for confidentiality reasons, drawings (which show location and peoples' names) and written work (which reveal location and names) are not included.

In Figures 9.1 and Figure 9.2 hypothetical examples are provided for explanatory purposes to show the two ways, with some of the permutations, that the students

progressed in reading or writing between the two assessment points. Figure 9.1 illustrates students who were assessed to be progressing, in some way or another, at the same level at both assessment points. While the illustration in Figure 9.1 is for the foundation level, similar student progress patterns on the four major outcomes between the two assessment points were found for levels 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the student sample.

	Sex	Age in years '96 '97		Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F								
Student A	M	5	6	O	O	O	O	43
Student B	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	●	12
Student C	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	5

Interpretation

Student A: an early childhood, male Aboriginal student was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point no evident progress had been made. This student, who has attended school for 2 years, had a high absence rate between the two assessment points.

Student B: an early childhood, female Aboriginal student was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point she had achieved major outcomes 1 and 2 at the foundation level and had made some evident progress on major outcomes 3 and 4 at the foundation level. This student, who has attended school for 2 years, had a reasonable attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Student C: an early childhood, male Aboriginal student was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point he had achieved all four major outcomes at the foundation level. This student, who has attended school for 3 years, had a good attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Points of interest

Student A showed no progress. This could be due in part to his high absences. There are signs that this student is at risk.

Student B showed progress and had a reasonable attendance rate. This student probably needed a tailored reading or writing (or both) program to boost progress.

Student C showed progress between the assessment points but because he has been at school for 3 years, and is still working at the foundation level, there were already signs of lag between his progress and what is expected students of his age to achieve.

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies

✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point

● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

O Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

Figure 9.1. Illustrative Example of Student Progress at One Level on the Four Major Outcomes between the two Assessment Points

Figure 9.2 shows students who were assessed to be progressing, in some way or another, at one level on the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point, students were assessed to have progressed to the next level on the four major outcomes and were progressing in some way at this level.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences

Level F ➜ Level 1

	Sex	'96	'97	❶	❷	❸	❹	% absences
Student D	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	15
Student E*	F	6	7	✔	✔	✔	●	20
Student F	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	●	10
Student G	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	5

Interpretation

Student D: an early childhood, female Aboriginal student who was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point she had progressed to achieving all major outcomes at level 1. This student, who has attended school for 2 years, had a reasonable attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Student E: an early childhood, female, non-Aboriginal student was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point she had achieved major outcomes 1, 2, and 3 at level 1 and had made some evident progress on major outcome 4 at level 1. This student, who has attended school for 3 years, had a reasonable attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Students F: a middle primary, female Aboriginal student was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point she had achieved major outcome 1 at level 1. This student, who has attended school for 4 years, had a good attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Student G: a middle primary, female Aboriginal student who was working at the foundation level of the four major outcomes at the first assessment point. At the second assessment point she had progressed to achieving all major outcomes at level 1. This student, who has attended school for 5 years, had a good attendance rate between the two assessment points.

Points of interest

Student D showed progress from one level to another on all four major outcomes. This student is highlighted with shading to illustrate that she was achieving at year level expectations.

Student E showed progress but probably needed a tailored reading or writing (or both) program to boost progress given her age and reasonable attendance rate.

Students F and G showed progress, albeit differently, between the assessment points but because they had been at school for 4 or 5 years there were signs of lag between their progress and what is expected for students of their age. The cumulative lag is more evident for Student G and, given her regular attendance and capacity to make progress, a tailored program is imperative to boost her continued progress.

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies

✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point

● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

* Non-Aboriginal student

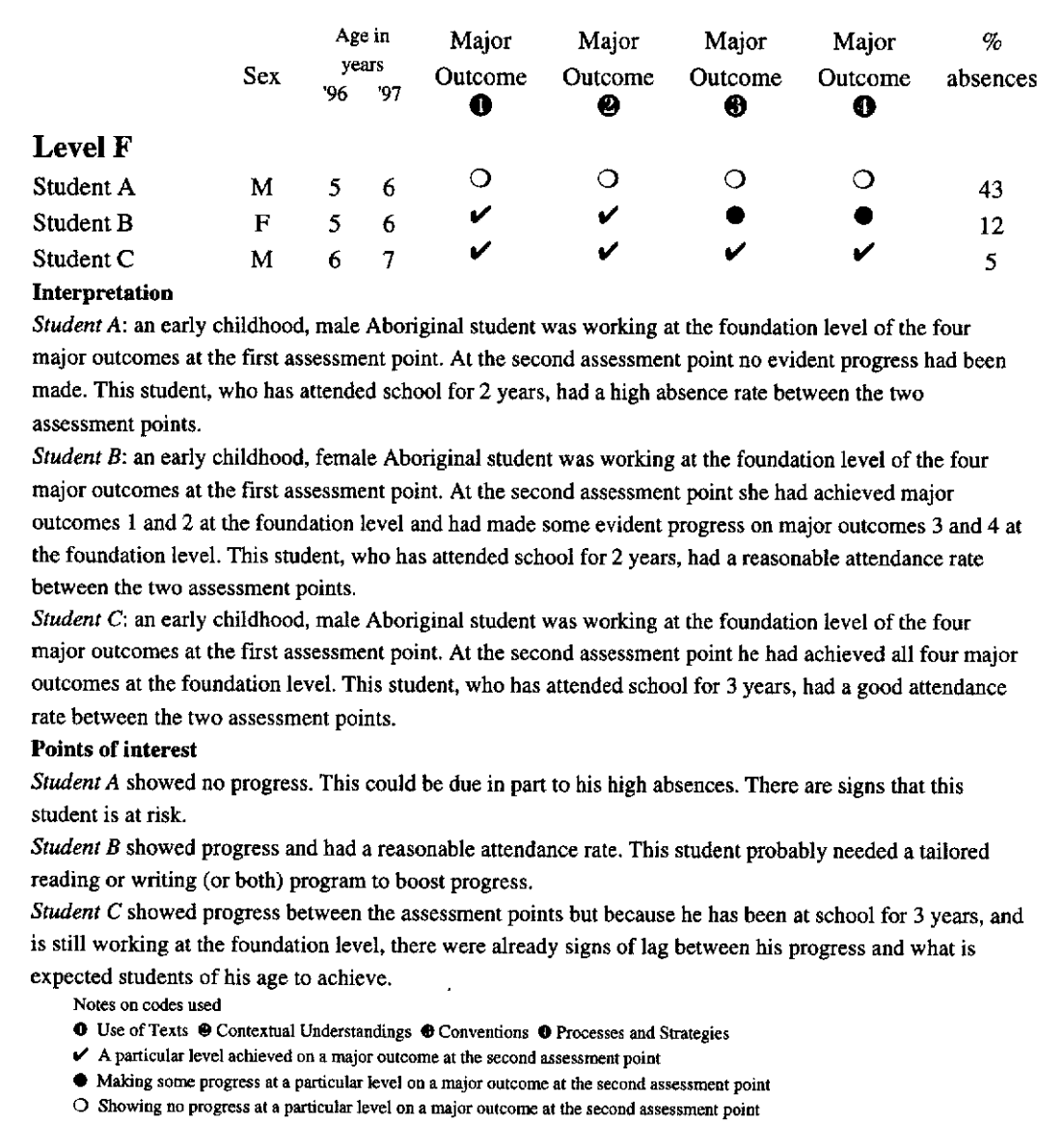Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.2. Illustrative Example of Student Progress from One Level to Another on the Four Major Outcomes between the Two Assessment Points

While the examples in Figure 9.2 illustrate progress from the foundation level to level 1, similar student progress patterns on the four major outcomes between the two assessment points were found (level 1 to 2, 2 to 3, 3 to 4, 4 to 5, and 5 to 6) in some of the student profiles across the case study schools. It must be noted that no student in the sample was found to have progressed more than one level between the two

assessment points which is possible for a student to accomplish. Additionally, no students were found to be progressing at level 7 or 8 on any of the four major outcomes. These levels of progress are more typical of Year 11 (16-year-olds) and Year 12 (17-year-olds) students.

An important point is illustrated in Figure 9.2 about expected year level achievement. For this thesis, year level expectation is defined as student progress at a particular level on all four major outcomes which is consistent with developmental learning patterns typical for students in a particular age group in any school in WA. Embedded in this definition is the problematic of using either some type of student achievement benchmark to define effective schools or an assessment process that defines the degree of progress students make during a period of schooling. Teachers in the case study schools still held the ideal of their students meeting year level expectations, especially in the town school, but this thesis has taken the approach to examine student progress and how school have been successful in fostering the progress. The progress profiles for each student to show levels achieved for each of the four major outcomes at the second assessment point are illustrated in Figures 9.3 to 9.12. In reporting the results about progress, pseudonyms are used for students' names. Mapping students' progress and the results of making qualitative assessment of their progress are the foci of the next part of the chapter.

The Findings about the Work Samples

Harmony School

As portrayed in chapter eight, school and classroom operations at Harmony School were conducive to students making progress in their learning. There were 23 students in the original group in the study but only 13 students remained in this group at the second assessment point. Figure 9.3 shows that these 13 students had an average absence rate of approximately 22%. Most students' absentee rates (other than Catriona and Kevin) were 15% or above which were considered to be too high by the teachers at the school. Based on the assessment of the 13 students' progress in reading, David, the one adolescent boy whose absentee rate was very high (57%), showed no progress over the year in his reading development. His teachers claimed that as an adult in his community his real interests were outside of the school. The other 12 students remaining in the group all showed some degree of progress. Seven students - Catriona (the one non-Aboriginal student in the school), Petrina, Sonya, Jason, Selina, Charlie, and Melinda - showed progress by moving from one level on the four major outcomes

to another between the two assessment points. Importantly, these results showed that the school had enabled most of its students to make progress in reading. It is imperative to note, however, that only three girls were considered to be achieving at their expected year level: Catriona, Selina, and Melinda who intended going to school in Perth the following year. These results of the student's reading at assessment point two are shown in Figure 9.3.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F ➜ Level 1								
Catriona *	F*	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Troy	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	●	24
Level 1 ➜ Level 2								
Petrina	F	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	15
Aaron	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	●	23
Patrick	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	44
Sonya	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	21
Jason	M	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	18
Bennie	M	7	8	●	●	●	✔	15
Selina	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	24
Charlie	M	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	17
Kevin	M	9	10	●	●	✔	●	9
Level 3								
David	M	14	15	○	○	○	○	57
Level 4 ➜ Level 5								
Melinda	F	11	12	✔	✔	✔	✔	16
N students achieving outcome				10	10	9	9	Average % absence 22%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
* Non-Aboriginal student
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.3.   Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Reading at Harmony School

It also was evident in the results that Troy, Aaron, Patrick, Jason, and Bennie had moved from one level to another but they had not consolidated their achievement at their specific levels on all of the four major outcomes between the two assessment points. Kevin, a student with special learning needs and an excellent school attendance record, had made some progress but was unlikely to reach expected year level outcomes at any time in his schooling. These results show the point where students started to lag behind year level expectations; moving beyond level 2 on the four major outcomes was a challenge for students. Typically teachers would expect 7-year-old

students to achieve level 2 on the four major outcomes in reading. Three students, who were 8-years-olds (Sonya, Jason, and Bennie), were showing signs of falling behind year level expectations even though Sonya and Jason had made progress at their levels on the four major outcomes. Older students (Selina, Charlie, Kevin, and David) showed that moving beyond level 2 required a developmental leap in their learning. In Figure 9.4 the results show a similar pattern of writing development to the 13 students' reading progress between the two assessment points. Troy, Aaron, Patrick, Bennie, and Kevin varied, however, in the way they achieved for reading and writing, even taking more time to show improvement in their writing than their reading.

	Sex	Age in years '96 '97		Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F → Level 1								
Catriona *	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Troy	M	5	6	●	●	✔	✔	24
Level 1 → Level 2								
Petrina	F	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	15
Aaron	M	6	7	✔	●	✔	●	23
Patrick	M	6	7	✔	●	✔	●	44
Sonya	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	21
Jason	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	18
Bennie	M	7	8	●	●	●	●	15
Selina	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	24
Charlie	M	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	17
Kevin	M	9	10	●	●	✔	●	9
Level 3								
David	M	14	15	○	○	○	○	57
Level 4 → Level 5								
Melinda	F	11	12	✔	✔	✔	✔	16
N students achieving outcome				9	7	10	8	Average % absence 22%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
* Non-Aboriginal student
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.4.   Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Writing at Harmony School

Students' difficulties with written English were evident in the survey results (see Table 7.4). In this group of students their slower progress in writing was particularly evident in spelling, as they grappled with the conventional complexities of digraphs and diphthongs, suffixes and prefixes, and tense. The sticking points highlighted in students' reading development also were evident in their writing. It must be noted

again that Catriona, Petrina, and Melinda were achieving year level expectations as they were in reading. Sonya, Selina, and Charlie progressed as they did in reading but below year level expectations and David's writing progress mirrored the same lack of progress as in his reading.

Three critical aspects of SAE development became apparent in the students' reading and writing at Harmony School. These aspects were evident when analysing each student's assessment tasks in connection with the levels described in Tables 9.3 to 9.6. The analysis provided clues about the sticking points that slowed progress of students moving from one level of outcomes to the next, especially beyond level 2.

- In the early years from Kindergarten (5-year-olds) to Year 2 (7-year-olds) students took longer to understand major outcome 3 (see Table 9.5), the conventions of text (left to right and top to bottom of a page, using terminology such as letter, word, and sentence, spacing between words and where words began and ended, one-one-correspondence between spoken and written words; and letter-sound relationships).

- In the middle and upper primary years from Year 4 (9-year olds) to Year 8 (13-year-olds), students took longer to work with the major outcomes 1 (see Table 9.3) and 2 (see Table 9.4), the use of texts and the contextual understandings of texts, with unfamiliar content at levels 4 and 5 (identifying, discussing, and justifying ideas in linguistically complex texts and explaining various interpretations of texts). In other words, students were unable to make interpretations about texts beyond the literal level or evaluate what the texts were revealing and from whose point of view the texts were written. Students were not coping with the nuances of text genre which impeded their learning in other content areas such science and health.

- In the secondary years, Year 8 (13-year-olds) to Year 10 (15-year-olds), students were not staying at school long enough to move into the critical analysis of texts in relation to different sociocultural contexts. This indeed meant that most students were not exposed to any extended knowledge of texts in relation to wider social issues and personal experiences. The "secrets", the hidden meanings, subtleties, and biases, of the English language in texts remained relatively unexplored by the Aboriginal students at the school.

The slowing down process of learning to read SAE began early for students with English as their second language and who mainly came from a non-print environment in the home. Time is the essence for learning but trying to enable students to catch up required a carefully planned language program that was taught by highly skilled teachers. Catching up really meant that the students had to learn SAE at a faster rate because most of their learning of SAE had to be done at school. This was a feat for any student in any school.

School B: Small Remote Aboriginal School

By the second assessment point in the study, 9 students of the original 20 in the group remained at School B. The average rate of absenteeism of these 9 students was approximately 21%. Six of the 9 students had excellent attendance rates and the other 3 had absentee rates of 21%, 69%, and 84%. These rates were symptomatic of the mobility of some families in the community. These students' reading progress results at the second assessment point are shown in Figure 9.5.

	Sex	Age in years '96	Age in years '97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F → Level 1								
Benni	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	2
Sheree	F	5	6	●	●	✔	●	1
Katie	F	5	6	●	●	✔	●	69
Level 1								
Marika	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	21
Gordon	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	1
Deborah	F	10	11	O	O	O	O	84
Level 1 → Level 2								
Gaylene	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	5
Level 2								
Kristy	F	7	8	✔	●	✔	✔	2
Level 2 → Level 3								
Shane	M	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	1
N students achieving outcome				6	5	4	6	Average % absence 21%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
O Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.5.   Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Reading at School B

Only Gaylene was meeting year level expectations in reading and progressed from one level on the four major outcomes to another. Her next challenge was to work with texts and the contextual understandings of texts with unfamiliar content. Time would tell if her progress would be smooth through this phase of learning. Benni, Marika, Gordon, Kristy, and Shane were showing potential but they required targeted programs to help them move in their learning to stave off falling behind year level expectations. This was even more imperative for Sheree (because of particular learning needs) and Katie (because of her poor attendance). Deborah, who had a very high absentee rate, was showing that her reading development was well behind expectations.

In Figure 9.6 the writing progress of the students at this school are displayed. Once again, Gaylene showed progress in writing and met year level expectations. The other students' pattern of writing development was similar to their reading but there was a variable of interest in the results. The students loved to write; 8 of the 9 students showed progress at a level (foundation, 1, 2, or 3) on major outcome 1. This issue is taken up again later in the chapter. However, there were signs that major outcome 2 (contextual understandings) and major outcome 3 (conventions) provided sticking points for most students in their progress.

	Sex	Age in years '96 '97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F → Level 1							
Benni	M	5 6	✔	✔	●	✔	2
Sheree	F	5 6	✔	●	✔	●	1
Katie	F	5 6	✔	●	✔	●	69
Level 1							
Marika	F	5 6	✔	✔	●	✔	21
Gordon	M	7 8	✔	✔	●	✔	1
Deborah	F	10 11	○	○	○	○	84
Level 1 → Level 2							
Gaylene	F	5 6	✔	✔	✔	✔	5
Level 2							
Kristy	F	7 8	✔	●	✔	✔	2
Level 2 → Level 3							
Shane	M	8 9	✔	✔	●	✔	1
							Average % absence
N students achieving outcome			8	5	4	6	21%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.6.   Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Writing at School B

At the second assessment point in the study 10 students remained from the initial group of 14 at School C. Of these 10 students, the average rate of absenteeism was approximately 26% which was a higher rate compared to both Harmony School and School B. Apart from Henri and Steven, 8 of the students' absentee rate was 19% or above; even though some often were in the community they chose not to come to school. The results of the students' reading progress at the second assessment point are shown in Figure 9.7. Robbie, Amelda, Michael, and Mathew moved from the foundation level of outcomes to level 1 although Mathew was showing signs of lag in his reading development. Henri consolidated his progress at level 1 between the two assessment points as did Donald and Lloyd to a lesser degree. However, the three boys also were showing signs of lag in reading progress. Steven, Maureen, and Aldo progressed from one level on the four major outcomes to another between the two assessment points but only Steven was achieving year level expectations.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F → Level 1								
Robbie	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	26
Amelda	F	5	6	●	●	✔	●	22
Michael	M	5	6	●	●	✔	●	19
Mathew	M	7	8	●	●	●	●	63
Level 1								
Henri	M	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Donald	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	22
Lloyd	M	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	50
Level 1 → Level 2								
Steven	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Maureen	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	20
Level 2 → Level 3								
Aldo	M	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	21
N students achieving outcome				7	7	6	7	Average % absence 26%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.7. Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Reading at School C

Once again, time was the essence in these students' progress because as their age-year level progression through school increased there was evidence of a cumulative lag in

their progress. The sticking point was at the level 2 on the four major outcomes. Except for Steven, this lag was apparent in all the students' progress which was a concern. Aldo was showing some potential for consistent progress but time would expose the degree of progress he could make.

In Figure 9.8 the results show that the 10 students' writing development was similar to their reading. However, Steven, was not achieving at his expected year level for writing. The pattern of writing development in this school was of interest. At a particular level, most students were developing major outcomes 1 (use of texts), 2 (contextual understandings), and 4 (processes and strategies) but the major outcome 3 (conventions) appeared to be causing concern for 8 students. These students were not coping with the complexities of spelling, grammar, and punctuation at various levels. This was a similar result to School B and the issue is taken up again later in the chapter.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F ➜ Level 1								
Robbie	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	26
Amelda	F	5	6	✔	●	✔	●	22
Michael	M	5	6	●	●	✔	●	19
Mathew	M	7	8	●	●	●	●	63
Level 1								
Henri	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	10
Donald	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	22
Lloyd	M	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	50
Level 1 ➜ Level 2								
Steven	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	10
Maureen	F	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	20
Level 2 ➜ Level 3								
Aldo	M	10	11	✔	✔	●	✔	21
N students achieving outcome				8	7	2	7	Average % absence 26%

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.8.   Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Writing at School C

School D: Large Remote Aboriginal School

In School D, 33 students from the first 43 remained in the group at the second assessment point. Of these 33 students, the average rate of absenteeism was approximately 19% which was a lower rate than any of the three small remote Aboriginal schools. This rate tended to support the school's claim that many students in their school attended school in regular patterns. In Figure 9.9 the results show that 15 of the 19 students in the Kindergarten (5-year-olds) to Year 4 (9-year-olds) sub-group moved from one level to another (foundation level to level 1, level 1 to 2, level 2 to 3) in reading between the two assessment points. Further, 8 of the sub-group were achieving at expected year levels. It is notable that in this sub-group of 19 students, 14 students achieved some level on three major outcomes with the exceptions of Elvis (a special needs student who was unlikely to meet year level outcomes at any time in his schooling), Chloe (50% absence rate), Katiya (40% absence rate), Stephanie (21% absence rate), and Bradley (13% absence rate). Even though progress was evident for many Kindergarten to Year 4 students, and even though some of the patterns of progress varied, eleven of the 19 in this sub-group experienced trouble with the major outcome 3 (conventions) particularly when students grappled with the increased sophistication of the outcome from level 1 to level 2.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F								
Elvis	M	5	6	○	○	○	○	61
Level F → Level 1								
Ayisa	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	11
Nathan	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	30
Level 1								
Chloe	F	5	6	●	●	●	●	50
Albie	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	5
Byron	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	23
Level 1 → Level 2								
Fiona	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	13
Rosalie	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	25
Victor	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	24
Dimity	F	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	49
Andrew	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	20
Katiya	F	6	7	●	✔	●	✔	40
Stephanie	F	6	7	●	●	●	●	21
Gina	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	11
Jack	M	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	13
Level 2								
Rose	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	30

Note Rose was not included in the K-4 sub-group

(figure continues)

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level 2 → Level 3								
Darcy	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Humphrey	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	4
Raylene	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	9
Bradley	M	8	9	●	●	●	●	13
Level 2 → Level 3								
Sharron	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	15
Connor	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	8
Cathie	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	7
Max	M	9	10	●	●	●	●	25
Level 3								
Jaxon	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	16
Tiger	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	8
Janelle	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	18
Level 3 → Level 4								
Brok	M	10	11	●	●	✔	✔	10
Celine	F	10	11	●	●	✔	✔	12
Kaylene	F	11	12	✔	●	✔	✔	4
Mariah	F	11	12	●	●	✔	✔	17
Tina	F	11	12	●	●	●	●	6
Jaya	F	12	13	●	●	●	●	12
N students achieving outcome				17	17	12	21	Average % absence 19%

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.9. Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Reading at School D

In the middle primary (10-year-olds to 12-year-olds) and secondary (13-year-olds to 14-year-olds) areas of the school there was evidence of students' progress declining even though the attendance rate of this sub-group of 14 students (except for Max) was not a vexing issue. Based on my observations, there were several possible explanations for the gradual decline of reading progress as students moved though the school. First, students were not progressing through the critical phase of working with texts and the contextual understandings of texts with unfamiliar content. Second, there had been several teacher changes in these year levels during the time of the study and apparently over several years before. Third, based on my observations, the very strong approach to reading commenced in the Kindergarten to Year 4 years was not continuing in the upper years.

In Figure 9.10 a very similar pattern of progress is evident in the students' writing, with 15 students from Kindergarten to Year 4 making progress from one level on the four major outcomes to another. Seven students were achieving at year level expectations (Aylsa was the one student who did not match her progress in reading). Fifteen students in the Kindergarten to Year 4 sub-group progressed at least on three major outcomes in their writing except for Chloe, Stephanie, and Bradley, similarly to their reading, and Elvis was at risk also with his writing development. The older students' rate of progress in writing, mirroring that in their reading, was slower than their younger counterparts in the school. Similar to students' writing progress in School B and C, most of the students in this school were finding the major outcome 3 (conventions) to be troublesome in their learning.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level F								
Elvis	M	5	6	O	O	O	O	61
Level F → Level 1								
Aylsa	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	11
Nathan	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	30
Level 1								
Chloe	F	5	6	●	●	●	●	50
Albie	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	5
Byron	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	23
Level 1 → Level 2								
Fiona	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	13
Rosalie	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	25
Victor	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	24
Andrew	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	20
Katiya	F	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	40
Dimity	F	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	49
Stephanie	F	6	7	●	●	●	●	21
Jack	M	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	13
Gina	F	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	11
Level 2								
Rose	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	30
Level 2 → Level 3								
Darcy	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Humphrey	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	8
Raylene	F	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	9
Bradley	M	8	9	●	●	●	●	13
Sharron	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	15
Connor	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	8
Cathie	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	7
Max	M	9	10	●	●	●	●	25

(*figure continues*)

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level 3								
Jaxon	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	16
Tiger	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	8
Janelle	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	18
Level 3 ➡ Level 4								
Brok	M	10	11	✔	●	✔	✔	10
Celine	F	10	11	✔	●	✔	✔	12
Kaylene	F	11	12	✔	●	✔	✔	4
Mariah	F	11	12	●	●	●	●	17
Tina	F	11	12	●	●	●	✔	6
Jaya	F	12	13	●	●	●	●	12
N students achieving outcome				20	17	10	21	Average % absence 19%

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies

✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point

● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

O Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.10. Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Writing at School D

It must be noted that no students in School D were progressing beyond level 4 on the four major outcomes in either reading or writing. There is an expectation that many 13 and 14 year-olds are capable of achieving at this level and beyond. There was no evidence provided by the principal and teachers in the school that these older students did not have the potential to achieve and the overall attendance patterns of the older students between the two assessment points were consistent with no real reason for concern. From my questioning of teachers in the school, it appeared that these students liked coming to school and parents took their responsibility seriously to ensure that their children were at school. One of my observations, which may provide a possible explanation for the trend, is that in School D a primary trained teacher and therefore not a language specialist, by request of the school, had been appointed to teach the core subjects in Years 8 to 10. In Harmony School, the teacher of the Year 8 to 10 students was a secondary English subject specialist, and Melinda (see Figures 9.3 and 9.4), for example, was able to discuss literary devices such as metaphor which she could exemplify in a text. This possible explanation would require further investigation to ascertain if any relationship existed between a teacher's training and students' progress in reading and writing.

School E: Town School

In School E, 43 students remained in the group from the original 50 at the second assessment point and had an average absence rate of approximately 7.5%. In Figure 9.11 the results show that 24 students made progress from one level to another in reading between the two assessment points. However, of this group of 24 only 12 non-Aboriginal students were considered to be achieving at year level expectations. Shane and Adam, both Aboriginal students, and Peta consolidated the four major outcomes at their respective levels. What was apparent in this school was that none of the 10 Aboriginal students in the sampled group were achieving at year level expectations. However, Shane and Adam showed progress on the four major outcomes over the year but at levels that were below year level expectations. Alex, a 13-year-old, Aboriginal student showed promising progress at level 6 but time would tell if his potential would be realised.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level 1								
Melissa	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	●	20
Michael	M	5	6	●	●	✔	●	25
Shane	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	27
Level 1 → Level 2								
Adrian *	M	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Louise *	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Jason *	M	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Peter *	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	11
John *	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Natasha	F	6	7	✔	●	✔	✔	5
Jenny *	F	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	5
Paul *	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	6
Jeremy *	M	6	7	✔	●	●	✔	11
Level 2								
Adam	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Susan *	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	●	4
Morgan *	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	●	11
Roy	M	9	10	●	●	●	✔	47
Marissa	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	5
Karen	F	7	8	●	●	●	●	15
Jonathan *	M	10	11	○	○	○	○	2
Level 2 → Level 3								
Nicholas *	M	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	1
Helen *	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	8
Ashley *	M	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	10

(figure continues)

Figure 9.11. (*continued*)

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome ❶	Major Outcome ❷	Major Outcome ❸	Major Outcome ❹	% absences
Level 2 → Level 3 (continued)								
Jade *	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Elizabeth *	F	8	9	✔	●	✔	✔	5
Megan *	F	9	10	✔	●	✔	✔	7
Tracey *	F	8	9	✔	●	●	✔	0
Level 3								
Peta *	F	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Lynette *	F	10	11	✔	●	●	●	2
Robert	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	5
Brian *	M	13	14	●	○	○	●	4
Rodney	M	13	14	○	○	○	○	9
Level 3 → Level 4								
Steven *	M	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Christian *	M	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Robin *	F	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	5
Pauline *	F	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	4
Michelle *	F	12	13	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Level 4								
Andrea	F	12	13	●	●	●	●	7
Level 4 → Level 5								
Kellie *	F	12	13	✔	●	✔	✔	10
Level 5 → Level 6								
Kelsie *	F	12	13	✔	✔	✔	✔	6
Alex	M	12	13	✔	●	✔	✔	2
Level 6								
Barry *	M	13	14	●	●	●	●	1
Esme *	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	1
Caroline *	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	10
N students achieving outcome				31	23	25	28	Average % absence 7.5%

Notes on codes used

❶ Use of Texts   ❷ Contextual Understandings   ❸ Conventions   ❹ Processes and Strategies

✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point

● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point

* Non-Aboriginal student

Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.11. Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Reading at School E

Furthermore, while the sub-group of 26 Kindergarten to Year 4 students (5-year-olds to 9-year olds) made reasonably consistent progress on all the major outcomes at their respective levels, this was not the pattern in the group of 17 students in Year 5 to Year 9 (10-year-olds to 14 year-olds). Approximately half of this group were not progressing smoothly through the increasing complexities of the different levels on the

four major outcomes. In Figure 9.12 the results show that students' writing progress was similar to that in reading except for one main difference. Only 15 of the 43 students in the group (7 students in Kindergarten-Year 4; 8 students in Years 5-9) progressed on major outcomes 3 (conventions) which was similar to the results in Schools B, C, and D. No Aboriginal students in the group achieved 4 major outcomes in writing between the two assessment points at any level, although Alex continued to show consistent progress similar to his reading. However, the results show that non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students alike were finding major outcome 3 a difficult outcome to achieve at most levels of the outcome.

	Sex	Age in years '96	'97	Major Outcome 1	Major Outcome 2	Major Outcome 3	Major Outcome 4	% absences
Level 1								
Melissa	F	5	6	✔	✔	●	●	20
Michael	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	●	25
Shane	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	27
Level 1 → Level 2								
Adrian *	M	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Louise *	F	5	6	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Jason *	M	5	6	✔	✔	●	✔	3
Peter *	M	6	7	✔	✔	✔	✔	11
John *	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	2
Paul *	M	6	7	✔	✔	●	✔	6
Natasha	F	6	7	✔	●	●	✔	5
Jenny *	F	6	7	●	✔	●	✔	5
Jeremy *	M	6	7	✔	●	●	●	11
Karen	F	7	8	●	●	●	●	15
Level 2								
Susan *	F	8	9	✔	✔	✔	✔	4
Adam	M	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	2
Roy	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	47
Morgan *	M	9	10	✔	✔	●	✔	11
Marissa	F	9	10	●	●	●	●	5
Jonathan *	M	10	11	○	○	○	○	2
Level 2 → Level 3								
Helen *	F	7	8	✔	✔	✔	✔	8
Nicholas *	M	7	8	✔	✔	●	✔	1
Jade *	F	8	9	✔	●	✔	✔	3
Elizabeth *	F	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	5
Tracey *	F	8	9	✔	✔	●	✔	0
Ashley *	M	8	9	✔	●	●	✔	10
Megan *	F	9	10	✔	●	●	✔	7
Level 3								
Peta *	F	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Lynette *	F	10	11	✔	●	●	●	2
Robert	M	12	13	●	●	●	●	5
Rodney	M	13	14	○	●	○	●	9
Brian *	M	13	14	○	○	○	○	4

figure continues)

Figure 9.12. (continued)

Level 3 ➜ Level 4

Steven *	M	9	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	2
Christian *	M	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Robin *	F	10	11	✔	✔	✔	✔	5
Michelle *	F	12	13	✔	✔	✔	✔	3
Pauline *	F	10	11	✔	●	✔	✔	4
Level 4								
Andrea	F	12	13	●	●	●	●	7
Level 4 ➜ Level 5								
Kellie *	F	12	13	✔	✔	✔	✔	10
Level 5 ➜ Level 6								
Kelsie *	F	12	13	✔	✔	✔	✔	6
Alex	M	12	13	✔	●	✔	✔	2
Level 6								
Barry *	M	13	14	●	●	●	●	1
Esme *	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	1
Caroline *	F	13	14	●	●	●	●	10
								Average % absence
N students achieving outcome				32	25	15	29	7.5%

Notes on codes used
❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies
✔ A particular level achieved on a major outcome at the second assessment point
● Making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
○ Showing no progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point
* Non-Aboriginal student
Shaded area denotes a student who has reached year level expectation

Figure 9.12. Profile of Levels Students Achieved in Writing at School E

At this school it must be recognised that many of the upper primary and secondary students were working at levels 4, 5, and 6. This pattern of achievement at these levels would be expected for this age group of students. These students' writing development tended to match their reading development which may be explained by the increased expectation of older students to demonstrate their learning through written texts. Older students' sophisticated use of texts was evident only in this school. The one exception was Melinda at Harmony School.

The Relationship between Student Achievement and Absenteeism

A variable of interest in the study was the possible impact of absentee rates on student achievement in both reading and writing. To examine the relationship the following calculations were completed. First, to derive an achievement rating for each school, the number of students achieving each of the four major outcomes at the second assessment point were totalled. The total was irrespective of the various levels at

which each outcome was achieved. That is, a student achieved 4, 3, 2, 1, or 0 outcomes in each of reading and writing according to some level of sophistication. Students still making some progress at a particular level on a major outcome at the second assessment point (coded ● in the previous Figures 9.3 to 9.12) were deemed not to have achieved an outcome even though some progress was evident in their samples of work. Second, an average percentage absentee rate for the total students achieving the number of outcomes was calculated. These data are shown in Table 9.7 for reading and Table 9.8 for writing.

Table 9.7.   *Number of Students, Number of Outcomes Achieved in Reading, and Averages of Student Absentee Rates*

	Number of Outcomes Achieved				
	4	3	2	1	0
Harmony School					
N students	7	2	1	2	1
Average % absences	16.3	33.5	24.0	12.0	57.0
Range % absences	3-24	23-44	24	9-15	57
School B					
N students	1	5	0	2	1
Average % absences	5.0	5.4	0	35.5	84.0
Range % absences	5	1-21	0	1-69	84
School C					
N students	4	3	0	2	1
Average % absences	15.3	32.6	0	20.5	63.0
Range % absences	10-21	22-50	0	19-22	63
School D					
N students	8	9	4	0	12
Average % absences	11.9	19.8	19.8	0	22.3
Range % absences	4-24	4-49	10-40	0	6-61
School E					
N students	18	8	4	3	10
Average % absences	5.8	4.6	12.2	24.6	5.9
Range % absences	1-27	0-10	7-20	2-47	1-15
Total N students	38	27	9	9	25

These results show an overall picture of reading achievement in the 108-student sample and an individual case study school picture showing the number of outcomes students achieved at the second assessment point. Approximately 35% (38 students) of the sample achieved 4 of the major outcomes, 25% (27 students) achieved 3, 8% (9 students) achieved 2, 8% (9 students) achieved 1, and 23% (25 students) achieved no outcomes. Approximately 60% (65 students) of the sample achieved 4 or 3 outcomes

which provides some evidence that government schools in the Kimberley can foster success in students' reading achievement. Of concern was that 23% (25 students) of the sample did not achieve any outcomes, although in individual profiles any progress that students had made, or not, was mapped as illustrated in Figures 9.3 to 9.12.

In Figure 9.13 the comparison between the number of outcomes students achieved in reading and the averages of their absentee rates in each of the case study schools is graphically represented. It is apparent that a consistent and direct relationship between absenteeism and achievement is not shown in the results. However, two discernible patterns are evident in this student sample, even though it is inherently biased.

■ Harmony School ■ School B ❑ School C ❑ School D ■ School E

Figure 9.13. Comparison of the Number of Outcomes Students Achieved in Reading and the Averages of Student Absentee Rates in the Five Case Study Schools

1. Students' average absentee rates were below 20% in all the schools, and notably below 6% in Schools B (1 student) and E (18 students), where 35% (38 students) in the sample achieved 4 outcomes. An additional 25% of the sample (27 students) achieved 3 outcomes when average absentee rates were below 34%, and notably again, below 6% in Schools B (5 students) and E (8 students). The concern here is that 14 students who missed approximately 20% or more of their schooling still were able to achieve at least three outcomes in reading. Perhaps higher attendance rates for these students could have improved their achievement.

2. Approximately 17% of the sample (18 students) who achieved 2 or 1 outcome had average absentee rates below 36% but the absentee rates ranged between 1%-69%. The three students in the small remote Aboriginal schools (Harmony School, School B, and School C), who did not achieve any of the major outcomes all had

absentee rates of 57% or more. In contrast, in School D, the large remote Aboriginal school, the absentee rate for the 12 students who achieved no outcomes was approximately 22% and in School E, the town school, it was approximately 6% for 10 students. There is a tentative suggestion in these results that the higher the absentee rates of some students the poorer is their reading achievement. However, a generalised relationship between attendance and reading achievement cannot be claimed conclusively in this study.

In Table 9.8 the results for the number of writing outcomes achieved at the second assessment point in the 108-student sample are illustrated. Approximately 24% of the sample (26 students) achieved 4 of the major outcomes, 36% (39 students) achieved 3, 11% (12 students) achieved 2, 5% (5 students) achieved 1, and 24% (26 students) achieved no outcomes.

Table 9.8. *Number of Students, Number of Outcomes in Writing, and Averages of Student Absentee Rates*

School	Number of Outcomes Achieved				
	4	3	2	1	0
Harmony School					
N Students	6	1	3	1	2
Average % Absences	16.0	18.0	30.3	9.0	36.0
Range % absences	3-21	18	23-44	9	15-57
School B					
N Students	1	5	2	0	1
Average % Absences	5.0	5.4	35.5	0	84.0
Range % absences	5	1-21	1-69	0	84
School C					
N Students	0	7	1	1	1
Average % Absences	0	22.7	22.0	19.0	63.0
Range % absences	0	10-26	22	19	63
School D					
N Students	7	13	0	1	12
Average % Absences	15.6	17.5	0	6.0	23.0
Range % absences	4-25	4-49	0	6	7-61
School E					
N Students	12	13	6	2	10
Average % Absences	5.5	8.7	12.0	6.5	5.9
Range % absences	2-11	0-47	5-25	2-11	1-15
Total N students	26	39	12	5	26

Approximately 60% (65 students) in the sample achieved 4 or 3 outcomes which is much the same overall result as the achievement result in reading. However, fewer students achieved 4 outcomes in writing than in reading but more achieved 3 outcomes. The concern here, similarly to students' reading achievement, is that 24% of the sample (26 students), who missed over 23% of their schooling, were not achieving any writing outcomes.

In Figure 9.14 the comparison between the number of outcomes students achieved in writing and the averages of their absentee rates in each of the case study schools is graphically represented. Two discernible patterns, again, are evident in this student sample.
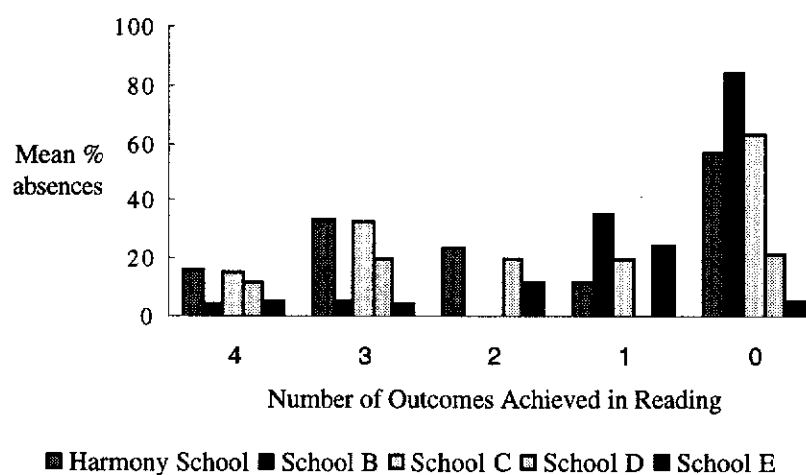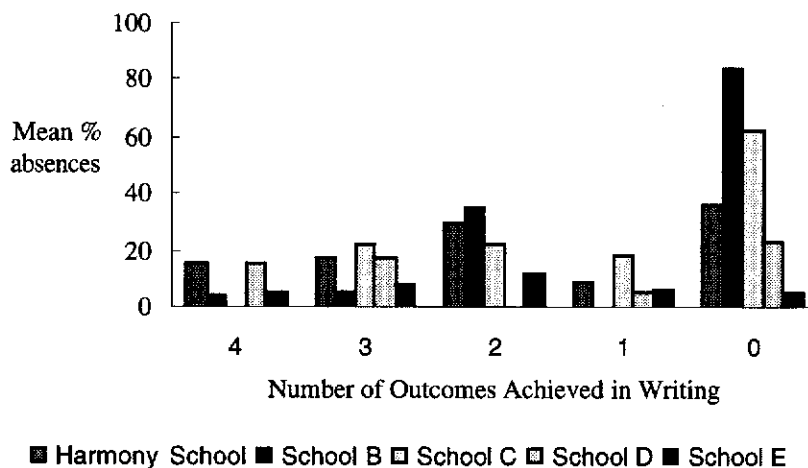

Figure 9.14. Comparison of the Number of Outcomes Students Achieved in Writing and the Averages of Students Absentee Rates in the Five Case Study Schools

1. Students' average absentee rates were below 16% in Harmony School and Schools, B, D, and E, and notably below 6% in Schools B (1 student) and E (12 students), for the 24% (26 students) of the sample who achieved 4 outcomes. None of the students at School C achieved 4 outcomes. Thirty-six percent of the sample (39 students) achieved 3 outcomes with average absentee rates below 23%, and notably again, below 9% in Schools B (5 students) and E (13 students). Where absentee rates were below 23%, 60% (65 students) of the students in the sample achieved either 4 or 3 outcomes. The difference in the results for writing was that the lower absentee rate of 16%, compared with the 20% in reading, related to fewer students (26 students in writing compared to 38 students in reading) achieving 4 outcomes. The tentative suggestion here is that there seemed to be a more direct relationship between students' achievement in writing and

absenteeism. The more time students attended school the better was their writing achievement.

2. The 17 students across the case study schools who achieved 2 or 1 outcome had absentee rates below 35% but the absence rates ranged between 1%-69%. In the Harmony School, School B, and School C, when absentee rates were 36% and over, students did not achieve any of the major outcomes. It must be noted that this represents only 4 students across the three schools. In School D, the absentee rate for the 12 students who achieved no outcomes was approximately 23% and School E, the town school, it was approximately 6% for 10 students.

In the next part of this chapter the successful practices that support students' progress and achievement at each of the schools are backmapped. As stated earlier, backmapping is concerned with analysing students' learning styles, learning processes and teaching strategies developed in classrooms, the organisation, management, and climate to be found in schools, and the home-school relationships that schools fostered in their communities in relation to the progress students made in each school. The backmapping process is a reminder of the variations in the operations of schools and classrooms that were revealed in the survey results discussed in chapter seven.

Classroom and School Practices that Improve Student Progress

In the backmapping process reference is made to successful practices that I judged to be evident to some degree, or not, in the case study schools. These judgements were based on a synthesis of the analysis of the information gathered during the three phases of the study and were confirmed with two key informants. The key informants were my District liaison person throughout the study and the District Superintendent at the time of the study. These people were intimately familiar with many aspects of school life in all schools in the District. As a school psychologist, my District liaison person was privy to many of the challenges schools, teachers, and students faced. As the District Superintendent, my key informant was skilled in the evaluation of schools, the performance management of principals, and working with the day-to-day issues and crises that befall schools. These informants were able to speak generally to me about the case study schools without compromising their privileged positions in relation to these schools.

In this part of the chapter, a review of the student progress and achievement in the case study schools is considered in terms of each of the four major outcomes, irrespective

of the level, that students achieved. These total numbers are shown in the previous figures, inclusive of 9.3 to 9.12, and focus on the examination of all students' progress in each school in relationship to the nature of the outcomes: use of texts, contextual understandings, conventions, and processes and strategies applied to texts. There are some patterns of interest in these results and in Table 9.9 the percentage of students achieving each of the major outcomes in each of the case study schools are presented.

Table 9.9.   *Percentage of Students Achieving Major Outcomes in Reading and Writing in the Case Study Schools*

	% of Students Achieving Major Outcomes			
School	❶	❷	❸	❹
Harmony: N students = 13				
Reading	77	77	62	62
Writing	69	54	77	62
School B: N students = 9				
Reading	67	56	45	67
Writing	89	56	45	67
School C: N students = 10				
Reading	70	70	60	70
Writing	80	70	20	70
School D: N students = 33				
Reading	52	52	36	64
Writing	61	52	30	64
School E: N students = 43				
Reading	72	54	58	65
Writing	74	58	35	67

Note : ❶ Use of Texts ❷ Contextual Understandings ❸ Conventions ❹ Processes and Strategies

At Harmony School there was consistent achievement across all the major outcomes in reading and writing except for the contextual understandings outcome in writing (major outcome 2). In School B, a small remote school, the achievement of outcomes was varied. Students were extremely enthusiastic about using texts to write but the conventions outcome required focus in classroom both reading and writing programs. In School C, another small remote school, students showed consistent achievement across most outcomes in both reading and writing although, achievement on the conventions outcome was a serious concern. In School D, the large remote school in

the study, students' progress was consistent across the major outcomes 1, 2, and 4. As mentioned, a good foundation in reading and writing was being laid in the K-4 classes but this was not being built upon in the upper year levels. However, in School D the conventions outcomes required close attention. In School E, the town school, there was evidence that the achievement of students was not optimal given the quality of the physical and human resources available in the school. Students were making headway on the use of texts (which would have been supported in some way by the well-resourced school library) and applying communication processes and strategies to texts but their lack of achievement on contextual understandings and, significantly, conventions was noticeable. Primary aged students' achievement in this school did not outstrip their peers in the other case study schools, but as noted, none of the Aboriginal students who participated in the study at this school were meeting year level expectations. In contrast, it was pointed out that several Aboriginal students were meeting year level expectations in the remote schools and this group was significant in the K-4 group of students at School D. In School E several secondary students were moving beyond level 4 outcomes which, in the main, outstripped their secondary peers in the remote schools.

Backmapping from Student Progress

The backmapping of the five case study schools is drawn together in several ways to form a matrix to map classroom and school practices in each of the case study schools. Several categories were used.

- Categories defined in the literature (Dimmock, 1995; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996) such as students' learning styles, learning processes and teaching strategies developed in classrooms, and the organisation, management, and climate to be found in schools were considered.
- The broad categories of student, classroom, school, and home-school relationships consistently used in the study for data collection and analysis were retained.
- The descriptions of ideas, extrapolated from the survey and tabled in chapter seven, were referred to.
- The themes that emerged in the pilot study and were strengthened or expanded in the portrayal of Harmony School in chapter eight as an ideal type were examined.

The matrix is graphically represented in Figures 9.14 (classroom level), 9.15 (school level), and 9.16 (home-school level) to show the judgements I made about the case study schools.

What was Happening at the Classroom Level to Support Students' Progress?

Why was student progress at Harmony School the most consistent of all student progress in the case study schools? In the classrooms many effective practices were in place consistently across all classrooms. The three teachers and the teaching principal at Harmony expended much personal time, which was freely given, to organise for teaching which generated great enthusiasm for learning in their classrooms. These teachers were exceptionally well organised and able to deal calmly with the unexpected, which often was the situation. Because these teachers prepared a saturated learning agenda that met students' needs and interests, there was hive-like activity in classrooms with short-term goals to be achieved. The Aboriginal students thrived in this type of atmosphere and these teachers did not have classroom management problems because they created physical and social space for learning. The students could move easily inside and outside of the classroom and the teachers, like the students, roved around constantly taking an intensive interest in what everyone was doing on their independent contracts. This process afforded time for teachers to work on explicit teaching with individuals and smaller groups. Students were easily motivated to keep on their learning tasks but teachers had to be physically and emotionally "fit" because creating this type of classroom demanded much of their energy all day, every day.

Besides being well prepared for teaching, these teachers promoted predictable, routined classrooms, where everyone was clear about the codes of expected classroom behaviour; students were afforded respect, teachers were revered, and classrooms operated in fair and just ways to ensure everyone's rights were protected and everyone took on their responsibilities willing. Students responded to the personal approach of teachers more than any particular teaching strategy, although my observations of the teachers at Harmony School matched the Garcia (cited in Cummins, 1998) model of Educational Effectiveness for Culturally Diverse Students (see Figure 4.3). Language was central to all learning activities, teachers encouraged high levels of communication in classrooms, and students collaborated within family-like settings. In these classrooms it also was clear that student expected their teachers to be responsible for the teaching. Teachers had to work especially hard trying to establish students' independent learning so that they took an active rather than a passive role in learning

which is counter to their traditional ways (watching, imitating, chattering with their social groups to form ideas, relying on their autonomy, and moving around frequently). Teachers maintained a delicate balance between students' preferred ways of learning and non-indigenous learning strategies (questioning, reflecting, making mistakes, taking risks, trying again) to enable students to cope with progress in education. Moreover, the teachers at Harmony School constantly and explicitly modelled all language forms and skills, especially in oral language, over and over again. And the significant point to this repetitive teaching and learning was finding the vicissitudes, the variety, the different, and the diverse, to retain students' interest in day-to-day activities. The modelling of code switching supported students' language learning by using their own language in concert with the classroom language. This allowed students to develop an understanding of how language and behaviour codes changed. Successful monitoring of the students was continuous and informal based on the rule of thumb "teach a little; test a little" Every piece of students' work was marked and every error reviewed. This approach also included the daily setting and review of homework and regular, and mostly informal, reporting to parents. The teachers monitored progress this way because they realised that students could not be made to learn, therefore, they had to find the ways that ensured students wanted to learn. Part of ensuring students learned was tied to how the curriculum content was thematically planned around family and community topics necessarily required for rural communities. The curriculum for the whole school was linked to the students' learning of language (speaking, listening, viewing, reading, and writing SAE) and mathematics. The content areas of social studies and the environment, science, technology, and especially health, were integrated around themes and closely linked to language activities to allow students to develop understandings about living in a modern world. One argument here is that the integrated approach reduced the depth of the curriculum for students but art, music, and physical education featured in the students' learning.

Many teachers in the other schools worked in the same way as the teachers in Harmony School but this was not always consistently the case across every classroom in each school. The three significant issues emerged in the backmapping of students' progress to classroom practices. These were concerned with:

- calm, stability, and order in classroom environments;
- consistency in pedagogy across all classrooms within a school but variety of activities within classrooms; and
- continuity in students' progress as they moved from one year level to the next.

The inconsistency in effective classroom operations tended to be idiosyncratic either related to individual teachers or particular school situations as I have shown my ratings in Figure 9.15.

Criteria for Judgement	Harmony School	School B	School C	School D	School E
Preparation and Planning for Teaching					
Short term goals used	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Students' interests/needs accommodated	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Individual learning contracts prepared	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Classroom Management					
Students met appropriate codes of behaviour	✔	●	✔	●	✔
Classrooms routined with purpose	✔	●	✔	●	●
Students warmly respected and treated fairly	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Learning Environment					
Teachers personalised relationships	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Social relationships used for learning	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Students cooperated with peers and teachers	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Teaching Practices					
Teachers constantly active and moving	✔	✔	●	●	●
Language central to all teaching	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Individualised contracts for learning	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Teachers modelled what needed to be learnt	✔	●	●	●	●
Learning Processes					
Students used preferred ways to learn	✔	●	✔	●	●
Students used non-indigenous ways to learn	●	●	●	●	●
Students were independent in their learning	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Students were always active in their learning	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Homework was part of students' leaning	✔	○	○	●	✔
Curriculum Content					
Curriculum content was integrated	✔	✔	✔	✔	●
Curriculum focussed on learning the basics	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Curriculum focussed on learning for living	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Monitoring Students					
Monitoring was frequent and informal	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Reporting to parents was regular	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Students were encouraged to self-evaluate	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Key: ✔ Consistently across the school ● Inconsistently across the school ○ Not evident in the school

Figure 9.15. Criteria Used to Rate the Success of Operations at the Classroom Level

Some exemplary classroom practices cannot go unnoticed in the schools besides Harmony School. In the two-teacher School B there was a K-4 teacher who had a gift for fostering the students' love of texts, especially creating their own. This teacher was new to the school in the second year of the study and her aim was to develop the students' reading and writing outcomes in better ways. The gaps in students' progress previously noted pointed to goal setting in her future program. In the two-teacher

School C there was also a very competent teacher in the K-4 area who was developing students' literacy skills. Unfortunately, this teacher transferred from the school by the second year of the study. While the replacement teacher was very skilled, there was some interruption to students' classroom routines. In School D there were eight teachers and I have mentioned the rich K-4 language approach taken in the school by four of the teachers. The Kindergarten teacher operated a learning program in a well-resourced, spacious classroom that was a joy to observe. Children in this program experienced a balance of whole group approaches to learning and self-choice activities that were planned to meet individual needs. This teacher was a permanent resident in her community and was held in high regard by parents and colleagues. Another strong aspect of this teacher's work was the cooperative planning links she made as a key teacher with the Year 1- 4 teachers in the school, all highly competent practitioners experienced in teaching Aboriginal students. The teacher combination gave 4- to 9-year-old students in the school a running start to their learning. The transition links for students between these teachers gave them continuity in their learning, something that appeared to be crucial to support students' progress.

In School E there was a big and diversely specialised primary and secondary staff where the class sizes were between 20-30 students. There was a very strong Year 1 and 2 group of six teachers who were able to cater for a wide range of students' needs. Also, in this school, a Year 7 teacher, a permanent resident and with several years of teaching experience, was able to plan individual learning contracts for her students to cater for the wide range of abilities in her class of 27. The business studies teacher with 25 years teaching experience, and also a permanent resident, operated a Business Studies program for 13- to 15-year-olds. The classroom was set up with a network of computers and students were able to work with their own computer on their individual contracts to learn and practise skills. An exceptional physical education program conducted by a specialist teacher across the entire school was a vital part of students' education. The energy and personal time these individual teachers devoted to their students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were inspirational but not all their colleagues shared the same commitment to students. The larger number of students in classrooms in this school placed a strain on teachers trying to grapple with the wide and varying needs of their students. In the smaller classes it was evident that the learning environments were more teacher-student personalised and based on individually developed relationships, individualised learning programs, and tailored daily work contracts.

In this study the investigation of classroom operations highlighted the literature discussed in chapter four (Carroll, 1963, 1989; Creemers, 1996b; Levine, 1992; Riddell et al., 1998; Scheerens, 1992; Skilbeck, 1995; Stringfield & Slavin, 1992). The literature and the study underscored how classroom practices were closely linked to student learning and progress and that there were wide variations between classroom operations in different schools and, more to the point, within the same school. The school differences were more noticeable as the staff size increased in a school.

What was Happening at the School Level to Support Students' Progress?

What were the operations in Harmony School that better supported teachers in their classroom work? Many of the operations in the case study schools reminded me of how Rosenholtz (1989) used the terms "moving schools" (learning enriched) and "stuck schools" (learning impoverished) to describe degrees of effectiveness. She characterised stuck schools as having a maintenance mentality and listless staff who lacked attachment to anything or anybody, who were self-reliant and resistant to taking advice, and who lacked faith in their leaders. It needs to be reiterated here that Harmony School was a very small school but a small number of staff in a school did not mean that school accord and systematic planning were necessarily gained without effort. Financial resources were adequate at Harmony School, but staff were trying constantly to improve their physical, material, and human resources. All these teachers were very experienced in teaching Aboriginal students and in isolated locations, but the main issue for the school was that all the staff required continued professional development in teaching students with English as their second language (ESL). Staff were working together with a democratic and leading principal, classrooms were organised, teachers knew what they were doing, and they were catering for their students' progress. The teachers had a strong, unified school direction and their classroom directions worked in concert with the school plan and common school goals. The language focus in school planning showed an impact on students' consistent progress in language although the students' slower progress on the contextual understandings outcome suggested that students' comprehension of text beyond the literal level was difficult to foster. Some students' individual learning capacities were constrained, everyday life was not lived using the English language, and school textbooks contained experiences far removed from those of the students. These teachers' dedication, care, passion, and love for their work created strong professional relationships in the school and everyone put in an extra work effort despite the frustrations. They received few personal rewards but were strengthened by the group effort. Harmony School could be described as a learning enriched school but in the

other case study schools there were differing degrees of success in school level operations. In Figure 9.16 an overview of how I rated school level operations in each of the case study schools is shown.

Criteria for Judgement	Harmony School	School B	School C	School D	School E
Resources					
Financial resources were adequate	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Equipment was being constantly improved	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Resources were used effectively	✔	✔	●	✔	✔
Staff had required expertise for the school	✔	●	●	●	●
School Planning					
There was a commitment to school planning	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
School planning focussed on SAE	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Long term plan for year level expectations	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
School planning transcended into all classes	✔	●	●	●	●
Decision making shared, open, transparent	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Communication purposeful	✔	✔	✔	●	●
School policies negotiated for development	✔	✔	●	●	●
Culture of trust, cooperation, shared power	✔	✔	●	●	●
School Leadership					
Leadership based on democracy	✔	✔	●	○	●
Leadership fostered teacher learning	✔	✔	●	○	●
Leadership managed change	✔	✔	●	○	●
PD met school and teacher needs	✔	✔	●	●	●
School Climate					
Safe, orderly, friendly, caring	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Students were trusted and genuinely liked	✔	✔	✔	●	●
Culture of success in the school	✔	●	●	✔	✔

Key: ✔ Consistently across the school ● Inconsistently across the school ○ Not evident in the school

Figure 9.16. Criteria Used to Rate the Success of Operations at the School Level

Although the mandated school development planning policy was progressing in all schools there was little transference of whole school planning into individual classrooms. Unlike Harmony School, it seemed there were few who knew how to make school plans consistently operational across classrooms. In the smaller schools it was difficult to see the school plan much beyond two teachers' individual classroom plans. From my perspective planning was over documented. There could be more efficient ways of combing school and classroom levels of planning. In the larger schools, there were more situations that existed to allow teachers to work on their own, contend with poor team spirit, experience poor communication, and be exposed to poor collaborative decision making and the like. In some schools it was difficult to find any school-wide ownership of the school plans. Leaders in these schools believed adamantly in the value of school planning but many teachers saw school planning as

an inconvenience to their classroom programs because they used too much classroom time for school planning. School planning got in the way of their real work. The differences in the schools mostly stemmed from the varying capacities of principals to be respected as leaders, manage and coordinate change, and to select staff with the required expertise necessary to meet the schools' needs. However, there were aspects of school planning that worked in some schools or sections of schools.

Staff in School B were building up newer resources such as a modern community playground set-up and trying to reorganise the classroom environments. Classrooms were cramped in a makeshift building with limited space for storage. There was a focus on language in its School Development Plan but this was achieving only a modicum of success for the students. Students had a great enthusiasm for writing, as noted, and I attributed students' enthusiasm to the great flair that one of their teachers possessed for teaching writing. The students' positive attitude towards writing was reflected in the way they completed the assessment tasks for me. However, the students' progress at this school suggested to me, and was confirmed by my classroom observations, that teaching approaches were not consistent across the reading and writing strands of language in the school. The inconsistency of teaching also may be explained by the complete change over of staff from one year to the next. I observed significant changes in classroom operations at the school during the time of the study. Similarly, the teaching principals changed in the school during the study and school planning seemed to lose momentum and became disjointed from one year to the next; one principal focussed more on his classroom teaching and the other focussed more on school level operations leaving the teaching to his other staff member.

In School C there were ample material resources; a modern playground that was used for long periods during school time and after school, an often used mini-motorbike for the students as a reward system, several computers to supplement the students' learning strategies and playing computers games, and a good supply of books. There had been a 50% change over of staff during the study but the teaching principal had remained. He had a nonchalant, laissez-faire approach to running the school and based on my observations, he and his co-teacher focussed in different ways on language development in the School Development Plan and their classroom work. As noted, students were achieving fragmented success in the learning area and students' lack of progress on the writing conventions outcome was evident. Students made plenty of use of the computers for much of the composing of their texts which may have made the act of writing less transparent so students did not develop their composing skills. Further, based on my observations, there was a greater emphasis in the K-4 area of the

school on reading and perhaps the results in students' writing progress were a reflection of these influences.

School D was a highly-resourced school with spacious classrooms and plenty of well-groomed grounds for students to play in (but not after school!). The principal had an autocratic style of managing the school, staff, students, and parents which did not encourage them to participate in cooperative decision making or school planning. However, there was a very strong and exemplary whole language approach to learning developed for the K to 4 students. However, this program was self-contained within the team of teachers so the success in reading and writing was not continued throughout the upper levels of the school. The school's priority on language in the School Development Plan was only partly being achieved. The K-4 students in this school were showing promising progress but in Years 5 to 9 all the students in the group progressed more slowly and the Years 8 to 9 students all progressed at even slower rate. The School Development Plan did not transcend into all classrooms. In this school students' progress on all outcomes needed some review and particularly the conventions outcome in both reading and writing.

School E, the town school, had an exceptionally high level and a wide-ranging variety of resources and buildings. This school was comparable to any well-resourced school in WA but it had a "Balkanised" culture around particular social sets. The influences of these cliques stalled whole school change. Once again, a very strong whole language approach to learning language from K-4 was conducted by a team of teachers, several of whom were highly experienced in the early years of education and teaching Aboriginal students. The school had an innovative language program institutionalised in the school which had been implemented with a strong base of teacher professional development. Also, the school deployed two subject-expert key teachers, in the language and mathematics areas, to support teachers. The language key teachers focussed on integrated language learning strategies across the secondary subject areas and this program was developing success for the students. As noted in Figure 9.11 several secondary students were making progress on outcomes beyond level 4. During the course of the study the mathematics key teacher assessed every primary age child in the school to develop their mathematics achievement profile. This mapping exercise had revealed gaps in the learning and teaching at various year levels and had led to the key teacher mentoring teachers. The key teacher assisted teachers to develop more effective mathematics programs, pedagogy, and assessment strategies by working alongside them in planning meetings, discussion groups, and in their classrooms as a critical friend. This was a best practice in school planning that linked

school goals to action in the classrooms to create improvement in students' achievements. However, in this school the strength of the program did not appear to be reaching the Aboriginal students. Furthermore, one school participant in the study, an experienced early childhood year level teacher in Aboriginal communities, lamented about how the school's innovative language program, introduced at great cost in previous years, was fraying at the edges in the primary school. As new staff arrived there were inadequate resources to induct them into the scheme of things. The teacher predicted that the innovation eventually would be lost.

Disempowering cultures and unsystematic school planning in schools affected the way teachers worked. While a direct relationship between students' progress and leadership is not drawn in this study, I believe that effective leadership in the Kimberley schools:

- made everyone's day-to-day classroom work easier;
- engendered a congenial workplace environment which alleviated some of the personal stresses teachers experienced;
- ensured school plans went into operation in all classrooms across the school; and
- created a close link between the school, parents, and the community.

In the schools where leadership was not functional teachers tried to cope in different ways. Some just withdrew into their classrooms and taught the best way they knew how, some became despondent and dreamed of the day they could transfer out of the school, and others confronted the principal on every opportunity or undermined the school's stability in subversive ways.

What was Happening at the Home-School Level to Support Students' Progress

Why did Harmony School enjoy a strong and productive relationship with its community? The main reason was that parents in the community desired to have their say in the directions that the school pursued and the school responded to this goal in a purposeful way. Apart from Harmony School, School B enjoyed a particularly positive relationship with its community. In this community the school was the focal point of daily life and parents wandered in and out of the school throughout the day and became involved in many of the school's social activities. This community was resources-poor but its school was highly valued. This community was regarded merely as a "stop over" place for many families as they moved around the Kimberley. In this school the transience rate was high but the school was one place that was predictable

in families' lives and was the main building and meeting place for anyone who visited the community. In the other three case study schools the home-school links were not strong although parents always came to events such as assemblies and special occasions. Parents did not respond to the schools' initiatives to involve them actively in the schools and they rarely communicated with the schools unless there was a complaint to be made. In all the schools the AEWs were pivotal in building home-school links and they were paramount to supporting students' learning at school. The AEWs were the cornerstones to linking the LOTE programs to community people and they were instrumental in getting traditional language speakers, who were mostly elderly, to the schools for lessons. In Figure 9.17 the judgements about home-school relationships in the case study schools are shown.

	Harmony	School B	School C	School D	School E
Parent Involvement					
The school assisted parents work with the school	✔	✔	O	✔	✔
Parents were supportive of the school's work	✔	✔	O	O	✔
LOTE was part of school planning	✔	●	✔	✔	●
Parents attended school functions	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Community and School Accord					
Building for the future	✔	O	O	O	✔
The school was valued	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Key: ✔ Consistently across the school ● Inconsistently across the school O Not evident in the school

Figure 9.17. Criteria Used to Judge Success at the Home-School Level

The tenuous home-school links in the schools were not just with the totally Aboriginal communities. It appeared, as reported in the literature, that schools did not always work with their communities in the best ways possible. Parents had little awareness of how schools worked, what was happening for their children, or how they could go about supporting their children to achieve school success. There were several reasons for this problem. In the main, many parents were too busy with their own lives and school was not a first consideration in their scheme of things. Others had their own unfavourable school experiences and found schools daunting places to be in. The bureaucratic structure of schools was not understood by parents, especially Aboriginal parents and their children. The fact that parents did not come to the school, however, did not indicate their lack of care for their children. They were "put off" being associated with the school because they felt unwelcomed, intentionally or otherwise. However in School E there was a dedicated room for Aboriginal parents and children. Those who worked with the Aboriginal people, such as the AEWs and a key teacher, were making a concerted effort to develop a home visiting strategy and talk with

parents to forge better relationships with them. Someone was always rostered "on duty" in the dedicated room to respond to anyone who phoned or visited. Small groups of parents were brought together for conversations and shown various aspects of the school and how things worked. There was an attempt to make parents feel more comfortable with being around the school.

Making Judgements about the Success of Schools

Proudfoot and Baker (1994) said that the successful school is the one that tackles its contemporary educational challenges, including those that stem from the nature of the school community. In describing some ideals in Harmony School to identify a *standard* (an ideal) for the study, as suggested by Glickman (1987), the backmapping process allowed me to identify those classroom and school practices that were associated with student progress. School level factors can provide a basis for straightforward comparisons of schools but the claim in this study is that it is classrooms where the teaching and learning action occurs. Classroom teachers and the way they work had a significant impact on the progress of students. Mortimore (1998) believed school effectiveness research should investigate the progress of the individual learners. In this study the way in which the assessment of students was conducted and analysed enabled school classroom success to be judged according to the progress students made in their learning. Lingard et al. (1998) posed the question "What effects make a difference, for whom, when and how?" Phase three in the study has revealed that schools in the Kimberley did make a difference for their students and did have an effect on them, but the effects varied from school to school. The variations were due to how tightly classroom and school operations were coupled. When classroom and school level operations worked in synchrony students were able to make more consistent progress across the year levels. The student assessment aspect of the study also confirmed that many Aboriginal students in the schools did not achieve quality outcomes in terms of meeting year level expectations. However, most Aboriginal students made some degree of progress at school especially in their early years but this progress, and the efforts of schools to promote success, is not captured when benchmark type testing is administered. The monitoring of students' learning through specially designed authentic tasks and then backmapping classroom, school, and home-school operations to substantiate student progress, or the lack of progress, is a way to allow teachers in their schools to establish their accountability, reflect upon their operations, and plan for improvement in students' learning. In the next and final chapter of this thesis the findings uncovered in the study are discussed in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER TEN

Findings: The Success of Schools in the Kimberley

In this last chapter of the thesis I begin by encapsulating what I have learned by doing the study and, as a consequence, provide implications and recommendations that are suggested by the findings from the study. The research problem in the study was that government schools in the Kimberley Education District did not appear to be successful schools because of the abundant information indicating that students performed poorly in their academic achievement. I aimed to investigate the inter-relationship between home and school, and between school and classroom processes; portray the reality of these processes; highlight the ways schools and teachers worked to engender success; and identify strategies that were useful enhancers of student outcomes. The reflections in this chapter lay out what I have discovered in terms of the conceptual framework, the research method and design, and what interpretations I have made within the boundaries of my research questions. In order to address the research questions a developmental and longitudinal research design was developed based on three iterative phases of investigation.

The first phase of the study focussed on four schools to gain a first impression of schools, classrooms, students, and their parents within their sociocultural contexts. The second phase was logistically driven. It was concerned with designing a study-specific questionnaire to survey another 14 schools across the Kimberley region which ascertained a bigger picture of the common and different aspects of school and classroom life in these schools. In the third phase of the study three purposes were pursued in five case study schools. First, a closer and finer examination was conducted of school and classroom operations. Second, student assessment tasks were designed and used to judge the degrees of progress students made in reading and writing (which included spelling) and how this progress related to their school attendance patterns. Third, classroom and school level operations that best supported students' success were identified and examined. Thus, the study has investigated the success of government schools in the Kimberley, how they make a difference to students' lives, what this difference looks like, and why the difference has occurred.

Several concluding aspects of the study are discussed in this chapter. First, the three conceptual referents of the study are recapitulated. These are the macro and micro contexts of schools and the research fields that informed the methodology of the study. Second, the strengths and limitation of the research design are reviewed. Next, the

specific research questions and the focus on school planning are addressed, the significance of the study is discussed, and implications for further research in the Kimberley are suggested. Finally, comments on the general research question are provided and recommendations from the study for possible changes are made.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Sociocultural Context of Schools

The study examined the mixed purposes of schooling. Is the purpose of schools to meet the economic needs of communities or should schools empower students to change the world they live in for their betterment? Perhaps schooling is about both these purposes and in the study the issue was explored. The reasons for the possible marginalisation of children in the Kimberley schools from mainstream schooling were carefully thought about with consideration given to residency, deficit views of individuals because they are different and because of the circumstance they live in. Poverty rather than socioeconomic status, the significance of language for Aboriginal people, and the notion of deficit associated with location and culture have been fundamental to the study.

These underpinnings have been used, not as reifications, but as undeniable aspects of the social and cultural lives in Kimberley communities because people in schools need to be aware of such issues in their work. It was important to understand the deprivation people experience because of poverty, the essence of Aboriginality, and the sense of place people attach to where they live because these influences must be accommodated in some way in school and classroom operations. The literature of poverty informed the study about the underprivileged circumstances many children experience in the Kimberley region and how people find themselves captured in a cycle of poverty. The readings on Aboriginality pointed to a history of mostly unproductive interactions between generations of Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people, and education. In the Kimberley the cultural contact for many Aboriginal groups with white people has been relatively recent but their way of life has changed mostly to the detriment of their social, cultural, spiritual, and economic stability. Racial theories were informative about the way in which race has been constructed over time and how some people today still consider some races inferior to their own. However, the world has changed and communications, transport, technologies, and the like have fostered global relations and markets rendering many of the old boundaries between races no longer distinct. In the Kimberley, racial boundaries are rather hardened, especially in overcoming institutional racism and unifying public policies on matters that improve the circumstances for people in Kimberley communities. At the same time, the literature reviewed about

location highlighted the advantages, rather than the deficits, of rural life and how rural communities differ from urban and suburban ones but also differ from each other especially in terms of the equality of educational provision, equality in opportunity, and student outcomes. For many experts, rural education needs to be about playing a vital role in community development predicated on entrepreneurship, ecologically sustainable principles, and a locally relevant curriculum. However, there are realities of the economic structure in rural communities that constrain how many rural students can become successful entrepreneurs, self-employed, or even employed in paid work.

The Educational Implications of the Sociocultural Context

The literature concerning how schools work followed four themes: home-school-community partnerships; catering for individual differences; curriculum responses to individual differences; and shaping classroom practices to meet individual differences. These themes were explored in particular relationship to Aboriginal people and rural schools. The literature about the first theme, home-school-community partnerships, showed that schools needed to know how the home-school link actually worked so that home-school-community partnerships as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-supporters could be created. Teachers needed to assist parents understand the changing nature of education and this is particularly so for many Aboriginal parents who have not had successful school experiences. At the same time, teachers in schools needed to be aware of the purposes that parents held for schooling. In some communities it was clear that education was to "give the same to our children as the white children received". In some communities, parents wanted the cultural values clearly separated. In other communities, there was apathy about any value that education could provide students.

The second theme of catering for individual difference was particularly explored in reference to Aboriginal children in terms of the major sets of influences that contribute to their personal and cultural identity but cause tensions and conflicts for them. Different students vary in their learning styles, rates, motivations, interests, and predispositions, which also are greatly influenced by where they live, the material advantages they have, and their cultural background. There is often tension in what students have to consider as knowledge and accepted ways of behaving. In addition, rural schools are different from other schools because of their distinctive size, the scale on which education takes place, and their isolation from support structures present in more populated areas. Educational programs may be less comprehensive because of resource levels in schools. In connection with the third theme, curriculum responses to cater for the individual differences of students were reviewed. Compensatory, relevant and meaningful, empowering (inclusive

and socially critical), and outcomes-based curriculum approaches were reviewed and how these approaches best meet individual differences. The recent curriculum reform in WA has enabled teachers to begin mapping the progress of their students' learning according to descriptions of outcomes defined for particular curriculum learning areas. The mapping of progress is the basis for the monitoring of the success of schools to provide teachers and school leaders with valuable information to plan for improvement in their schools. Once again there are conflicting arguments about the purpose of schooling and how the curriculum should be shaped. Many writers suggested that the curriculum for the future must be constructively balanced to meet the needs of an industrialised democracy and those of individuals to shape their futures. There also were conflicting ideas about the purpose of education for Aboriginal students. Some indigenous communities see that access to mainstream society is through mainstream education, while others wish to maintain the cultural integrity of their communities. In remote communities in the Kimberley region, Aboriginality-as-persistence is evident as groups tend to remain tied strongly to their family relationships, to protocols associated with feelings of self-worth, and to kinship obligations.

In the final theme of this conceptual referent the literature clearly pointed out that classroom teachers must adopt particular teaching principles. They must enable the Aboriginal child to retain his or her individual autonomy within the group, use Aboriginal social relationships to provide trellises to connect with the curriculum, capitalise on the thinking strategies used by Aboriginal children, and accommodate Aboriginal learning styles and worldviews into their classroom practices. The delicate balance for teachers to maintain was to allow Aboriginal children to discover that learning at school required effort, which could be an uncomfortable cultural experience, but also to retain their dignity and not be "shamed". Language is a highly significant feature of Aboriginal identity. In the Kimberley, Aboriginal identity for children is strongly linked to their exposure to a Kriol, Aboriginal English, a traditional language/s, and Standard Australian English (SAE). Growing numbers of Aboriginal people speak varieties of English as their first language, and many Aboriginal children use their Kriol or Aboriginal English in their daily lives, at home and in the informal aspects of school and classroom interactions. Teachers need to acknowledge and value Aboriginal children's backgrounds and experiences to ensure that learning, teaching, and assessment strategies work best for them.

Seeking Out the Successful School

There is no recipe for school effectiveness but school improvement processes support schools to change and become more effective. This was the essence of the general

research question: What are the effective ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes? The literature in these fields of research was abundant and provided leads for the conduct of the study and signposts of what might be expected to form descriptions of school processes and outcomes. There was evidence to suggest that school organisational factors have little impact on school effectiveness but instructional conditions have larger effects. Thus, it became important in the study to understand the work of teachers in their classrooms and how classrooms varied from one another. The literature on school improvement provided information about planned change, the paradoxes and ironies in educational change, descriptions of school cultures, insights into teacher development, and how the transformation of teachers' cultures may improve student outcomes. School improvement is strongly linked to classroom change because the teacher is pivotal to school improvement. Several sources in the literature argued that in school improvement policy cannot mandate what matters, implementation dominates outcomes, local variability is the rule, and uniformity is the exception. Schools differ in their development of school planning and thus their degrees of effectiveness.

The study also examined issues of educational equality and quality. My fundamental belief, which concurs with others noted in this thesis, is that the pursuit of educational equality demands that educators expect that all children can learn and schools cannot be absolved from their duties in teaching marginalised children. Differing arguments were presented in the literature about the relationship between the level of inputs and educational equality. Therefore, part of the study examined how schools provided equal opportunities for students through appropriate and adequate educational inputs such as resources allocated to them, the ways in which resources were used, and the planning and implementation of specialised programs to meet students' needs. However, underlying deep structures of schooling, which may deny some children inclusion in the schooling and educative processes, were also explored. There is debate about the meaning of educational quality and here the aspect of equality of outcomes from schooling for all students came to the foreground. Quality can be about accountability with an emphasis on student outcomes or it can be about school improvement with an emphasis on processes. These two aspects of quality can be complementary. The stance taken in the study was that a school might not be a quality school, or provide students with equal outcomes, but it could be accountable. A school can demonstrate its effectiveness because it works to improve students' learning outcomes. In this sense, a school could be termed a good or successful school.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design

Strengths of the Design

The design was developmental and longitudinal with three cumulative phases of data collection and analysis conducted over a period of three years. The study was triangulated using mixed methods (exploratory study, survey, and case studies with a pretest-posttest design) and used both quantitative and qualitative data. A study-specific confirmatory questionnaire was designed, trialed, and conducted in order to reach more people across the vast distance separating schools. The questionnaire was developed from the analysis of information emerging from the first phase of the study for use across a number of geographically isolated schools. Finally, student assessments and an examination of five case study schools allowed transparent interpretations to be made about the success of schools and classrooms. The strength of this design was its thoroughness and persistence in trying to peel off the layers on how schools worked. Data sources were numerous with interviews conducted with many people, abundant observations made and recorded, and documents and artefacts collected for analysis. The on-going analysis of data bridged directions between the successive phases of the study and at each stage of the data collection some form of reporting back to people in the study was conducted. A final brief report connected to the research questions was provided to the Education District Office.

The standards of research applied to the methodology of the study were rigorous and met the criteria defined by Guba and Lincoln (1989). The study was trustworthy because I worked closely and persistently with many participants across several sites in the study to gather and analyse data contained in documents, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, and student samples of work. All interpretations made from the data were continuously member checked with participants to check for the "goodness" of my interpretations. This hermeneutic process enabled participants to comment upon, elaborate, correct, revise, or expand any interpretations I made. Triangulated research methods, associated with the longitudinal nature of the design, were used to enhance the internal validity of the study and to make it credible. A clear audit trail was kept in my research records; the storage of raw data (school notes, school profiles, teacher observation schedules, students' work samples, my personal journal), their reductions, and their syntheses. The study was dependable because it was conducted over three years and the procedure of combining qualitative and quantitative data also increased the transferability of any results. The

study was authentic because several stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, principals, and District Office personnel) were fairly represented in the study, I was able to create action for teachers, and I have made recommendations for change based on the findings in the study. During the study my researcher relationships were positively developed with people involved in the study. Not only did people cooperate and give freely of their time, thinking, and ideas, but also they asked me for professional advice. Over the period of the study, and to note just a few examples, I was asked to: work with some pre-primary teachers to monitor the way children were supervised in their out-door play; assess the functioning of a pre-primary centre because the teacher had not received any feedback from a specialist about her work in seven years; work with some inexperienced Year 1 teachers on best practices in the teaching of spelling; assess several students as possibly gifted and talented in the upper and secondary area; be a referee for a principal and teacher seeking promotion because I was the only person who knew their work at close hand; advise a principal on school policy development; and advise an Aboriginal youth on how to move back into the schooling process.

The ways in which I interacted with people involved in the study were indicators to me that the ethical considerations in the study were met with due care. The ethics in the study were carefully considered to retain a balance between my personal interest in and care for participants by not forming friendships with individuals, crossing boundaries between opposing groups, and maintaining my professional distance in schools. People were informed about the study, participants consented to be involved, I did not gather data deceitfully, and I was conscientiously aware of not offending indigenous people. I believe that the study fairly represents communities, parents, teachers, and students. To my knowledge I did not cause harm to anyone. In reporting the study I have been most careful not to use real names, photographs, and students' drawings that would otherwise easily identify people and schools. I guaranteed participants in the study anonymity, an obligation that I have met and I believe that privacy of individuals and schools has been protected and every measure has been taken to retain the anonymity of people and schools.

Limitations of the Design

There were several limitations in the research design of the study. It must be acknowledged that this study was conducted in a particular place, at a particular time, and under particular circumstances. Many factors rendered the study atypical and limited generalisations are warranted from the study. Qualitative approaches in research designs

such as this study are politically mediated. The power of the researcher to represent social settings and people within those settings in unique ways is ever present. Under the school effectiveness research paradigm criticism could perhaps be made about the study because there has been no attempt to statistically control contextual factors in the study and no sophisticated multi-levelling data collection and analysis techniques were used to assess the nested nature of schools. Correlates of school effectiveness were not found for the schools in the study but existing descriptions of schools, classrooms, and students, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds, were useful for the conduct in the study. It is reiterated, however, that the interpretive paradigm was chosen deliberately for the study based on the reasons discussed in early chapters of the thesis. The specific-study questionnaire was long which may have decreased the response rate to the survey. The possible sample of respondents was limited to start with but the response rate may have been improved with a shorter questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was not tested although it appeared to be valid in terms of the variability in school and classroom operations across schools as shown in the survey results and confirmed in the case studies. As previously discussed, the pretest-posttest design for the student assessment part of the study was time intensive and it is acknowledged that the sample of students involved in the assessment tasks was biased. Writers of some of the literature reviewed criticised the use of language as a focus for assessment because it is an aspect of a student's achievement which is susceptible to home circumstances. It can be contended that subjects such as mathematics are more influenced by school and classroom approaches. Aboriginal students' use of SAE can be limited so whether the assessment procedure in the study gained the full extent of students' understanding about reading and writing could be questionable. However, the final judgements of students' progress were confirmed with classroom teachers to their satisfaction.

Addressing the Specific Research Questions: The Findings

How Does the Sociocultural Context of Schools Influence the Ways they Work?

At the macro level of school contexts, regional disadvantage, specialised town economies, constrained access to goods and services, and limited job opportunities as described in the literature were evident in the Kimberley school communities. However, several tourist-related Aboriginal enterprises were developing in the case study communities and participants in the study speculated that these ventures had great economic potential for Kimberley people. Employees of government authorities (state level agriculture, conservation and land management, education, health, power, water and local government workers) provided a demand for supply of goods and services and accompanying

infrastructure across the Kimberley. In the remote areas any local business is very small and usually controlled by non-indigenous people. In the communities where pastoral leases have reverted back to community control, the viability of the enterprises varies. However, in these communities most of the young boys aspire to be jackaroos. To ride a horse at mustering time and to compete in rodeos is their dream. Many of the girls' dreams seem to be more about family. It was important to find a man for "living" (marriage) and have children. Others just want to get away into the towns and only a few plan to go further with their education which means moving away from home and family. Aboriginal students tended not to move out of their community to pursue further education or work. Either they did not aspire to such a future or they wanted to remain with their community and family. Importantly, jobs for everyone in the Kimberley communities were not available. The notion that the purpose of schooling is to move into work is a myth. If the community had no way of supporting their economic needs then the social wage was people's only option for their day-to-day survival. If people moved it was to move to communities to be with relatives, not always a permanent move, but not necessarily to obtain work. Material deprivation for many Aboriginal people in the communities that I observed was real.

At the micro level of schools, there were confessional type revelations by participants in the study that racism existed in several of the Kimberley school communities. No-one said that Aboriginal people are naturally less physically, intellectually, and creatively capable than others. Rather, the comments came from an ethnocentric point of view. Many non-indigenous people in their conversations with me, thought that Aboriginal people did not try hard enough to get work. The perception was that Aboriginal people were not concerned about working. One principal said openly that they were "lazy". From my perspective, and similarly reported in the literature, it seemed that non-poor people described poor people as belonging to a culture of poverty, laziness being one of the ways to stereotype them. Few participants in the study linked poverty and the strategies people adopted for survival to wider contextual influences. Participants did not talk about Aboriginal people's history of work and industrial action in the Kimberley or how the situation and the economy now have changed. Several participants acknowledged that many Aboriginal people retained some links to a hunting and gathering culture but tended to draw attention to this as a curious remanent of culture rather than an economic way for survival. Thus many Aboriginal children in the Kimberley will leave school and expect to get social security assistance and never work. There is no wide-scale work, especially unskilled work, available for everyone.

Health problems for Aboriginal people are real. However, my impression was that much had been done to improve and co-ordinate services in the region, particularly in relation to using the school as a site for action. From conversations with community nurses, it seemed much had been achieved with children in schools in respect to middle-ear infection and other physical ailments. What was more pressing was the emotional and mental health of Aboriginal people and the increasing evidence that pointed to child abuse in communities. In some of the case study schools, students were exposed to depressed adults, habitual drunkenness, and reckless driving. One school principal I talked to firmly believed that many people in his school's community were bored with their life and many suffered some form of depression. People were not busy in life so they looked for ways to cope. People had no work to do, their leisure pursuits were few, and even if they did have a vehicle "to get out and about for a while" they could be gone for weeks which disrupted children's education. People left the community to visit relatives and friends in other communities or stock up on food and goods. Some went to towns to gain access to alcohol (most remote communities have a "dry policy" and it is illegal to take alcohol into the community). It cannot be overstated that substance abuse has a devastating effect on communities as it does in any community. The impact of any substance abuse is that it directly affects all people in a small Kimberley community. In the larger towns substance abuse and much associated crime served to further alienate Aboriginal people from mainstream life.

For the schools, the problem was that many of the children did not come to school in a regular pattern. They moved with transient families, or if abandoned, from one caregiver to another, or literally fended for themselves. If and when they came to school, many were not physically or emotionally ready to commence a day's school learning. Many of Kimberley children would not spend the 15,000 hours in compulsory schooling highlighted in the Rutter et al. (1979) study. The influences are varied: attendance, truancy, lack of motivation to learn, no aspirations for learning, lack of successful learner role models, social problems and, in some instances, a range of associated health problems normally associated with ghetto living. Students in the remote school had few interests outside of school. They often stayed back at school to play, used the basketball courts, or played and tidied up in classrooms until dark and then they went home. Students in the remote case study schools often relied on the teachers to take them off on excursions after school such as taking an afternoon swim at the local gorges. School 4X4-wheel drive vehicles were used for this. In the town school there were many outside interests students could take up, if they chose to do so, such as joining clubs and sporting groups.

Schools involved in the study interacted with their communities in different ways. Material deprivation affected the cohesiveness of communities, how a sense of community was

engendered, strained household relationships, and transferred adult roles to many children. But Harmony School and School B, for example, demonstrated that despite a community's lack of wealth, the links between the school and the community could be strong. These schools were meeting places where people could talk and be with others. Perhaps parents were there because there was nowhere else to go. These schools, however, had parents actively involved in decision making. They knew exactly what was happening in their schools. Teachers knew about what was happening in homes. There was a sense of care about children in these small communities. In the other schools the patterns written about in the literature were evident. The involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools was mostly confined to informal, social gatherings, and special school events and their participation in school affairs and decision-making was minimal. This situation, however, cannot be over-read. This type of participation in schools is typical of many schools across WA. In the Kimberley setting, the minimal way in which people were involved in their schools, however, only seemed to compound the alienation of Aboriginal people from their schools and in the town settings widened the social gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. I believe what clearly emerged from the study was the importance of home-school relationships in these schools, an aspect of school operations that is repeatedly stated in the literature. Throughout my observations in the study, and even though schools were taking organised action to involve parents in school life, it seemed that Aboriginal parents were not always comfortable in the school setting even at social events especially when a stranger, such as me, was present. In contrast, where there was marked discontent with the school, Aboriginal people were forthcoming about their views. Teachers, in the main, thought that they had cordial and respectful relationships with their students and parents and that the parents supported programs in the schools. However, it was clear that parents did not attend school meetings in a significant way or assist in classrooms with the educational program. The home-school relationships could be arranged in different and better ways in several schools because while teachers had a very positive picture about policy in their schools, at the same time, there was uncertainty whether their positive view was shared with parents and students.

Teachers varied in their views about parents according to the parenting skills that directly affected the work of schools and classrooms. There were perceptions of those parents who did the right thing by the school, that is, cared for their children and sent them to school ready for learning and those who did not have the capacity for such care. Thus, parents were valued in terms of how they cared for their children because this was encapsulated by teachers as parents' contribution to their children's education. No-one declared that they were racist. Such a declaration was most unlikely. In the remote schools I visited, I had the impression that Aboriginal people were not denigrated as people. Rather, teachers

described the situation that Aboriginal people found themselves in as rather hopeless and beyond their control as teachers. There seemed no solutions to the problems of poverty. In their work, teachers were more focussed on how to work in the schools to overcome the classroom challenges they faced. Again, and in contrast, where schools and the community worked together teachers took a much more positive view of their work. The down side of this was they became deeply sensitive to how they were unable to support the smooth and gradual progress of their students' learning. More to the point, the many dedicated teachers I met really wanted to do their best for their students. In contrast, racism seemed to be prevalent in the town schools. Blatant derogatory remarks about Aboriginal people and their culture, as reported by others to me, existed in the more urbanised communities. At the same time, across all the schools, many teachers were sensitive to cultural issues. Cultural ways in the community were usually acknowledged and accepted as a way of life. Teachers accepted differences, but when cultural activities encroached on school activities teachers expressed greater frustration. When students were away from school to meet cultural obligations it was more difficult for teachers to reconcile the cultural way with their expectations about school attendance. It was not the ritual that caused them consternation but the interruption to the student's learning and consequently the apparent waste of their time spent planning.

How Are School Resources Used to Support Students' Learning?

Parents I spoke to thought that having a school in the community was a good resource. The state of buildings was not the concern for them. They had a school and they would fight hard to keep it in the community. Overall, people were satisfied with their schools as workplaces, the functionality of school buildings and classroom designs, and believed that there was a good level of resources in schools which were well used. To me some of the school buildings were less than desirable. I found some schools with small confined teaching spaces an anathema. Physical and social space is needed to organise and manage student-centred learning. Aboriginal children are used to open spaces, yet many came into many classrooms that were cramped and overcrowded with classroom paraphernalia. Many buildings in the remote schools were somewhat makeshift. This is not to say classrooms were not attractive learning environments. There was just no space to move in many of the classrooms I visited. In classrooms that were purpose built, such as some pre-primary centres or newer schools in the towns, the situation was different. Small work groups were organised more easily and were able to work without interfering with other groups. Transitions within the classroom for students from one point to another were easier for teachers

to manage in these situations and students had freedom of space for individualised and cooperative learning approaches.

It was somewhat surprising to me that the material resources in schools were not the biggest issue on teachers' minds. Overall, principals and teachers said the financial resources in their schools and classrooms were adequate although they stressed they would not like to see a reduction of resources. Resources associated with the professional and personal lives of teachers were a different matter. These issues provided a constant talking point. Travel and distance worked against teachers for professional development and isolated them from their interests. Being away from close relationships was stressful for many teachers. At the same time, different stresses were evident when couples were teaching in these schools, especially the remote schools. In schools where a principal and teacher were spouses, other teachers often felt the need to be guarded with their words and actions.

Alongside these issues was the difficulty of accomplishing holistic public policy (Miller, 1996) to assist schools in their work. Teachers believed that a strong integrated approach to outside support, especially from agencies other than from education, did not exist for them. While the Health Department provided a good level of service to the case study schools and community nurses were endorsed for their work in schools, other personnel such as social workers were required to assist teachers in addressing home-school issues for students. Professional support for teachers was not always quickly and easily accessed into the school. Outside educational support was seen as essential for curriculum issues, at risk students, and for acknowledgment of teachers' work, especially if assistance and endorsement did not come from within the school.

The overwhelming evidence in the study showed that schools, in the main, lacked expertise in teaching students for whom English was their second (and sometimes third) language. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in schools so that they can be more effective in improving students' understandings and knowledge of SAE. Part of the language issue was helping students move between language codes. In the classrooms, teachers were only just coming to a realisation that most of their students speak English as a second language. At the same time, teachers maintained that their students' English language experiences were minimal and this created the difficulty in the classroom. But they did not infer that their students' life experiences were limited and deficient. However, to teach the "secrets" of the English language required a highly competent teacher. Not only do teachers have to understand how language works in their own culture and know the critical developmental points in the teaching of reading and writing, but they need to be

able to translate that into classroom practices for Aboriginal children as second-language learners. Teachers not only have to be ordinary speakers of English but they also have to do extraordinary and creative things in the teaching of English. They need to accommodate Aboriginal cultural language continuities as well as teach the "secret" language. Additional and specialised resources are required for such program innovation and the capacity to maintain any programs commenced. It must be noted here that the AEWs in schools provide a strong support for teachers in their work as they do with home-school interactions to bridge the cultural contact children and their parents have with their schools. The AEWs are advocates for students and their parents and assisted teachers with interpreting the cultural life in communities.

However, the study highlighted the whole gambit of the complexities of teaching language. I was left with the question: Were teachers trying to do much in this area with too little expertise? At school children were moving between three languages, at least, and in many instances there were not enough explicit strategies helping students to cross borders. Two of the languages that children worked with had no traditional written forms. One of the main strategies in teaching the traditional language (LOTE) was using the developed written forms of the language and applying familiar classroom "learning to read" strategies. This is totally different from emersion in a cultural language context and learning to speak it. The other, English, demanded a highly complex way of recording text. Children's Kriol was their language of thinking and communicating and they could not exploit this in lessons. Teachers could not understand the Kriol to use it to scaffold learning English. The whole aspect of funding, implementing, and maintaining innovative programs, especially in the language programs, was another significant challenge for schools. Nakata (1995) was very clear about this issue. Students' own languages should be used to help them understand how the English language works.

How Do Within-school Environments Influence the Ways Schools Work?

I was able to use the multi-level model of school effectiveness (Scheerens & Creemers, 1989) to guide data collection and analysis and seek out how the five factor model of school effectiveness (Edmonds, 1979) and the eleven factors identified by Sammons et al. (1995) surfaced in the data. The framework for analysing school improvement (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996) also guided inquiries and observations in the case study schools. The school effectiveness characteristics that provided a picture of a successful school were significantly featured in all interviews and conversations with people and my own observations. Leadership, both how people administered and provided educational vision and direction, was a constant topic. A safe and orderly climate was described as essential

to the schools and setting high expectations for students was frequently mentioned, especially in terms of appropriate behaviour at school. Sammons et al. (1995) identified factors (professional leadership; shared vision and goals; high expectations; purposeful teaching; monitoring progress [both student and school performance]; home-school partnership; and a learning organisation for staff) that also featured strongly in the data collected in the study. The characteristics of a positive climate and learning environment for students, concentration on teaching and learning, positive reinforcement, and student rights and responsibilities were evident in many school and classroom situations. However, there were concerns evident about some students' behaviour, teacher and student confrontations, and race relations in some schools.

School leadership was focussed on improving student outcomes but the monitoring of student progress, although mentioned often by principals but less frequently by teachers as important, was a problematic process. Teachers emphasised basic skills such as language and mathematics and also life skills as the learning outcomes that were most important for students to acquire. They were the outcomes that teachers seemed to convey as a vision for successful schools. But it was the processes within the school that they defined as making the school effective or a "good school". They "latched onto" successful processes rather than students' outcomes to endorse their work. One of the vital aspects that made teachers feel comfortable and tension free in their work was the working and personal relationship that they had with their principal or key leaders in the schools. While many teachers were happy with the decision making in their schools, many others thought that their schools did not operate on democratic principles. They were denied a voice in important decisions, their duties were unclearly delegated, they received confused messages in communication, they did not enjoy cooperative, trusting, and open interactions with other staff, and they could not place faith in the decisions made by their leaders. Hence, staff morale was not high in all schools because conflict was not well managed. There appeared to be no clear or direct causal link between good leadership and student outcomes because so many students did not meet expected year level outcomes. A harmonious school, however, made each person's day-to-day professional and personal life more pleasant.

The lack of time was one of the main problems suggested by participants in the study that worked against team building and planning school development. There was not enough paid work time for schools to unite as organisations working towards a common purpose. The lack of cohesiveness became more of an issue as the school became larger or when there were many staff changes. The smaller schools were able to meet regularly, usually informally, but more often than not these meetings were after school hours and often in social conversations. In the main, students were not involved in school level decisions but

in one town school, where there was a nucleus of secondary students, a student council had been formed. Under the guidance of a teacher, the council conducted meetings, discussed issues relating to students, canvassed students for opinions, and reported to the school's administration team about possible solutions to problems.

In all the case study schools there was general order overall but there were cycles of upheaval and incidents of conflict between parents and principals, parents and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students. Teachers were trying to deal more and more with people, particularly students, who used violence as a means to sort out their problems. This was not to say that violence was on the increase in these schools, but staff were endeavouring to explore alternative ways for students to communicate within and across cultures. Apart from academic skills, many of the students' social problems were associated with their poor language and interpersonal skills. They were unable to communicate or negotiate their points of view. There was no particular pattern that was exclusive to Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students in the case study schools but the Aboriginal cultural way of teasing in a modern world context, however, often went beyond the acceptable and led to verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and physical fights. While the violence was not necessarily along racial lines, there was evidence of racism in the schools. Some teachers would quietly talk about the racist attitudes of their colleagues. Others were plainly open about maligning Aboriginal people using words such as "useless" and "lazy" to describe them and making claims about wasting their time trying to teach the students.

How is the Curriculum Shaped and What are Best Classroom Practices?

The Shape of the Curriculum

The impression I gained was that teachers did not actively think about the type of curriculum they taught in their schools. The complexion of the curriculum varied in different schools and even within the same school. In some ways the curriculum in the schools was compensatory although teachers, in the main, did not take a deficit view of their students. Any "blame the victim" attitudes tended to be reserved for parents. The assumption by teachers was that the students needed the basics, language and mathematics, and the time left over for anything else in the curriculum needed to go into health education and life skills. So the curriculum was more rooted in the non-discriminatory construct of a meaningful and relevant curriculum. Teachers tried to differentiate their planning and teaching to manage their classrooms and teach students according to their backgrounds and experiences. Ultimately, this left students alienated from the mainstream curriculum, separated, and treated unequally.

Overall in school planning, it appeared that teachers found it increasingly difficult to teach older students how to read and write, especially at levels which demanded them to analyse and evaluate oral and written texts. The schools also were trying to accept that their students were second language speakers because most of them used a Kriol in everyday life. This awareness was only just beginning to emerge in the schools. How to deal with the issues of associated pedagogical approaches was only at experimental stages. Whether to allow Kriol a place in the classroom also was a policy issue that was unresolved for teachers. Beside the immense challenges in teaching SAE, students in each school were being taught their local traditional language. It is here that the cultural messages about language often were confused for students. The LOTE program worked in three of the case study schools to varying degrees but it was obvious that the older the students became, the more their disinterest appeared to grow in the school program. Often in these programs, students dealt visiting community people the same treatment they would to teachers whose classroom management skills did not work for them. There was a paradox in teaching Aboriginal traditional languages inside classrooms. It seemed that students treated their Aboriginal mentors differently in the classroom than they would in the community setting. Yet watching these mentors confirmed for me that Aboriginal people teach by showing; the students choose or choose not to join in the imitating and learning. When I visited one case study school there was a famous Aboriginal artist visiting the school and showing her skills to the students. Under her direction, the children were developing a wall-mural of their country's dreaming. The artist continued for the half a day on the mural unperturbed by the coming and going of the students as they dabbled with their own efforts, wandered off, and perhaps returned to the task at a later time. The only people who were agitated by the students' so termed "off-task" behaviour, were the teachers who either tried to keep the students on their task or found them something else to do. In two other case study schools the LOTE program was not viable. In one school there were only a few traditional language speakers of the country alive and they were too old to come to the school to work with the children. This language was dying. In the other school, community people expected students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to be transported to a cultural centre for their lessons. This program fell into disarray because of disagreement over teaching approaches and the lack of support by the "white" part of the parent group and several teachers for the program.

Participants in the study tended to confirm that the emphasis in secondary curriculum was learning life skills. But learning life skills meant different things for the participants. One idea was that life skills were to ensure that the students could read, write, fill in forms, and know the essentials for healthy and safe lifestyles. However, especially in the town schools

the secondary curriculum became more subject oriented (for example, Business Studies, Technology and Enterprise, and optional studies such photography) but many subject-specific teachers found that there was no time in their timetable to concentrate on students' literacy skills. Also in the town schools there was more of a community and school expectation that the curriculum was about students meeting benchmark standards. Another idea was to provide students with entrepreneurial skills. These types of programs were evident in all schools with secondary students and were aimed at providing skills to students so they later could be involved in local economies. Programs were diverse but matched what happened in the communities. For example, boat building (although this program became defunct once the teacher moved from the school), horticultural practices, and art studies (from creation through to framing, exhibitions, selling pieces, and managing the income for excursions for the group) were part of some schools' optional studies. In the smaller schools, older students did not have continuous access to a range of options that supported local ventures. The staff were not available so secondary students appeared to leave school as soon as they could. In the larger schools there were concerted efforts by schools to show students how they could contribute to their communities. Whether students chose, or had the necessary support, to use their skills learnt at school was another matter.

In the more successful schools there were glimmerings of an inclusive curriculum. The curriculum was envisioned as one which is culturally appropriate and built on the life experiences of students but there was not strong evidence to suggest that students were examining colonial history, for example, from different perspectives. There were instances, especially in secondary social studies classrooms, when I observed students critically analysing the issues involved when different cultures interact but not necessarily how dominant and marginalised groups interacted. There were evident attempts to allow students to make meaning about their world and relate concepts to their past and their future. Primary and secondary students were developing knowledges and competencies for the information economy but this varied in schools because of the difference in availability of technological resources. There also were glimpses of Aboriginalising the content in the curriculum. There were traditional languages taught by community members, fieldtrips to use the immediate environment for topics of study, and grappling with teaching second-language learners. Additionally, while teachers could not speak or understand Kriol they legitimised the language and they were starting to talk about code switching. But when the concept was reduced to phrases such as "at home you use home-talk" and "at school you use school-talk" something has been lost. Code switching is not about asking students to be two separate people but it is meant to assist students move between cultures so that they can understand and be sensitive to different body language such as posture, stance, gesture and eye contact as well as intonation and purpose. Aboriginal children should be using

their expert mimicry skills to learn the secrets of the English language. The competent language teacher for these children also needs to be a competent drama teacher. I did not see such language experiences in classrooms although there was a great thrust on whole SAE language approaches in the curriculum. I saw the interpersonal relationship between students and teachers being made explicit by setting rules for politeness and behaviour but classrooms are not substitutes for real life-situations. I did not see models of language used by a 6-month-old baby or a 60-year-old being used. I did not see gender issues in communication being addressed. I did not see Aboriginal children "taking off" the Whitefella in classrooms. Learning to cross cultural borders was an issue not discussed openly in many of the observed classrooms. Perhaps I did not see enough.

The curriculum offerings for students in the smaller schools were reduced. The timetable worked against teachers but many overcame the crowding in the curriculum through integrated approaches to program plans. In the larger schools the offerings were more varied because there were more staff, but occupational training again worked better in the larger schools because there were specialised staff appointed to advance vocational training. Dual purposes for schooling underscored the curriculum in schools. "Learning the basics" was about teaching students English, mathematics, and personal and environmental health in primary classrooms and "learning for living" was more evident in secondary classrooms. There was purpose in most classrooms for students trying to take on productive roles in their communities, or further afield, when they left compulsory schooling. Some students went outside of their communities to continue their education and this was encouraged at the individual level rather than held as the goal for coming to school. While students aspired to work in their communities to be the community nurse or work in the community office and such like, there was little understanding in some communities about the effort that was required from everyone for students to realise any such dreams. Many people in schools believed that they added value to students' lives but they were unlikely to develop in students a commitment to further learning or enhance students' life chances. Schools, for the moment, did not seem to be interrupting the on-going marginalisation of students.

Best Classroom Practices

The most successful teachers in schools were those who believed that being a teacher was central to their sense of self and was their path in life. These teachers were exemplary in their preparation and planning for teaching spending considerable time, even extensive amounts of personal time, to plan and prepare for their teaching. Teachers who were successful in their classrooms engendered a positive classroom

climate in their classrooms even though they required extra time to manage and monitor those students who had difficulty in completing their work, working independently, and meeting classroom rules. Very high expectations were set for students in meeting classroom rules, attendance, punctuality, cleanliness and tidiness, and completing homework set. Lesson content taught in classrooms was interesting, encouraged students to learn and use "white" thinking skills, was based on students' background knowledge and cultural experiences, and was integrated and thematic across or within subjects. The teaching of language was used to particularly focus much of the students' learning. When teachers relied on Aboriginal students' well-developed sense of autonomy, used a discipline style that did not bring shame upon students, and allowed students to exhibit their individualism and flamboyant sense of personal style, then classrooms were harmonious places for learning. Not only did teachers have to support students' self-identity, they needed to develop students' self-efficacy about success at school. When teachers focussed on student-centred learning and they constantly modelled and repeatedly demonstrated and consolidated, over long periods of time, what needed to be learned, especially in a range of language skills and competencies, the greater the progress students made in their learning.

Teachers had to balance teaching and learning strategies between students sitting, watching, listening, and copying with making an effort, asking questions, and doing things even though mistakes might be made. This indeed demanded that successful teachers in the Kimberley schools were extraordinary adults. In mixed cultural classrooms, where the same types of strategies may have been used, non-Aboriginal children did not progress as smoothly. The family-type environment for them was not as intimate and individualised in bigger sized classrooms. In larger classrooms it was more difficult for teachers to balance the preferred learning styles of Aboriginal students with those non-Aboriginal students are more accustomed to. One aspect was clear in the classrooms. Teachers could not resort to survival teaching strategies using "busy work" activities. Students would simply not turn up to schools, even though videos and computers as gap-fillers had some appeal for some of the time. In the end, if school was not interesting students found more exciting things to do at home or away from home. There were "big time" interests for Aboriginal students: going to town, going to the rodeos, going mustering, and having fun.

How Can Student Achievement Best Be Measured?

The potentiality of students was highly regarded by people in schools and all students were viewed as those who were like most students to be found anywhere; they could succeed.

However, teachers found working with students' language, health and emotional problems, and their cultural ways of living very challenging to accommodate in the classroom. These problems seem to limit students' chances of achieving quality outcomes but teachers were adamant that many tests were inappropriate to assess the real learning of their students. The concern for teachers was how to measure progress that gave positive reinforcement to students and provided accountability for their own work. The curriculum reform in WA is relatively new but it offers promise to teachers in mapping students' progress and defining exact points for forward planning and implementation of school planning and classroom programs. The formative aspect of the study showed what students knew and what they needed to learn. How the new curriculum documents are used at the school and classroom levels remains to be seen in the future. However, what emerged in the study was that formative assessment is powerful in identifying progress, and new directions to make progress, in students' learning. Part of the success of the study was the way the assessment of the student sample was conducted. The assessment tasks were familiar to the students, they were based on the learning they were engaged in, and classroom teachers had the power to verify that their students had performed to the best of their ability on the assessment tasks. The analysis of the tasks was significant because some form of judgements could be made about them. First, individual student progress could be ascertained. Individual profiles for students could be mapped showing where students were progressing and where exactly students were stuck in their progress. Second, some judgements could be made about students' achievement in relation to year level expectations for particular student ages. Third, overall pictures could be drawn about school success in fostering students' progress. School profiles showed the program strengths and weakness in students' progress and highlighted the areas where schools needed to take action for change and improvement.

Addressing the Research Focus

The research focus in the study was to ascertain the ways the school development planning strategy provided a driving force for change in schools. Schools were only coming to terms with school development planning and many teachers, especially inexperienced teachers, had little conceptual knowledge of a holistic, systematic, and cyclic planning process to improve outcomes. Those teachers who understood the planning process better, realised that they were still only identifying policy matters, school priorities, and planning budgets based on scant student data. Continuity in school planning seemed to be a difficult goal to attain. Teacher movement in and out of these schools was high. I did not gain any strong impression that school planning, as a meta-planning strategy, transcended into each classroom within a school to address curriculum and pedagogy. In some smaller schools

there was more evidence that school planning was operational across all classrooms within the school but this was not typical for all schools. It appeared that many teachers, especially inexperienced teachers, were unable to reconcile their responsibilities at the school level with those at the classroom level in terms of school planning. They felt that the teaching was valued less than school planning, which in many cases, they did not perceive to be related to their classroom operations. My judgement was that staff in schools need to adopt a backmapping process to deliberately link an evaluation of student progress and classroom practices to ensure that whole school planning held meaning for teachers.

Some schools had a great capacity for change because the leadership in the school fostered the capacity of teachers, as individuals and as part of a team, to learn and change. School planning was most successful in those schools where teachers thrived on their own professional and personal desire to learn in order to do better in their craft as teachers. The capacity to change, while influenced by resources and funds, policy development and innovation, and curriculum and pedagogy, was more dependent on the management of the school, the organisational structure of the school, the school culture, and leadership. Teachers were learners but they needed school structures and leadership to allow a culture to flourish that permitted teachers to learn. Therefore, school planning in many schools lived at the discussion, decision making, and documentation stage and was not always operational in the schools. It was difficult to find strong evidence that change and improvement strategies existed in schools even those that celebrated professional practice and the training needs of teachers, let alone those that improved student achievement.

During the study my understandings of success in schools became richer. As outlined in chapter nine in the backmapping process, some strategies, although the study does not claim a direct relationship between these and students' progress, appeared to be useful enhancers of students' success at school. These interrelated enhancers were the successful processes that needed to be adopted in schools. The enhancers were concerned with:

1. calm, stability, and order in classroom environments.
2. consistency in pedagogy across all classrooms within a school but variety of activities within classrooms.
3. continuity in students' progress as they moved from one year level to the next.
4. leadership that made everyone's day-to-day classroom work easier; engendered a congenial workplace environment which alleviated some of the personal stresses teachers experienced; ensured school plans went into operation in all classrooms

across the school; and created a close link between the school, parents, and the community.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is the first of its type in relation to the Kimberley Education District. Two main aspects of the study contribute to the significance of its purpose. First, in the Kimberley region of WA, there is substantial evidence that says students, especially Aboriginal children, do not perform academically and do not complete schooling. From this view, schools in the Kimberley are not quality schools. The main purpose in investigating this research problem was to take a positive view of schools in the Kimberley region and seek out ways that could endorse their success. These schools needed to be able to show that they were "good" schools and worked effectively to improve student outcomes. Second, there are constraints of cost, travel distances, and accommodation when conducting research in geographically isolated communities in WA. Because these constraints were addressed adequately, and for this reason alone, the study is a contribution to the knowledge about education within the Western Australian scene. An interpretive model of research was adopted to elucidate how poverty, Aboriginality, and location could be considered when making judgements about the success of schools. The study reminded us that children come to school from different family backgrounds and perform differently at school. How schools responded to difference was shown in the study. In some schools, teachers were pragmatic about the sociocultural context of their schools and worked with the contextual influences in their communities to achieve the best they could for students' learning. Some schools were alienated from their communities which often was related to the leadership style of principals or the racist attitudes of staff towards students. The study showed that, in the main, financial resources provided to schools were at good levels and allowed students to participate in all school activities, irrespective of income levels in the community or families. The study also showed that many families in the Kimberley schools hold aspirations for their children to succeed at school and they provide advocacy for their children in situations that they judged to be unfair.

The study is of interest to researchers who endeavour to amalgamate the research fields of school effectiveness and school improvement. The study showed that models and frameworks readily found in the school effectiveness and improvement fields provided ways to investigate school and classroom contexts and this could be carried out in an interpretive manner. The interpretive methodological challenges

could be addressed sufficiently to make judgements about the success of schools. The Edmond's (1979) five factors of school effectiveness were considered when investigating school operations and the multi-level model of school effectiveness (Scheerens & Creemers, 1989) was consistently used throughout the research design to guide data collection and analysis at the contextual, school, classroom, and student levels. Because the research focus was on school development planning, the framework for analysing school improvement (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996) was used to examine dimensions such as the culture of schools, school policies, leadership and management, resources and how these created a capacity for change in schools to improve students outcomes. In this study the backmapping process enabled these reference points to be analysed to ascertain the effective practices in classroom and school operations. The backmapping also allowed some modest between-school comparisons to be made.

The study supported an approach for schools, serving students who experience hindrances in their education, to demonstrate their effectiveness by considering the inter-relatedness of their context and schooling processes. The study is significant because it shed light on ways to conduct assessment with students from diverse backgrounds that advances reliable information about their progress at school. A sample of students was followed over a period of one year, especially collecting information about their absenteeism, and achievement at two assessment points one year apart. Using student outcomes statements from WA's reformed curriculum, students' progress was mapped and profiled. The assessment procedure showed that the process used in the study could be informative, formative, and provide ways to help students' learning both at the classroom and school levels of planning. The assessment procedure also was a way to explore how Aboriginal students coped in the school setting with SAE. Many of the Aboriginal students, and their non-Aboriginal counterparts, found the coping with the convention of SAE, especially with writing and spelling, was a challenge. Some analysis of students' achievement of outcomes was conducted in relationship to their absentee rates which showed students writing and spelling in particular required consistent attendance at school to improve their understandings of SAE.

Implications for Further Research

There are several implications for further research based on the study. First, at the policy level there is a need to investigate how inter-agency support for schools can supplement the educational endeavours in schools. Access to support agencies was almost non-existent in the remote schools and in the towns agencies were stretched to cope with the myriad of

demands. There was great variation in the health of children within the case study school communities because of the way parents looked after them and the level of assistance available. These communities had the same range of health issues as any other community, but often children were left alone when parents went into towns or went out binge drinking. With consequent physical and emotional health problems children often disrupted classroom activities and classrooms. If children travelled with their parents on excursions away from the school, which were always exciting episodes in children's lives, the children were usually absent from school for long periods. Community health issues are on-going and solutions to problems are progressing with their work in schools but other agencies' support, such as psychologists and social workers with required expertise, are needed to work with families and schools for the improvement of students' lives. Aboriginal parents need to have their confidence restored in schools. Who would want to associate with an institution that defined you as a failure in the past? Beside the investigation of inter-agency support for schools, research could be conducted into other peripheral strategies to ascertain how these approaches improve home-school relationships. For example, how effective are some of the strategies such as the drop-in-room strategy and home visiting? What are the ways that AEWs use to make links between schools and homes?

Second, at the school level there is potential to investigate other schools in WA, similar to those in the Kimberley, to ascertain if the same issues are evident. Such research would enable policy and professional support to be expanded for principals and teachers in these schools. There is the opportunity to further investigate the ways schools can work more closely with their rural communities to ensure that local economies and school purposes can be reconciled to provide students with real goals for their futures. Part of this investigation would need to look more closely at the issues of attendance and transience and ways to help students "catch up" on their progress because they miss school. Research in connection with the curriculum is needed to investigate how Aboriginal students' understanding of SAE can be improved. This research needs to focus on the four major outcomes in the WA *Curriculum Framework* and identify the strategies that best assist students to make progress through various level of sophistication in each of the outcomes. This is particularly important in relation to the conventions in text major outcome for reading and especially writing. Moreover, there is opportunity to investigate other subject areas, such as science, and how students progress in them in relation to their understanding of SAE. The drawings that the students completed in the assessment part of the study showed that they had a well-developed knowledge of, and affinity towards, their environment making it a suitable basis for linking their forms of knowledge to western forms. As indigenous people interact with western cultures and technologies, there is a need that these experiences are empowering because western explanations may conflict

with those of indigenous people in some contexts. In the social studies curriculum there is the potential to research how teachers can capitalise more on conversations and story telling about family genealogy and geographic origins because the history of Aboriginal people has been lost for many. This research would need to be sensitive to the sacred knowledge of different Aboriginal groups but would provide a deeper acknowledgment of Aboriginal history in the curriculum.

Third, at the classroom level action research in classrooms would assist teachers to be reflective on their pedagogy. More teacher-as-researcher activity in classrooms would provide greater understanding for teachers on how effectively their technical repertoires accommodate students' interests and needs, preferred learning styles, and languages codes. As a participant and non-participant observer of several classrooms in this study, it became apparent that many teachers did not have either the experience to teach in Kimberley schools or lacked the technical expertise to teach the students successfully. These parallels became more obvious when I observed those teachers who were exemplary in their practices and enjoyed the respect of students, their parents, and fellow teachers.

Finally, at the student level further statistics on attendance and transience could be gathered across all school in the Kimberley to identify the type of patterns of school attendance that exist. Based on these patterns, a clearer picture of students' attendance in relation to home-communities and home schools could be revealed so that appropriate inter-agency and educational support could be provided to families, students, and schools.

Addressing the General Research Question

The general research question for the study was: What are the successful ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes? It is claimed through this study that the essential principles of school effectiveness and school improvement are all students can learn and outcomes are the focus for teaching. The study showed that different schools have contextual capacities and limits but each school must seek out the ways in which it and classrooms can operate for the advancement of students' progress and achievement of outcomes. The study has identified challenges associated with school-home relationships, the ways schools and classrooms operate, the ways school plan and implement curriculum, how teachers develop their pedagogies, and the ways students are assessed. In response to teachers who do not fully understand these challenges, many Aboriginal children will choose to continue avoiding school or actively resist engaging in the learning process

Importantly, at the school level it was found that teachers were best supported in their work when school leaders worked to make everyone's day-to-day classroom work easier, engendered a congenial workplace environment which alleviated some of the personal stresses teachers experienced, ensured school plans went into operation in all classrooms across the school, and created a close link between the school, parents, and the community. At the classroom level in the Kimberley context, calm, stable, and orderly classroom environments are essential to establish. Consistent pedagogy is required across all classrooms within a school but a variety of activities within classrooms is important to accommodate Aboriginal styles of learning. Monitoring the continuity in students' progress as they moved from one year level to the next is imperative.

The study showed that there are ways that schools can work for the betterment of students' progress at school but these ways are not universally adopted or implemented. Teachers in the Kimberley schools can learn to understand how to create a good school, how schools can be described as effective and improving, and how they can be termed schools that meet equality and quality ideals. The recommendations made from the study are intended to address these aspects of schooling in the Kimberley.

Recommendations from the Study

In this study there was evidence that schools could make a difference to students' lives and engender success. Schools were supporting students to make progress in their learning but also it was evident that changes for improvement could be integrated into current thinking and planning. Five key recommendations, and plausible strategies to implement the recommendations, have emerged from this study which would, I believe, would further engender success in the Kimberley schools. While several of the strategies to implement the recommendations are linked to the availability of resources, the strategies are not intended to demand additional resources for schools. Rather, based on the study, the purpose of the recommendations is to provide a catalyst to rethink how the education of Aboriginal students in the Kimberely schools can be turned towards more hopeful futures. The recommendations and strategies are listed below.

Policy Level

1. Kimberley school classifications (according to size) for the purpose of allocating funds must be reviewed to ensure flexibility is provided in the allocation of resources and the selection of staff, especially promotional positions.

- Use current resources but rethink a framework of resource allocation to schools that is not dependent on enrolment.
- Develop a system of promotion and merit selection to the Kimberley schools that attracts experienced and expert educators.

2. Resources must be provided to retain the vitality of small remote schools in their communities.

    1. Apply a generous staffing formula to remote schools to allow them to develop breadth in the curriculum.
    - Allow schools the capacity to select their own teaching staff based on identified needs in School Development Plans.

3. Resources must enable bigger schools to adopt alternative school organisations such as small family-type environments in classrooms.

    - Apply a flexible staffing formula to the bigger schools to create alternative school organisations to allow teachers to develop individualised learning programs, especially for Aboriginal students.
    - Allow schools the capacity to select their own teaching staff based on identified needs for individualised learning programs.

4. Resources must be provided to train teachers to develop approaches to teaching and learning for Aboriginal students for whom English is not their first language.

    - Provide ESL change agents to cells of schools linked according to different Aboriginal language groups
    - Improve the teaching of language to Aboriginal students using action research approaches with classroom teachers.

Home-School Level

5. Schools must forge better ways to interact with their communities and parents to develop greater understandings of aspirations for their children.

    - Use the experience of home-school liaison experts, such as the AEWs, to ensure parents' views are incorporated into school planning.
    - Use these home-school liaison experts to bridge cultural knowledges especially about student transience and school attendance.

6. Schools must promote goals for futures in rural locations.

- Develop planning goals and programs, in collaboration with communities, which are concerned with fulfilling life choices in an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world.
- Develop programs that actively present models of successful school-learners, especially for Aboriginal students

School Level

7. Leaders with high inter-personal and professional skills must be appointed to schools.

- Select principals to schools in collaboration with community and staff stakeholders.

8. Leaders must have the commitment and skills to initiate, implement, and support change in schools for the betterment of teachers' professional development and students' learning.

- Select principals to schools who have a proven success as leading professionals.
- Include open and transparent community and staff input into the performance appraisal of principals.

Classroom Level

9. Teachers who are committed to teaching second-language learners must be appointed in all Kimberley schools.
  - Select teachers who have the knowledge and skills of how SAE works in conjunction with Aboriginal languages.
  - Select teachers to schools who have an ability to blend students' preferred learning styles with those that assist students move between different cultures on their own terms.
  - Select teachers who have the knowledge and ability to deliver a curriculum that deals with the essentials of all learning areas and builds futures for students.

Conclusion

In the study, terms such as *good, effective*, and *improving*, and *equality* and *quality* were considered. Not all of the schools in the study could be termed *good* schools but in all schools there was evidence of staff endeavours, in various and different ways, to *improve* students' learning. In some of the schools there were various aspects of school or classroom operations that were less than *effective*. One of the main issues that was revealed about school effectiveness was concerned with developing consistent programs and teaching and learning approaches across the year levels within a school. Another interesting aspect that emerged in the case study schools was the influence leadership had on student outcomes. Irrespective of whether key leaders in the schools were considered effective, or not, by staff and parents there appeared to be little relationship to the school's accountability on the premise of students achieving *quality* outcomes. What effective leaders were able to do in the case study schools was "smooth out" the work of teachers in classrooms so that their concerted effort could be given to improving students' progress.

In some ways the case study schools showed glimpses of *quality*, in varying degrees, in their processes for improvement. However, the case studies schools could not be defined as *quality* schools in terms of the benchmark outcomes students achieved. At the same time, one of the schools demonstrated that for non-Aboriginal students it was achieving some degree of quality because many students were achieving at expected year levels. The whole question of *equality* in these schools remains open for point and counterpoint in debate. However, Harmony School was illustrative that schools in the Kimberley could be considered *good* schools, and be termed successful, because of the way the school and classrooms operated, the strong home-school relationship that was fostered, and the way students progressed in consistent ways. The challenge in the Kimberley is for all schools to pursue success in the ways they work.

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APPENDIX A

**Example of an Interview Transcript, Summary Log,
and Extrapolated Themes in Phase One of the Study**

PART ONE: THE TRANSCRIPT

TAPE FOUR - SIDE A & B
Name: **** ****** School: ***** *****
4 DECEMBER 1995

Thanks for taking part in my study. The purpose of this interview is to gain your views about how the school and your classroom operate? We can start with looking at your relationship with the community.

Why have you made links to the community?

I think that the main reason why for a start you need to get into the community to be effective and because my husband works with a lot of the people he is well known around town and he will tell me what goes on and they know who I am and that helps me to get out into the community to talk to people as well.

It seems that you have managed to talk to parents individually.

Yes, I guess through my role too as an Aboriginal Education Specialist Teacher I'd go on a lot of liaison visits with the AEW or without. I am quite comfortable to go by myself. I rather do that. So yes I do go and talk to people and if kids are not going to school I will go and follow up and find out why.

Are you able to get from parents some fairly good perceptions of what they think about the school?

That is an interesting question because there is a lot of unhappy feeling towards the school at the moment in the community.

What are the reasons for this?

The community doesn't see the school as working or interacting with the community, getting out and being a part of the community.

Do you mean in the activities for them at school or actually going out and understanding Aboriginal people?

Both I think and it is sort of over this that we have a problem with absentees at the moment. We are down to 50% of the kids attending High School and that is quite low when we went up last year and so I have worked with Family and Children Services and taken the issue to them and said look I am desperate on behalf of myself and the other secondary staff can you please help us because I couldn't see anything getting done through administration in that area and they have come up with these community meetings and they have been great. We have now had three and on Friday the teachers were invited without the administration.

Did the teachers go?

Yes, we had a great time. About 13 teachers and all will be here next year accept one and so the meeting went on for about 2 and 1/4 hours with just everyone having their say.

Why didn't the administration staff go?

The staff and the people of the community didn't actually want the administration there because they have trouble themselves communicating with these people. The administration also perceive us as having a problem in actually having our say in the community and so they just wanted the teaching staff to talk to them and see how they feel about working in this town.

Have any actions come out of these meetings?

Yes, they are forming a P&C over the holidays. They are actually getting the paperwork together now. Based on our concerns they are drafting a letter to the administration of the school raising issues. Why hasn't this happened? What happened about this and that because it was brought up last year? We would like to do all these other things and so it is not coming from us but it is coming from the community.

How representative of the whole community was the meeting? Did people come from [name of part of the town]?

It wasn't as many at the last meeting but at the previous two we had invited many people because I took a back seat in it but I worked with our AEW coordinator to try to get people to come. We actually had people from out of town there.

Would you get people from [name of school] that is more bounded with the Catholic system?

We are not sure but people at the meeting actually took on different areas and they are actually drafting up an absentee survey and they are actually going out to different areas so that we are getting to the wider community and their view about the problems?

What was the talk about in terms of what they saw as the problems?

A lot of excuses were made for the kids but the parents themselves are not happy with the school so why should they make their kids go to school if it is an unhappy place and they all say their experiences are bad. They just didn't want the kids to go to school so they didn't see it as important to send them.

Can they pinpoint their dissatisfaction?

Yes!

Are you able to tell me their concerns?

I know they are dissatisfied because if you go to a community meeting we have one representative from the school and that is the principal. When the principal is there things are dominated by the principal and then when they come to school they feel uncomfortable for saying things and don't feel they have a chance to express their thoughts openly.

Are they unhappy with the school because they can't get involved?

Yes and some people actually tell you and if you will talk to certain people in town they won't send their kids to school as long as the principal that we have at the moment is here. They will keep their kids home even though it is affecting their kids education and these are high school and late primary kids.

How do you try to overcome this issue in your classroom?

I work in all the secondary classes and through my role I see the kids and follow them through about coming to school.

How would you like to see your school improve to be more effective?

In a place like this I would say improved communication, people having their say on a staff level and not being treated like idiots like we are wet around the ears and have just come up from the city. Maybe a lot of them have but sure enough we know how a school is supposed to be run and it isn't.

What is the level of resources like in the school?

I guess they are pretty limited because if you concentrate on suitable resource for our kids there aren't many around. I guess we don't have a lot of finances to play with so it is just getting hold of them.

What can you say about the kids? Do they make it easier for teachers to work effectively?

The kids vary and they have wide ranges in their abilities.

Are they easy to teach when they are at school?

Yes and no it depends on if the kid likes you and comes to school and will have a pleasant time. If it's not that way you are in for a hell of a time and you may as well pack your bags now and go.

Is that a gender issue or a personal issue with the kids?

Some people would say it is a gender issue but personally I don't have a problem and I have even had one of the male members of the staff saying to me how were they all work with me. I am supporting that class and actually collaborative teaching with the male, and he has said as soon as I leave they went off but as soon as you come back they are like pussycats. You know if you give the kids respect you will get respect back and as a gender base issue I don't have a problem. It is more just personality and the way you treat the kids. They are strong-minded individuals and you if you don't give them some freedom you are in for a lot of trouble.

Does this apply to the initiated males who come to school?

Yes and no. It is not so much here. I mean I know we have a strong community of traditional Aboriginal and things like that but these kids are more town kids.

Do you think traditional ways are more evident in the remote areas?

No, even at [name of a community] one of my boys had the initiation and he was the most pleasant, beautiful boy that you could ever find.

Would you say teacher-students relationships could be positive irrespective of gender?

Yes, this boy even actually told one of the other boys don't do that. Listen to what Miss is saying, you shouldn't swear like that, it is rude. He actually tried to have a calming effect on others.

What can you say about the girls?

We seem to lose them at a very young age here by Year 9.

Is this through pregnancy?

Not so much pregnancy at that stage in Year 9. They just seem to become women and they are interested in boys at that stage but it depends on their family background. You just lose them and their attitude changes towards you and they can be real little bitches.

Do they see you as competition?

Yes and then they won't come to school.

So how come you have gotten on so well, despite the gender aspects, with students?

I think it was just coincidence at the start. I tried to divide them up like for activities in Year 8. They were in boys and girls groups and we just kept it like that and then I thought oh well boys and girls together and it has actually worked quite well.

Do you mean that you don't have a problem with family groups mixing?
No not too much. I haven't found that to be a problem but sure you get the ganging up on people in one family and they withdraw from school for a while.

Do you see that feuding could happen in any multi-cultural mix of students?

Not really no.

How would you describe your beliefs about teaching in this type of school?

Student-centred learning is the way to go.

And do you believe you carry that out?

Yes I do.

Can you tell me how you go about doing this?

Yes, here I have programs, like in sewing or clothing, or drafting or whatever, and the kids come along and I give them an outline of what I am going to teach and mark them on each term and I give them the scope that they can achieve at. And if they are an "A" student they will do whatever they can non-stop. The first time I started that in cooking I gave them free choices in writing their own programs like we did restaurant day this term and they just loved it. More people have to be like that. I know the Art teacher has commented and said I don't know if I can do it like that. And I said well it is the only way I can see that works. I think it is also about personality and there are clashes there and the kids sort of disagree with him.

How do you think your particular programs transfer to home life?

Actually we try to cover that issue because most of them only have fires outside their home, but the kids can still come to me and say can we make up a batch of scones we are having morning tea and they knew how to do it without the reinforcement of doing it at home. If they do cooking at home, even if it's an adaptation of a recipe from school, that is great. That is learning.

It seems that you are getting a fair sense that transference is occurring with some of your programs.

Even one of my Year 8s had a morning tea today and all the parents came in and they all gave a demonstration to their family or family members on the sewing machine. Actually we made them up something and this Year 8 boy has actually gone over to the TAFE now with his sister twice a week he will attend TAFE doing sewing.

What sort of aspirations can you foster with this boy?

Well they actually see what the Year 9s and 10s do and we actually run a cottage craft program and we are actually making things to sell and they actually respect the things he can do and also he respects himself.

Is there any talk about when you leave school you could set up a little industry? Where does that come into it?

I haven't actually said that but they have picked up on that. That is sort of how they are looking. I would say look at this and they say are they selling that for money and they say oh, we can do that too. And I say yes, and that is all I have said.

So is other entrepreneurial work done in any of the courses?

Yes they actually call it enterprise manual art and they actually make chopping boards, photo frames and boomerangs and sell them and BBQ plates so I do in my programs too.

It seems to me in communities, especially small communities, many students don't want to go away but there aren't jobs for everyone in this community.

I agree. The kids know why they are learning skills. I think that is why we don't have any troubles because the kids can actually see what is happening and the kids demonstrated their learning to me. They have had to find a recipe that they can demonstrate to the class and prepare and I don't have a problem you know they go to English classes and say I am not doing that. I am not standing up in front of the class but I don't have to ask twice. They just do it.

Do you think things can change for these students?

You bet.

What else would you like to change here at your school?

I think the administrators have got to get their hands dirty and get out into the community. I mean they would tell you they do but they don't. They know a few people here but when was the last time they got out and did liaison work and found out what such and such is doing. We go out there and report such and such and they will say what do you mean? And I will say well I went out and found out. They expect us to do all the dirty work you know and they take the credit for it.

That is very difficult when you don't have support. How do know that you are doing a good job?

A parent will tell you that you are doing a good job even if you weren't. If you actually go out and talk to these people and talk with them they think you are wonderful.

They will say you are great.

Yes and I think they would tell you even if you weren't doing a great job in the classroom. It's just because you know them. You are actually taking time to teach their child and you are going to see them, getting to who are they are at home and inviting them to assemblies or some other school event.

Are you exceptional in this school?

In some ways I am.

How many of the other staff do what you do?

Not many. Yes there are not many others. I mean you really have to take the time to go out.

Is this personal time more often than not?

Yes it is. I run the Young Women's Group here at school as well through an Aboriginal Corporation project and that is where all Year 7s up to High School girls go. There are about 16 or 17 in the group and that has helped me at school. I had a bit of trouble for a start when the kids said you can't do it. This is the rumour I got back "because you are a teacher you will tell all the other teachers about our problems". Well it took me three weeks to win the girls over.

It seems they must have your trust and confidence.

Yes and we have a great time and we've done so many caterings and things. People ask the Women's Group to go and do such and such work.

With your husband having a business here you have actually got a commitment to the town.

We have yes. And people like that because one of the parents who came into today, she asked me about what happened at the Community Meeting because she couldn't make it and I filled her in and then said it was good that most of the teachers were there are going to be here next year and that is another sort of plus the community likes.

I suppose parents don't like too many teacher changes each year.

Yes they hate teachers coming and going. They will say I am not going to talk to him. He is going to go off next year and why should I try. If these people won't come out and talk to us why should we waste our time coming in to see them. That is their attitude.

Do you think students are happy and satisfied with what they do with you?

I think so. They will tell you if they are not and I ask for feedback on my units each time, whether it is written feedback or verbal.

Is the principal happy with what you do?

Yes.

What about your colleagues?

Yes, they are and they can't believe how well the kids work with me.

You seem to have a very strong commitment to your work and the students.

Yes, I think so. I also get annoyed when you hear the staff going into the staffroom whingeing about such and such and calling them little [a very strong derogatory term] whatever they call them. I get really annoyed and sort of think you have got to be positive. You have got to make the little things count and so many people don't and when I came into my job I mean there has been dramas about the last term that have made me feel do I want to be here? But if it hadn't been for the kids they have kept me sane and I love teaching them.

Your work is very personal. It seems to come from within you and you generate your own work satisfaction. It is obviously something within you.

Yes, I mean we put on a dance with the Young Women's Group at school sometimes or we put on a Christmas Concert and my students want to do the Rock Eisteddfod and so many teachers stop and say wow, I can't believe the kids are actually working. I am there only if there are any problems. They come to me and I say oh come on guys get into it and they come up with moves and say is that OK Miss and I say that is great. What is the next one and sit and watch. Teachers can't believe how well the kids are working together with me. It is just amazing and I wish more people would do it.

There is recognition that you are exceptional in the school. Does the staff give you recognition as someone who is really working quite differently with these kids and want to find out more and learn more about what you are doing?

A lot of the staff will comment, like you were at it again weren't you? They see it is coming from inside me and I am not doing it because I have to.

Do they use you as a role model?

Some people do. If they have only got small classes they will actually bring their class and come in and work here.

Do you mentor the staff of any particular aspects of what you are doing or any approaches you use?

Not really. I have gone to staff meetings and never shut up and I sort of get into these things and say please don't forget samples and when I go down to conferences I will fill them in at staff meetings but I don't like to take up too much of their time. I would rather work with them individually and I have done that with the manual arts teacher this year and we have both taken an English class and he is just like wow [teacher's name] and he has said like wow [teacher's name].

He's a bit like a sponge.

He has been and he has commented to other people he is learning and he is seeing this new different world.

That's great.

I also go into the science teacher's class and I will just come up with something but I don't like to force my ideas on to people because you can sort of hit a barrier but people normally say oh yeah, that's great lets go for it.

In these different classrooms do you see friction between students?

I only see the secondary classes but yes. Yes, three kids actually two in Year 10 and one in Year 8 causes some sort of friction. The one Year 8 is a problem because of his attitude because he thinks he is better than everyone else and he gets into a lot of trouble but the others have fitted in. One female Year 10, she has a lot of trouble because the other girls think she is fighting for their men. The others give her a lot of trouble about it, tease her and say things about her.

How do you try and deal with promiscuity?

I tackle it through Sex Education and try to make it for separate groups for some lessons. I have done a lot of role plays and things like that through the Young Women's Groups and now I have brought it into Health Ed and kids say wow and the other teachers are saying I didn't believe that kids can do that and I have done a lot of role plays and I have actually taken the kids on camps and we talk about moral issues and the sorts of dilemmas a lot of them have. We act out what you can do about alcohol and workshops like that. I deal with a lot of out of school issues but it is not as easy at school because the kids also have barriers too. They will say certain things inside school that you want to hear. I guess that when they go out of the school they give you different points of view so being out of school with them is more of a real situation to them. Their views come out and they talk to me because they know me.

Do other teachers talk about friction between kids?

You do hear bits and pieces I would say it is more between some teachers and kids.

Can you tell me about this?

I would say, there are some certain teachers who can't work with the kids. Sure we get the odd occasion when I have to call kids out and sort of talk to them individually but this last term we haven't had any problems. I can remember a couple of issues last term and that was the bush kids versus the town kids and bush kids didn't have good hygiene and they were smelling a bit and things like that. Others were making crude comments and things like that but really they are starting to work together more and you can notice on the playground they will go into teams and encourage each other. We have had Healthways here with basketball and I think actually I wasn't really in for that. I can't see much benefit but now when I watch the kids I can see the benefits. I haven't talked to a lot of the teachers about it but being on playground duty you can see the kids organise themselves into different teams and taking their turns like they were shown by these role models and I think that is good.

What about competitiveness between the kids? Is there any really drive to succeed, be the best?

It is a shame factor to be better than your mates especially amongst Aboriginal people. Well this is why I think this student-centred learning has a lot going for it. My basic English group is the lowest achieving group. When I make it clear we are not competing against anyone else I have seen how well these guys have improved this year. I say you compete against yourselves. I don't care if you can't do such and such but do it for yourselves. I really like to see the kids pushed because I sort of wonder. I look at my Year 10s this year and think how many next year are going to be on the street drinking grog like the others? They need to be pushed to get somewhere and to get out of town.

How difficult is to set goals with these older students?

Well I don't see it really as being done and this is where kids need to see a purpose to school and need to see a goal. But whose job is it? You know, there are so many things to be done here and whose job is it to take them on? Whose job is it to chase everyone? There is no real ownership over it I guess and that is the problem.

I guess you have to sort out your teaching and time priorities.

Yes, you are right, yeah.

What about the difficulty of teaching the kids with their range of abilities and perhaps lack of motivation, even academic confidence in terms of reading and writing?
This can be frustrating. I find it more frustrating in Maths than I do in English or something like that.

What is it in Maths that presents the problems?

Just like their problem solving, they can't see what the problem is and they have not got the basic skills like what is 5 x 3 and I'm thinking oh no, how can I teach if they can't remember that. How can I do any of the other skills? Get me out of here!

Do you think this is a priority in this school?

Oral language and health are priorities in the school and that is for the next development plan for this year and next year. Numeracy is an ongoing priority that is being maintained.

Is it recognised as a problem?

Their Kriol gets in the way but I don't seem to notice it. I was saying to an English Superintendent who came up a couple of weeks ago that my English has gone down the drain since I have been here. You don't notice it because you try to talk in the kids' language. I guess that once you come here the kids will repeat what they are saying but it takes a while to understand them. Other people have come into the classroom and you are interpreter for them. I mean some Family and Children Services people came into my English class and we were doing a lesson and they were going round the class and they came up to me and said you actually seem interested in Aboriginal Education and couldn't get over it and could not understand a thing these kids were saying and the kids wanted to know all about these people who could not understand a thing. The kids were treated like aliens. Can't touch them and can't be near them.

How well do the students go with code switching?

Code switching has just come into classrooms through FELIK [Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools].

Do you think the Program has got potential to help build some bridges between the cultures?

Well the kids here will tell you they speak English especially our top kids so I think until they have grounds to think they are actually speaking Kriol that they are not going to progress any further.

I wonder if they understand that people have degrees of competency with language?

No, I wouldn't say so. Really for what they say about white people they really put them on a pedestal and white people are saying they can do this or that and black people just do it.

But you have expectations of them.

Yes I do and I wouldn't accept anything less and I would tell them.

Do you expect behaviour and academic effort to be of a high standard?

Yes, and that is what I find is the real trouble here in some other classes. I don't have any trouble in my classes but when I hear of some of my kids playing up for another teacher in another class, I say guys what is happening?

Do you think this is a teacher issue rather than the one related to the kids?

It is really, because they will say like the other day last week there were some kids that were playing up in this class and the kids were angry about it and I brought them down for a photo just before recess time and they sort of said to me Miss we are going to go home. I said why and they said well we are going to get suspended and have time out because of this teacher. And I said girls you are only just hurting yourself in other areas and they said no, that their feelings towards this teacher were stronger and wiped it out. And so I said oh well your choice.

What sort of support is in the school to help teachers monitor and reflect on their practice?

Well most of us here have been temporary. I mean I have just gone onto permanent staff this year. There is performance management appraisal but that only really comes from administration. You don't see them as being supportive when you have got a real problem. And I mean me I haven't got that much experience behind me and I sort of feel like I have to help because otherwise there are teachers in trouble they are going to get reprimanded from the powers and I just feel like I want to help and make suggestions. I don't see anyone else do that. If I wasn't doing it no-one would get any help.

Is evaluation and monitoring fairly strong in your program? How do the kids know they are progressing?

In terms of feedback, they self evaluate themselves. They have got checklists and things like that to monitor themselves. I try to get their work marked but they mark it themselves and I go through and make comments.

Do you think that is fairly consistent across classrooms in the secondary areas?

Fairly much so. In some areas it is not high on teacher's list because of so many other issues that seem to be important.

Do you think part of student-centre learning is also negotiating with the students about assessments?

Yes, I know of some teachers who are in to it but I couldn't say that it is well done.

How easy is it to engage the kids in learning and get them to knuckle down and get onto a task?

If they like it the activity it's no problem, but if they don't you are battling to even keep them for ten minutes.

What sort of activities tunes them in?

Practical activities. We have options here that most kids would say they enjoy all their options.

Such as ....

Manual arts such as woodwork, metalwork, enterprise, child care, clothing and craft, home economics, foods. I have high attendance in foods and horse riding. I am doing this cottage craft industry at the moment, like art and craft as well.

Has there ever been any talk in this school to focus the curriculum on those and the English, maths, comes in as cross curriculum component?

In post compulsory area but not in the lower secondary. No, I guess the powers that be like to think that here we are still looking at this unit curriculum stuff. They are still not sure how to give us the reins to go on with student outcomes and integrated curriculum. Yes there is still some hold back. Accountability is the famous word. Well it has been pushed on us this last year. We have to fill out forms showing each subject that we teach and how we are accountable at this school? We have got a new Deputy coming up on Friday and I have just asked teachers to put a list of suggestions for the secondary school for next year and actually ask all good and bad points to be discussed and look at the ways we can change things.

What sorts of things are coming through?

I guess they like the way we structured groups it this year, the different streaming groups. That has been really positive because we can better deal with individual needs. Some aspects of the curriculum are a waste of time like occupational education. The Year 10 camp was better because we took the kids last year to Darwin to take a look at post compulsory options and actually got the kids to take responsibility for it, the planning, where were going to go, where were we going to stay and then actually doing it.

That seems practical.

Yes, so if this new guy is not into this sort of thing then we are stuffed and so I just though I would get in early and just give him a list collated from secondary staff to say this is what we want done for next year.

Is homework an issue?

It is for parents that push their kids to achieve more but the majority of kids haven't got pens and pencils or even paper in their house. There is a homework centre but that is more for the primary school kids and high school kids wouldn't even consider going there.

Is there a space in the secondary area for a homework set-up?

For sure but getting someone to do it and getting kids to actually want to go along are the problems. I don't know how many would actually attend. They would have to see that school is important to do extra work. Really our results are pretty poor. We have got kids in Year 9 or 10 working at Level 1, 2, 3 student outcomes and they are 15 years of age. Their behaviour has been atrocious and this year they have grown up and matured but they are going to leave school with what? They can't even read a shopping list down at the supermarket. It is just amazing. What is happening? I feel really bad myself because I think these kids are going out but then I think what have they done for the last seven years at school? Surely they must have done something.

What are the best sort of instructional methods to work with these kids?

Repetition, demonstration, watching, modelling. I would say also too students instructing other students. Peer tutoring. The kids love computers and we have got computers in all rooms now. Trouble is the kids have to come to school enough to realise they enjoy it which is the problem at the moment. I think computers are great but I am just worried that some teachers who tend to be quite lazy will actually just tell the kids to play with the computer and I have voiced my concerns. The computer becomes like a worksheet and I haven't said that and I don't want to get people up the wrong way but that is what I worry about and I can see it happening in the classrooms. We have computers but we haven't been trained how to use them best in the classroom. For me it is because we don't get support from administration.

Is that all admin people?

Yes. And you would hear a lot of grizzles between the staff and they don't have any support and one of the teachers in primary school is leaving this year because she hasn't got any support and all her support people that she had this year will be leaving and so she is leaving too and she told that to the principal.

Are admin coordinated as a team?

Yes and no. Depends on what day it is or the issues being brought up or who is in trouble today. They have all got little groups.

So the human side of things can affect the workplace.

Very much so and I think last term has showed there is a break in the staff over some issues. You probably haven't heard this but staff have been divided and admin sort of talk to little teams and have got their own little groups and confidentiality I think things get discussed

over the golf matches with half a carton under your belt and that is a worry. And so you refuse to say things and you don't even want to talk to that person and then you get stabbed in the back. Someone else is talking about you.

This seems to be a difficult time in the school. How do you think it will change next year?

I'm with the community. I don't think it will change until the principal changes. In a school like this, you have got a young staff, a community that is bloody hard to work with and if you haven't got and can't trust or rely on the people above you are stuffed. This is the problem we have at the moment and people say I don't go into the staffroom that much. I'm just too tired. The community is trying to do something about it. They have done a petition, documenting their grievances. People don't know about it but I do because of my contacts and this is how bad it is. It is sad to say it but I think it is great. I shouldn't say that because I should be supporting my principal.

We have used the time you have available and we can finish off on that note because we really have come back to one of the issues we started with. I have appreciated and valued what you have contributed to this study. I will type this interview up and let you check that it captures what you intended to say. Thankyou for your time.

PART TWO: SUMMARY LOG OF THE TRANSCRIPT

SOURCE [original script page numbers]	KEY IDEAS FROM THE TEXT	CODE
Page 1	Knows what goes on in the community because husband and self are more permanent residents: set up a business	1
Page 1	Gets to know and speak with people in the community	1
Page 1	Parents are unhappy when the teachers do not get out into the community and take part	2
Page 1/3/21/22	Admin team problem; really the principal; parents won't send their kids to school	3
Page 1	Regular meetings with community people to try and solve problems like absenteeism	3
Page 3 Page 4 Page 5/6 Page 6 Page 7 Page 8	A good school is about: • communicating and every on having their say; • being treated as professional with knowledge • resources • respecting the kids • student-centred learning negotiating goals and assessment; parents in often to see how program is working • life skills and enterprise skills to fit back into their existing community • principal getting out with the community; liaising • teachers need to give time to meeting parents on their own grounds • knowing your work is valued by colleagues, parents and students	3
Page 4	Gender issue varies	5.1
Page 4 Page 12 Page 11	Lose kids at a young age, girls are interested in boys, perhaps some pregnant; can see female teachers as competition; won't come to school; boys turn to alcohol; Promiscuity	5.1
Page 5	Teachers who don't capitalise on student's autonomy run into trouble	4.2
Page 7/8	Teacher sees self as the exception	4.1
Page 8 Page 19	Parents don't like the constant change of staff Teachers need commitment	2
Page 9	Racist and disrespectful staff in regards to kids/parents; have to be very positive and "make the little things count"	4.1
Page 9	QUOTE ... "they see it coming from inside me and I'm not doing it because I have to" ...	4.2
Page 9/10	Mentoring staff individually	3
Page 10	All Aboriginal population in secondary: only two non Aboriginal students	3
Page 10/11	Sex and health education issues Dilemmas and moral issues in the program	4.2
Page 11	Bush kids versus town kids (all Aboriginal)	3
Page 12	Shame to stand out from peers; especially amongst Aboriginal people; (roots in traditional culture) need to learn to compete against themselves ie student-centred learning	5.1
Page 12	Kids need high expectations to "get somewhere, to get out of town".	4.2
Page 13	Kids need to see a purpose to school; need goals	4.2
Page 13	Leadership to prioritise real issues	3
Page 13	Frustrating teaching a great range of abilities especially maths; basic facts	4.1
Page 13	Tend to adopt the Kriol, modelling SAE a problem	4.1
Page 14	Code switching just starting as an issues in classrooms	4.2

Page 14	Class cohesiveness difficult to foster for some teachers	4.2
Page 15	High expectations but ones that are realistic; some kids work better for some teachers than others; they respect some teachers more than others	4.2
Page 15	No real mentoring except from admin in regard to Permanent status; collaborative teaching not strong	3
Page 16	Classroom monitoring strongly focussed on the students taking control; but not necessarily by all teachers	4.2
Page 16	If kids like the topic, subject there is no problem keeping then engaged on the task; enjoy practical activities the most (note examples mentioned)	5.1
Page 17	No cross curriculum focus in lower secondary (Old Unit Curriculum still being followed)	3
Page 18	Homework not done at home; no facilities; no real resources to organise secondary homework classes although primary kids do it	5.1
Page 18	Literacy standards really poor after seven years of primary schooling	5.2
Page 19	Quality in terms of outcomes is very poor	5.2
Page 19	Continuity; transience, truancy, poor classroom behaviour, rapid change of staff	5.1
Page 19	Instructional methods: repetition, demonstrations, watching modelling, students instructing other students, peer tutoring	4.2
Page 19	Misuse of computers; busy work like a worksheet	4.2
Page 20	Lack of support from admin creates and unsatisfactory workplace; lack of consistent coordination between admin team; no rust	4.1
Page 20	Cliques within staff a real problem	3
Page 21	Poor communication in the school; leadership crucial with a young staff and an unstable community	3
Page 23	Good buildings	3

PART THREE: RUNNING RECORD OF THE MAIN THEMES IN EACH CATEGORY

COMMUNITY [Code 1]
Knows what goes on in the community because they are more permanent residents: set up a business. Gets to know and speak with people in the community.

PARENTS [Code 2]
Parents are unhappy when the teachers do not get out into the community and take part. Parents don't like the constant change of staff; teachers need commitment to stay at the school for longer periods.

SCHOOL [Code 3]
A good school is about:
• communicating and everyone having their say
• being treated as professional with knowledge
• resources
• respecting the kids
• student-centred learning negotiating goals and assessment; parents in often to see how program is working
• life skills and enterprise skills to fit back into their existing community
• principal getting out with the community; liaising
• teachers need to give time to meeting parents on their own grounds
• knowing your work is valued by colleagues, parents and students

Admin team problem; really the principal; parents won't send their kids.
Regular meetings with community people to try and solve problems like absenteeism.
Mentoring staff individually.
All Aboriginal population in secondary: only two non-Aboriginal students; bush kids versus town kids (all Aboriginal).
Leadership to prioritise real issues.

No real mentoring except from admin in regard to P on P; collaborative teaching not strong. Cliques within staff a real problem.
Poor communication in the school; leadership crucial with a young staff and a difficult community.
Good buildings.

CLASSROOMS [Code 4]

Teacher Efficacy [Code 4.1]
Teacher sees self as the exception.
Racist and disrespectful staff in regards to kids/parents; have to be very positive and "make the little things count".
[Kids] ... "they see it coming from inside me and I'm not doing it because I have to"
Frustrating teaching a great range of abilities especially maths; basic facts.
Tend to adopt the Kriol, modelling SAE a problem.
Lack of support from admin creates and unsatisfactory workplace; lack of consistent coordination between admin team; trust.

Teacher Practices [Code 4.2]
Teachers who don't capitalise on student's autonomy run into trouble.
Sex and health education to examine dilemmas and moral issues.
Kids need high expectations to "get somewhere, to get out of town".
Kids need to see a purpose to school; need goals.
Code switching.
Class cohesiveness difficult to foster.
High expectations but ones that are realistic; some kids work better for some teachers than others; they respect some teachers more than others.
Classroom monitoring strongly focussed on the students taking control; but not necessarily by all teachers.
Instructional methods: repetition, demonstrations, watching modelling, students instructing other students, peer tutoring.
Misuse of computers; busy work like a worksheet.

STUDENTS [Code 5]

Behaviour [Code 5.1]
Continuity; transience, truancy, poor classroom behaviour, rapid change of staff.
Gender issue varies .
Lose kids at a young age, girls are interested in boys, pregnant; can see female teachers as competition; won't come to school; boys turn to alcohol; girls turn to promiscuity.
Shame to stand out from peers; especially amongst Aboriginal people; (roots in traditional culture) need to learn to compete against themselves ie student-centred learning.

Attitudes [Code 5.2]
If kids like the topic, subject there is no problem keeping then engaged on the task; enjoy practical activities the most; examples listed.
Homework not done at home; no facilities; no real resources to organise secondary homework classes although primary kids do it.

Achievement [Code 5.3]
Literacy standards really poor after seven years of primary schooling.
Effectiveness in terms of outcomes is very poor.

APPENDIX B

Letter of Invitation to Schools
to Participate in Phases Two and Three of the Study

«principal_name»
«title»
«school»
«address»
«town»

Dear «first_name»

As you are most probably aware, during 1995 I have been planning for my doctoral study in government schools in the Kimberley Education District. I am conducting this study independently but it is with the support and acknowledgment of Michael Heaven, District Superintendent. Fortunately, I have been able to gain an Australian Research Council Small Grant Award to assist in the conduct of the study. I have titled my study *Kimberley Schools Study*.

Towards the end of 1995, I visited a few schools in the District to gain some firsthand understanding of schools in the district and to confirm my research procedures. I am gratefully indebted to the principals and staff in these schools for their cooperation and because they gave their time and patience unstintingly.

My study is concerned with identifying those characteristics which are associated with school success in geographically isolated government schools which serve communities which experience some degree of poverty. I have chosen the Kimberley District because all government schools are geographically isolated in some way and have students who may experience material deprivation. Attached is an outline of the study.

Over the next two years I plan to collect information concerning home-school relationships, the operations of schools, the operation of classrooms, and students' progress from as many schools as possible in the Kimberley District.

In particular, I would like to track a small sample of students in schools as they move through the primary years and compulsory secondary years. Part of the tracking would be concerned with the transition of students from Kindergarten to Year 1, Year 3 to Year 4 and Year 7 to Year 8.

The purpose of this letter is to invite you and your staff to participate in the study. Participation can be at two levels:

1.   Staff can respond to a questionnaire in 1996. The survey will take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

2.   In addition to the questionnaire commitment, schools may participate as sites for case study. The case study would involve me as researcher in the   school for substantial periods of time over two years (1996-1997). As part of the case study, I would be involved with interviewing parents, community members, principals, teachers and students where appropriate. Importantly, I would be responsible for collecting samples of students' work to ascertain the progress they make over the period of time.

After discussion with your staff and school community please could you respond to my request by returning the enclosed expression of interest sheet by **8 March, 1996.** A reply paid envelope is supplied for your convenience.

I look forward in anticipation to your response, as I believe that my study involving your school can contribute to the acknowledgment of the uniqueness of government schools in the Kimberley. More importantly, the identification of how schools work successfully for their students will be of benefit to all schools in the District.

Besides guaranteeing confidentiality for all participants in the study, my commitment to participants will be to provide regular feedback about the information I gather. The study has the potential to support your school in its planning processes.

If you have any queries or require any further information regarding my study please contact me on the following:

- Phone: (09) 9351 3594
- Fax: (09) 9351 2503
- Post: SMEC address as above
- Email: rgribble@cc.curtin.edu.au (if applicable)

Yours sincerely

JOAN GRIBBLE
12 February 1996

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

KIMBERLEY SCHOOLS STUDY

«school»

Please return this form to me by the **8 March, 1996** in the enclosed reply paid envelope. Your level of interest can be shown by ticking the relevant box. Thankyou for your consideration.

☐ Staff at the school are not interested in being involved in the Study.

☐ Staff at the school are interested in being involved in the Study at Level 1.

☐ Staff at the school are interested in being involved in the Study at Level 2.

Please supply names of staff who are willing to participate in the Study.

Staff Member Name   **Role**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

School Contact Name for researcher

_____   _____

KIMBERLEY SCHOOLS STUDY

Objectives

What makes a school successful, and in what terms a school's success can be expressed, are questions which have confronted educational researchers and policy makers for several decades. The purpose of the study is to identify how government schools in the Kimberley Education District foster success for their students. Kimberley schools are geographically isolated and support many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Background

More often than not, school success is closely linked to levels of student academic achievement based on scores from standardised tests. In the Western Australian context the success of rural schools has been brought to the forefront. The Report based on a Ministerial Review of Schooling, has provided some evidence to suggest there are no major differences in student achievement which can be attributed to school location. A clear direction for research is alluded to in this Report. Where differences exist in student test results in language and number they appear to be strongly related to socioeconomic factors, rather than location, and affect all schools in much the same way.

The Kimberley region is unique due to its geographic isolation and differing cultural contexts. There is a diversity in characteristics of topography, industry, and population. Apart from the circumstances of distance, isolation, sparse populations, both coastal and inland, school environments are different. Communities contrast in social composition, nature, culture, and lifestyle from location to location. The support communities are able to provide for schooling varies due to social, cultural, and economic factors. Associated with the geographic differences of the Kimberley are the associated land use and local industries which are relevant for local economics, employment, and hence schooling. Many of the schools in the region are small and face challenges in providing the most coherent educational program possible for students. It is difficult to address the rapidly changing purposes of rural schooling, particularly for students who may experience educational difficulties.

Significance

The significance of the proposed study is to ascertain how school success is fostered within the diverse range of schools in the Kimberley Education District. The outcomes of the study will enable staff in Kimberley government schools to:

- improve planning to further enhance parent and school partnerships;
- develop possible alternative organisations for schooling;
- reconsider the delivery of curriculum content using culturally appropriate pedagogy and assessment;
- assist District Education Office consultants and psychologists with their support to schools; and
- provide policy makers within the government education system with information about adequate resource provisions to their schools.

Research Questions

The General Research Question
What are the successful ways school communities in the Kimberley work to improve student outcomes?

The Specific Research Questions

How does the sociocultural context of schools influence the ways they work?
How are school resources used to support students' learning?
How do within-school environments influence the ways schools work?
How is the curriculum shaped and what are best classroom practices?
How can student achievement best be measured?

The Research Focus
In what ways does the school development planning strategy provide a driving force for change in schools?

Method

Over the course of the study there are three developmental phases. The three phases in the study are listed.

Phase 1: Commencing the Fieldwork
General information was generated from four schools to commence the study. The data were analysed and themes of interest were identified to prepare a study-specific questionnaire.

Phase 2: Developing a Broader Picture
The study-specific questionnaire was designed and administered in 14 different schools to develop a broader base of information. The information was analysed to create descriptions of various aspects of school contexts. Both consensus and divergence in opinions were identified. Five schools were selected for case study work.

Phase 3: Looking in Schools
Data were generated from teachers and students in the five schools. The data were analysed to make interpretations about the success of schools in terms of the best outcomes students achieved and the best practices that fostered these outcomes.

APPENDIX C

**Cover Letter to Schools
to Accompany the Questionnaire in Phase Two of the Study**

«name»
«title»
«school»
«address»
«town»

Dear «first_name»

I trust all is well with you and your work. Please find enclosed the questionnaire which you agreed to respond to for the purpose of the *Kimberley Schools Study*.

The questionnaire will provide me valuable information about schools across the Kimberley District. All teachers participating in my study will complete the same questionnaire. However, the analysis of the data gathered from staff at your school may hold the potential to provide specific feedback for the school to use for school planning if you thought this was a worthwhile idea. My thanks are extended to you for your consideration to be a respondent to the questionnaire.

I acknowledge that the questionnaire is long but I will greatly appreciate your time and thought taken to complete the task. If you have any queries or require any further information regarding the questionnaire please contact me on the following:

- Phone: (09) 9351 3594
- Fax: (09) 9351 2503
- Postal   Address as above
- Email: rgribble@cc.curtin.edu.au

Yours sincerely

JOAN GRIBBLE
28 November, 1996

APPENDIX D

The Study-Specific Survey

KIMBERLEY SCHOOLS STUDY
STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE
1996

As part of my PhD studies I am conducting a study to identify the ways government schools in the Kimberley Education District are successful for students. The study will explore the effects of poverty, Aboriginality, and location on student achievement over a three-year period. The characteristics of what makes a geographically isolated school successful for students, and upon what criteria the success should be measured, are central to the study.

You indicated earlier this year that you would be able to participate in the study by responding to a questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information from you about some of the areas impacting on your work: parents; the school; the classroom; and the students. Your views about each of these areas will be valuable. Information contained in questionnaires from your school will be collated and reported to the school. Your individual answers will be kept strictly confidential and your anonymity is guaranteed. The identification code on this questionnaire is for my purpose of keeping track of changes from 1996 through to 1997.

This questionnaire is lengthy and will take approximately **40 minutes** to complete. While I realise I am taking much of your valuable time, several teachers in the Kimberley District have assured me that the information gathered from the questionnaire will be helpful to each individual school. I recommend that you complete the questionnaire over two or three sittings.

PLEASE RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE BY:

30 SEPTEMBER, 1996.

THANKYOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

**PLEASE INDICATE YOUR RESPONSES FOR EACH QUESTION BY TICKING
THE APPROPRIATE BOX**

PERSONAL DETAILS

What is your age? _____ years

Are you male or female?　　　　　Male　❑ 1　　Female ❑ 2

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Yes　❑ 1　　No　　❑ 2

How many years have you been appointed to your current school?
　　　Less than 1 year ❑ 1　1-2 years ❑ 2　　2-3 years ❑ 3　　More than 3 years ❑ 4

How many total years teaching experience do you have in geographically isolated schools? (Usually referred to as PCAP schools)
　　　Less than 1 year ❑ 1　1-2 years ❑ 2　　2-3 years ❑ 3　　More than 3 years ❑ 4

How many total years teaching experience do you have in schools where communities are socioeconomically disadvantaged? (Usually referred to as PSP schools)
　　　Less than 1 year ❑ 1　1-2 years ❑ 2　　2-3 years ❑ 3　　More than 3 years ❑ 4

How many total years teaching experience do you have in schools with Aboriginal students?
　　　Less than 1 year ❑ 1　1-2 years ❑ 2　　2-3 years ❑ 3　　More than 3 years ❑ 4

What is your role in your current school? Please indicate title/s

_____

If your role is a teaching one please indicate the year level/s you teach.

_____

Have you been involved in some cross cultural awareness professional development program in the past three years?
　　　　　　　　Yes　❑ 1　　No　　❑ 2

Have you been involved in some professional development program in the past three years concerned with poverty?
　　　　　　　　Yes　❑ 1　　No　　❑ 2

For the following multiple choice questions, circle the number of the response you feel expresses your level of agreement with the statement.

1 STRONGLY DISAGREE	2 DISAGREE	3 NOT SURE	4 AGREE	5 STRONGLY AGREE

There are no right or wrong answers associated with these questions. It is important to gain your individual views through your responses.

PARENT LEVEL

The following statements are associated with the parents of student in your school. The statements are intended to gain your views about the parents as a collective. Not all community members might have children attending your school. It is important to gain your understandings about how you believe the school's parent group thinks, feels or acts. Also, it is important to identify some of your attitudes towards the parents. If your role is a teaching one, not all the parents will necessarily have children in your classroom or program/s.

Perceptions of parents

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about parents in this school							
1	Most parents in this school have experienced successful mainstream education.	1	2	3	4	5	39
2	Most parents value the education provided by this school.	1	2	3	4	5	40
3	Most parents hold aspirations for their children to succeed at this school.	1	2	3	4	5	41
4	Some parents in this school are too busy with their own lives/problems to be concerned about education.	1	2	3	4	5	42
5	Parents in this school are receptive to the school's programs.	1	2	3	4	5	43
6	Harmonious home/school relationships are evident in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	44
7	Parents in this community require external support to fulfil the expectations set by the school (eg. attendance, homework, nutrition).	1	2	3	4	5	45
8	Most parents in this school are interested in how the school operates.	1	2	3	4	5	46

Parent involvement

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about parent involvement in this school							
1	Parents in this school are always involved in the school's major functions.	1	2	3	4	5	47
2	Parents in this school are involved in their children's education at home.	1	2	3	4	5	48
3	Many parents in this school attend school meetings.	1	2	3	4	5	49
4	Most parents help the school in some way or other.	1	2	3	4	5	50
5	Many parents involved themselves as helpers in classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	51
6	The knowledge and skills of parents are used in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	52

School actions to involve parents

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about school actions to involve parents							
1	Structures are in place for the involvement of parents in decision making in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	53
2	Teachers report informally to parents on a regular basis about students' progress.	1	2	3	4	5	54
3	Regular formal reports are given to parents about students' progress.	1	2	3	4	5	55
4	School activities are reported regularly through local media.	1	2	3	4	5	56
5	Regular newsletters inform parents about this school and student activities.	1	2	3	4	5	57
6	Regular social family functions are organised by the school.	1	2	3	4	5	58
7	Structures exist in this schools to deal with parents' views, concerns and complaints.	1	2	3	4	5	59
8	Home visiting is a common strategy for communicating with parents in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	60

SCHOOL LEVEL

The following statements are associated with the overall operations of your school. The statements are intended to gain our views about how your school operates. It is important to gain your understanding about how you believe your school is organised, functions,and meets the needs of teachers parents and students. If you are in an administrative position, respond to the questions from that perspective.

Resources available to the school

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about the level of resources in this school							
1	Central Office allocation of staff is adequate for this school.	1	2	3	4	5	61
2	Central Office support for special problems in this school is high.	1	2	3	4	5	62
3	The School Grant is adequate for this school's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	63
4	Financial assistance through special programs (eg. PCAP, PSP, ESL) is adequate.	1	2	3	4	5	64
5	Some innovative programs in this school cannot be maintained because of lack of resources.	1	2	3	4	5	65
6	Some innovative programs cannot be considered in this school because of lack of resources.	1	2	3	4	5	66
7	District Office personnel are responsive to this school's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	67
8	District Office resources to support this school are effective.	1	2	3	4	5	68
9	The parents and wider community are able to supplement school funds.	1	2	3	4	5	69
10	There is a range of community resources for this school to use.	1	2	3	4	5	70

Effective use of resources in the school

	My beliefs about the effective use of resources	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1	Staff have a high degree of expertise to meet any special needs of this school.	1	2	3	4	5	71
2	Staff are deployed effectively in this school to meet the needs of students.	1	2	3	4	5	72
3	There is easy access to professional development for staff in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	73
4	Professional development meets the needs of all staff in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	74
5	In this school I am satisfied with my workplace conditions.	1	2	3	4	5	75
6	This school has a significant number of up-to-date equipment and material resources.	1	2	3	4	5	76
7	This school has a wide range of equipment and material resources.	1	2	3	4	5	77
8	This school's equipment and material resources are well used.	1	2	3	4	5	78
9	Systematic training for teachers for use of resources exists in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	79
10	The style of building of this school is functional.	1	2	3	4	5	80
11	Classroom design is appropriate for teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5	81
12	It is important in this school that the grounds are beautified.	1	2	3	4	5	82

Decision making in the school

	My beliefs about the decision making processes in this school	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1	There is a complementary approach to informal and formal decision making in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	83
2	Formal decision making in larger groups, such as a staff meeting, is marked by a sense of working together.	1	2	3	4	5	84
3	Decisions from both informal and formal meetings are followed through into actions.	1	2	3	4	5	85
4	Staff meetings in this school are regular, worthwhile and functional.	1	2	3	4	5	86
5	I feel free to speak my mind during the consensus decision making process in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	87
6	Teachers in this school work together to solve individual teacher problems.	1	2	3	4	5	88
7	School level decisions are mostly reached by consensus rather than by decree.	1	2	3	4	5	89
8	Staff cliques operated in the decision making process in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	90
9	Administrators are prepared to make and take responsibility for final decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	91
10	Students are involved in the decision making processes in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	92

Leadership in the school

My beliefs about leadership in this school	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1 Clear communication patterns are established between various staff members in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	93
2 Duties in this school are delegated on a rational, clearly understood and accepted basis.	1	2	3	4	5	94
3 Leadership in this school is marked by a sound educational vision which is communicated to staff, parents and students.	1	2	3	4	5	95
4 Leadership in this school is committed to improving student outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5	96
5 When appropriate, it is expected that decisions in this school should be taken by school leaders without consultation with staff.	1	2	3	4	5	97
6 Teachers in this school have faith in the decisions taken by school leaders without consultation.	1	2	3	4	5	98
7 Leaders in this school set a good example by working hard at their leadership role.	1	2	3	4	5	99
8 Leaders in this school always have time to support or counsel teachers, parents or students with problems or concerns.	1	2	3	4	5	100
9 Teachers are positive in their interactions with one another.	1	2	3	4	5	101
10 There is a high level of professionalism in staff in this school because they are trusted by school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	102
11 Staff morale is very high in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	103

Achievement orientated policy in the school

My beliefs about the achievement oriented policy in this school	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1 This school has a clear and defensible view about what is important in the curriculum for students to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	1
2 This school's planning focuses on improving students' learning.	1	2	3	4	5	2
3 Learning programs from one year level to another are built on quality information about students' levels of achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	3
4 The school's policy on curriculum encompasses the full range of student development - intellectual, emotional, physical, social and cultural.	1	2	3	4	5	4
5 Parents, teachers and students appear to work towards the same goals in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	5
6 Collecting data to monitor students' progress is systematic in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 This school's documented plans are put into operation.	1	2	3	4	5	7
8 Programs of work developed in this school are relevant to the local and wider community's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	8
9 School priorities in planning are resourced to create improvement in students' learning.	1	2	3	4	5	9
10 Students' life chances are enhanced through this school's policies and planning.	1	2	3	4	5	10
11 This school adds something of value to what students already have in their lives.	1	2	3	4	5	11
12 This school is able to develop in students a commitment to further learning.	1	2	3	4	5	12

Orderly and caring atmosphere in the school

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about the school's orderly and caring atmosphere							
1	Teachers, other workers and students feel safe at all times in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	13
2	The school has a clear and consistent policy for managing student behaviour in and outside classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5	14
3	Teachers in this school make an extra effort to help their students.	1	2	3	4	5	15
4	Incidents of teacher and student confrontation are few in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	16
5	Students' work is regularly displayed in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	17
6	Work displays are regularly changed in all classrooms in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	18
7	All teachers in this school care about their students and what happens to them.	1	2	3	4	5	19
8	Most teachers in this school are fair to their students.	1	2	3	4	5	20
9	Most teachers are patient with students who have learning problems.	1	2	3	4	5	21
10	Harmonious race relationships exist in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	22
11	This school has easy access to support agencies to work with students' problems.	1	2	3	4	5	23
12	Students fulfil expectations by keeping the school rules for behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	24

CLASSROOM LEVEL

The following statements are associated with the overall operation of your classroom. The statements are intended to gain your views about how your classroom/s or program/s operate. It is important to gain your understandings about how you believe your work is organised, functions, and meets the needs of students for whom you are directly responsible. If you are a non-teaching principal, respond to the statements to reflect your beliefs about classrooms in the school as a collective.

Preparation and planning for teaching

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about my preparation and planning							
1	Goals for student learning are clearly evident in planning.	1	2	3	4	5	25
2	Students' experiences are considered in the planning of lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	26
3	Planned teaching and learning strategies are interesting.	1	2	3	4	5	27
4	Time allocation is planned to cover all areas (or subject area) of the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	28
5	Students' learning style is considered in lesson planning.	1	2	3	4	5	29
6	Appropriate amounts of homework are planned for students.	1	2	3	4	5	30
7	A balance of informal and formal assessment is planned.	1	2	3	4	5	31
8	Considerable personal time is spent on planning and preparation.	1	2	3	4	5	32

Classroom learning environment

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about the learning environment in my classroom/s							
1	Students have a clear motive for coming to school.	1	2	3	4	5	33
2	Students have fun in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	34
3	Students work hard in the classroom to complete their work.	1	2	3	4	5	35
4	Students are interested in learning new things.	1	2	3	4	5	36
5	Students would work even when left on their own.	1	2	3	4	5	37
6	Students in the classroom want to be friends with one another.	1	2	3	4	5	38
7	Students have a sense of belonging in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	39
8	Most students in the classroom care about each others' work.	1	2	3	4	5	40
9	Students are attentive in classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	41
10	Students are challenged to fulfil potential.	1	2	3	4	5	42

Classroom behaviour management

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about behaviour management in my classroom/s							
1	Students are expected to attend school regularly.	1	2	3	4	5	43
2	Students are expected to be punctual.	1	2	3	4	5	44
3	Students are expected to have good personal hygiene.	1	2	3	4	5	45
4	Students are expected to meet rules for behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	46
5	Students are expected to perform to their capabilities.	1	2	3	4	5	47
6	Students are easily engaged on task.	1	2	3	4	5	48
7	Most classroom time is spent on students involved in learning activities.	1	2	3	4	5	49
8	Most classroom time is spent talking about what students need to do.	1	2	3	4	5	50
9	Out side interruptions to the classroom are few.	1	2	3	4	5	51
10	Classroom routines are organised and smooth.	1	2	3	4	5	52
11	Students are able to self-manage task related behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	53
12	Considerable teacher time is required to monitor and maintain classroom behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	54

Organisation of curriculum content in classroom programs

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about the organisaiton of curriculum content in my classroom program/s							
1	Curriculum content is taught to reflect viewpoints from different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5	55
2	Students' background knowledge and experiences form the starting point for teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	56
3	Links are made across subjects (or within a subject) through integrated topics.	1	2	3	4	5	57
4	The application of language skills taught is prominent across the curriculum (or into subject area/s).	1	2	3	4	5	58
5	Interesting lesson content is provided for students using various artefacts, media and technologies.	1	2	3	4	5	59
6	Students are assisted through curriculum activities to deal with prejudices.	1	2	3	4	5	60
7	Great emphasis is placed on the accuracy of knowledge and skills in the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	61
8	Curriculum activities encourage students learning to use thinking skills.	1	2	3	4	5	62

Teaching practices in classrooms

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about teaching practices in my classroom/s							
1	All students know the goals for achievement for every lesson.	1	2	3	4	5	63
2	Student-centred learning is emphasised in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	64
3	Most lessons cater for the interests and needs of students.	1	2	3	4	5	65
4	Teacher modelling of the skills being taught is prominent in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	66
5	It is easy to show students the application of skills learnt from lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	67
6	Models of learners are used through peers, teachers, parents and visitors in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	68
7	Students are able to do most of the talking during lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	69
8	Socially appropriate language and behaviour are modelled in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	70
9	A range of situations for individual, paired, small group and whole class learning are provided.	1	2	3	4	5	71
10	Questioning techniques are taught to as a way to clarify their thinking.	1	2	3	4	5	72
11	Periods of consolidation of new skills taught are allowed for.	1	2	3	4	5	73
12	The pace of teaching is appropriate for most students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5	74

Monitoring students' progress in classrooms

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about monitoring students'progress in my classroom/s							
1	Feedback through regular conferences with each student about his or her academic progress is provided.	1	2	3	4	5	75
2	Opportunities for monitoring through informal assessment such as games and quizzes are provided.	1	2	3	4	5	76
3	Opportunities are provided for students to be monitored by peers and parents.	1	2	3	4	5	77
4	Students are encouraged to self evaluate.	1	2	3	4	5	78
5	Careful records are kept of students' progress.	1	2	3	4	5	79
6	Every effort is made to acknowledge each student's accomplishments.	1	2	3	4	5	80
7	All parents are regularly met, formally and informally, to report about their children's progress.	1	2	3	4	5	81

STUDENT LEVEL

The following statements are associated with the students that you are directly responsible for in your classroom/s or program/s. The statements are intended to gain your views about the students you teach.

If you are a non-teaching principal, respond to the statements to reflect your views bout students as a collective group.

Students' background experiences

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about my students' background experiences							
1	Students can take part in all school activities even if parents can't afford to pay.	1	2	3	4	5	82
2	Most students lack experience with Standard Australian English.	1	2	3	4	5	83
3	Most students have developed interpersonal skills appropriate for their age and situation.	1	2	3	4	5	84
4	Most students have rich conceptual experiences associated with success at school.	1	2	3	4	5	85
5	Many students have continuous health problems.	1	2	3	4	5	86
6	Many students truant from school.	1	2	3	4	5	87
7	Transience is prevalent with students.	1	2	3	4	5	88
8	Many students have emotional problems which disrupt classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	89
9	Many students have emotional problems which disrupt the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	90
10	Students have facilities at home to sustain teacher set work.	1	2	3	4	5	91

Students' motivation to learn

My beliefs about students' motivation to learn	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1 Most students are keen to come to school.	1	2	3	4	5	92
2 Most students have a desire to succeed in their school activities.	1	2	3	4	5	93
3 Most students have interests outside of school.	1	2	3	4	5	94
4 Most students see learning as relevant to their lives.	1	2	3	4	5	95
5 Students come to class able to concentrate and be attentive.	1	2	3	4	5	96
6 Students' geographic location limits their aspirations to succeed at school.	1	2	3	4	5	97
7 Students' geographic location limits their job prospects when they leave school.	1	2	3	4	5	98
8 Most students have a positive sense of their identity.	1	2	3	4	5	99
9 Most students fulfil homework requirements.	1	2	3	4	5	100
10 Many students appear to spend too many hours watching TV or videos.	1	2	3	4	5	101

Students' language development

My beliefs about students' language development	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1 Most students have adequate fluency in the spoken form of the language of instruction in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	102
2 Most students use an adequate level of Standard Australian English in their reading and writing during classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	103
3 Time has to be allocated in the classroom to speaking and listening activities.	1	2	3	4	5	104
4 Constant clarification of students' understanding has to be considered due to their poor use of Standard Australian English.	1	2	3	4	5	105
5 Most students easily understand my use of vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5	106
6 Vocabulary has to be constantly taught to students.	1	2	3	4	5	107
7 Specific grammar forms have to be taught to students.	1	2	3	4	5	108
8 Students require practice in correct pronunciation of words.	1	2	3	4	5	109
9 Students are able to extract meaning from pictures.	1	2	3	4	5	110
10 Most students are able to extract meaning from written texts.	1	2	3	4	5	111
11 Most students are confident to ask questions for their clarification.	1	2	3	4	5	112

Students' achievement

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
My beliefs about students' achievement							
1	Many students fear rejection by their peer group if they improve their accomplishments.	1	2	3	4	5	113
2	Most students strive to improve their performance in class activities.	1	2	3	4	5	114
3	Most students enjoy competing against their peers in their classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	115
4	Many students are afraid of making mistakes in their work.	1	2	3	4	5	116
5	Most students are capable of succeeding in their school work.	1	2	3	4	5	117
6	Most students aspire to complete compulsory schooling.	1	2	3	4	5	118
7	Many students have the potential to complete upper secondary education.	1	2	3	4	5	119
8	Many students are capable of entering post secondary school training or tertiary education.	1	2	3	4	5	120
9	Most students have the potential to get a job.	1	2	3	4	5	121
10	There are some academically able students in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	122
11	Many students have artistic or sporting talents.						123
12	Most students meet their expected year level outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5	124

PLEASE MAKE ANY FURTHER COMMENTS IF YOUR WISH.

MANY THANKS! YOUR TIME AND THOUGHT ARE GREATLY VALUED BY ME.

APPENDIX E

Letter and an Example of the Feedback Provided to Respondents to the Questionnaire

«name»
«title»
«school»
«address»
«town»

Dear «first_name»

Please find enclosed the results of the survey conducted for *Kimberley Schools Study.* The feedback shows the means from all teachers across the schools who responded to the 1996 questionnaire. The means are indicated for each item in the questionnaire by a continuous line to provide a graphical picture of the results.

The results from the survey should be considered in the light that:

- teachers' responses came from schools ranging in size and location;
- teachers would have interpreted the questions differently;
- there were [number] responses from your school.

I am sure that the results will provide healthy discussion for you and your other colleagues in your school.

Many thanks for your support and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries about the feedback on the questionnaire.

Regards

JOAN GRIBBLE

16 July, 1996

EXAMPLE OF THE FEEDBACK TO RESPONDENTS: HOME-SCHOOL LEVEL

Beliefs about parents in school communities

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1	Most parents have experienced successful mainstream education.					
2	Most parents value the education provided by schools.					
3	Most parents hold aspirations for their children to succeed at school.					
4	Some parents are too busy with their own lives/problems to be concerned about education.					
5	Parents are receptive to programs in schools.					
6	Harmonious home/school relationships are evident in schools.					
7	Parents require external support to fulfil the expectations set by the schools (eg. attendance, homework, nutrition).					
8	Most parents are interested in how schools operate.					

Beliefs about parent involvement in schools

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1	Parents are always involved in major functions at schools.					
2	Parents are involved in their children's education at home.					
3	Many parents attend meetings at schools.					
4	Most parents help schools in some way or other.					
5	Many parents involve themselves as helpers in classroom activities.					
6	The knowledge and skills of parents are used in schools.					

Beliefs about school actions to involve parents in schools

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1	Structures are in place for the involvement of parents in decision making in schools.					
2	Teachers report informally to parents on a regular basis about students' progress.					
3	Regular formal reports are given to parents about students' progress.					
4	School activities are reported regularly through local media.					
5	Regular newsletters inform parents about school and student activities.					
6	Regular social family functions are organised by schools.					
7	Structures exist in schools to deal with parents' views, concerns and complaints.					
8	Home visiting is a common strategy for communicating with parents and schools.					

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APPENDIX F

**Letter and an Example of the Feedback Provided to Schools
who Requested their School Results from the Questionnaire**

«name»

«title»

«school»

«address»

«town»

Dear «first_name»

As requested, please find enclosed the results of the survey conducted for *Kimberley Schools Study* in relation to your school. The feedback shows the means from all teachers across the schools who responded to the 1996 questionnaire. These means are indicated for each item in the questionnaire by a continuous line to provide a graphical picture of the results. The means for ***** [school] are indicated by a broken line.

The results from the survey should be considered in the light that:

- teachers' responses came from schools ranging in size and location;
- teachers would have interpreted the questions differently;
- there were [number] responses from your school.

However, I am sure some of the items will provide healthy discussion for the staff at your school.

Many thanks for your support and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries about the feedback on the questionnaire.
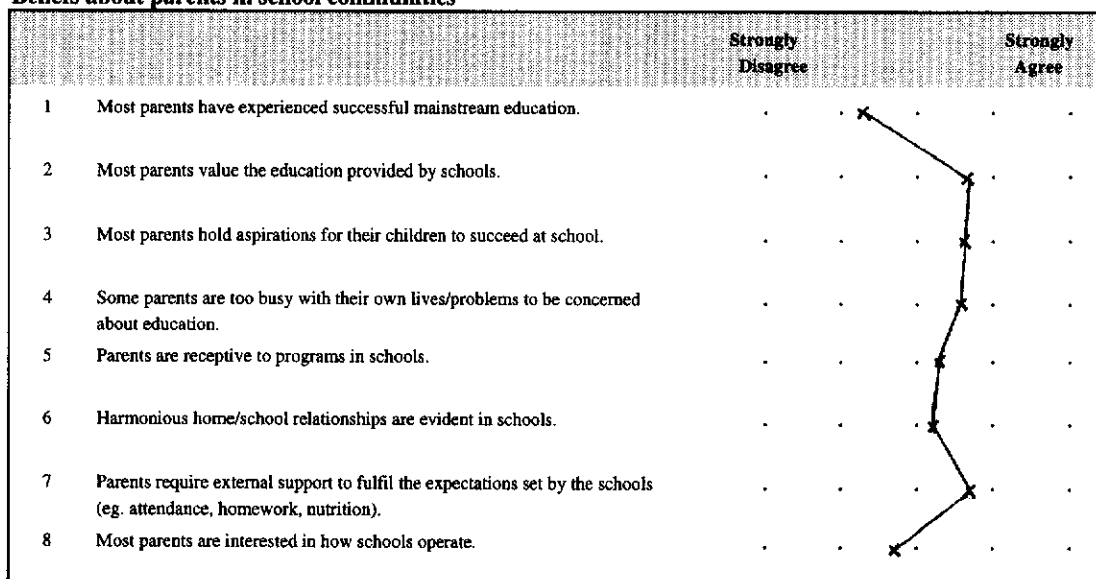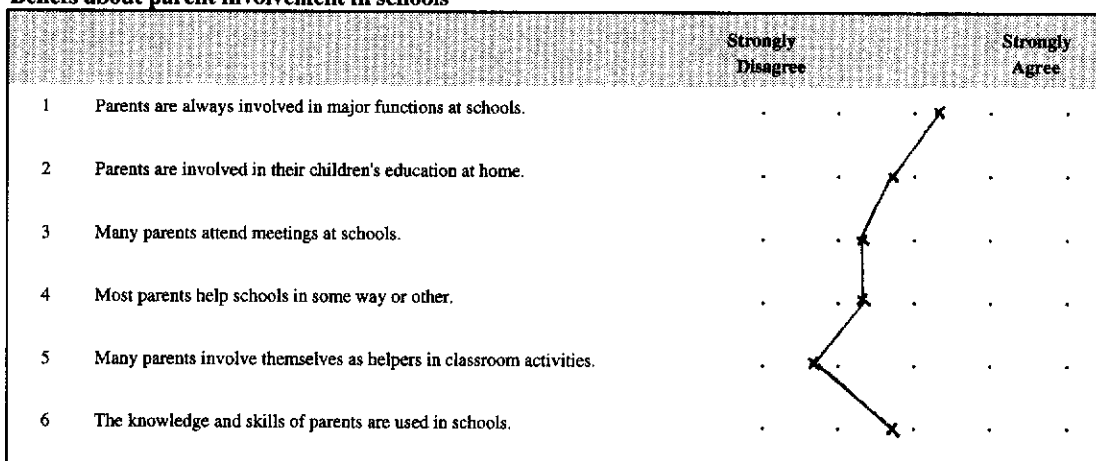
Regards

JOAN GRIBBLE

18 August, 1996
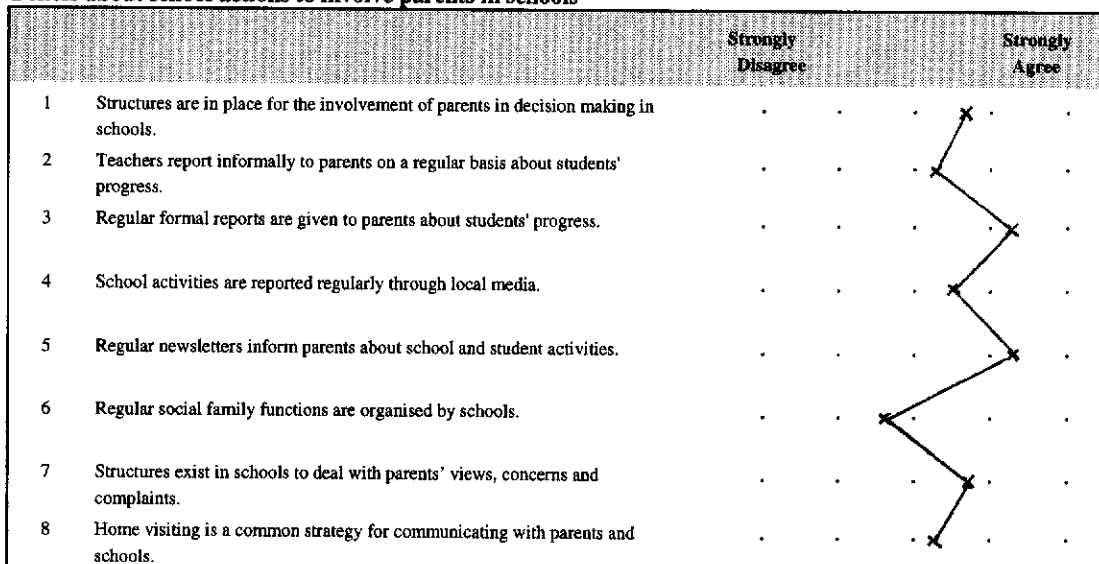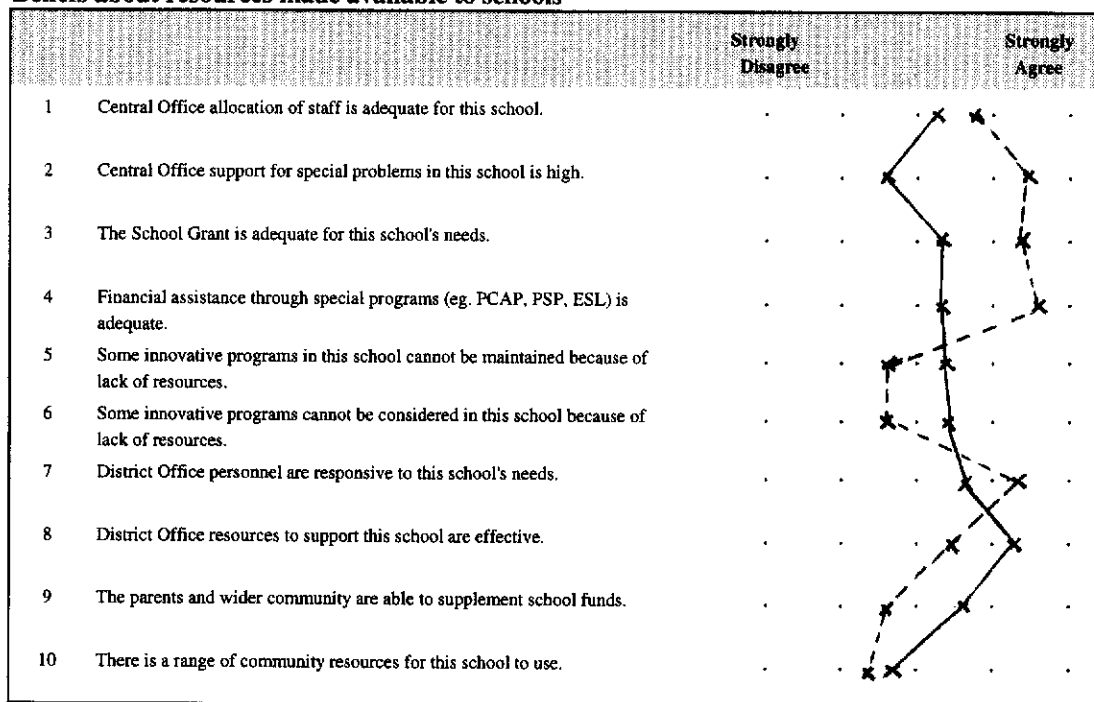
EXAMPLE OF THE FEEDBACK TO RESPONDENTS: SCHOOL LEVEL
(Resources)

Beliefs about resources made available to schools

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1	Central Office allocation of staff is adequate for this school.						
2	Central Office support for special problems in this school is high.						
3	The School Grant is adequate for this school's needs.						
4	Financial assistance through special programs (eg. PCAP, PSP, ESL) is adequate.						
5	Some innovative programs in this school cannot be maintained because of lack of resources.						
6	Some innovative programs cannot be considered in this school because of lack of resources.						
7	District Office personnel are responsive to this school's needs.						
8	District Office resources to support this school are effective.						
9	The parents and wider community are able to supplement school funds.						
10	There is a range of community resources for this school to use.						

Beliefs about effective use of resources in schools

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
1	Staff have a high degree of expertise to meet any special needs of this school.						
2	Staff are deployed effectively in this school to meet the needs of students.						
3	There is easy access to professional development for staff in this school.						
4	Professional development meets the needs of all staff in this school.						
5	In this school I am satisfied with my workplace conditions.						
6	This school has a significant number of up-to-date equipment and material resources.						
7	This school has a wide range of equipment and material resources.						
8	This school's equipment and material resources are well used.						
9	Systematic training for teachers for use of resources exists in this school.						
10	The style of building of this school is functional.						
11	Classroom design is appropriate for teaching and learning.						
12	It is important in this school that the grounds are beautified.						

APPENDIX G

Letter of Acknowledgment to the Respondents to the Questionnaire

«name»
«title»
«school»
«address»
«town»

Dear «first_name»

I wish to thank you for responding to the 1996 questionnaire connected with the *Kimberley Schools Study* that I am conducting for my doctoral studies. I greatly appreciate your support of my study and me as a fellow worker in education in Western Australia and especially in the Kimberley District. The amount of time that you have taken to complete a lengthy questionnaire has enabled me to add depth of information to my study. Your response has been particularly important to enable me to now focus the study in some case study schools.

I realise that you have taken some of your valuable time to assist me by completing the questionnaire. Your consideration, comments, and thoughtfulness are gratefully acknowledged. This letter, as a small token of my appreciation, is an acknowledgment and recognition of your participation in my study. You may wish to use this letter for your curriculum vitae purposes.

Yours sincerely

JOAN GRIBBLE

January, 1997.

APPENDIX H

Data Used for Patterns in Figures in Chapter Seven

The tables in this appendix report the mean, standard deviation (SD) and the percentage of respondents answering strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), unsure (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5) to each item in the categories contained in the questionnaire. The graphs for each item, presented in chapter seven, are drawn from the percentage of responses to each item which are displayed in the following tables.

Table H-1.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Parents in their School Communities*
(see Figure 7.3)

	Teacher beliefs about parents with students in the schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Most parents in this school have experienced successful mainstream education.	2.26	1.04	27.6	34.2	23.7	13.2	1.3
2	Most parents value the education provided by this school.	3.53	0.97	5.3	10.5	18.4	57.9	7.9
3*	Most parents hold aspirations for their children to succeed at this school.	3.74	1.00	2.6	9.2	22.4	42.1	22.4
4	Most parents in this school are too busy with their own lives/problems to be concerned about education.	3.62	1.00	1.3	14.5	21.1	44.7	18.4
5	Parents in this school are receptive to the school's programs.	3.53	0.82	2.6	7.9	28.9	55.3	5.3
6	Harmonious home/school relationships are evident in this school.	3.25	1.05	6.6	14.5	35.5	32.9	10.5
7	Parents in this community require external support to fulfil the expectations set by the school (egs. attendance, homework, nutrition).	3.58	1.10	2.6	18.4	19.7	36.8	22.4
8	Most parents in this school are interested in how the school operates.	2.90	1.08	7.9	36.8	18.4	32.9	3.9

Note: * missing data

Table H-2.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Parents' Involvement in their Schools*
(see Figure 7.4)

	Teacher beliefs about parent involvement in the schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Parents in this school are always involved in the school's major functions.	3.39	1.30	7.9	23.7	11.8	32.9	23.7
2	Parents in this school are always involved in their children's education at home.	2.62	1.11	17.1	31.6	26.3	21.1	3.9
3	Many parents in this school attend school meetings.	2.26	1.24	30.3	40.8	10.5	9.2	9.2
4	Most parents help the school in some way or other.	2.18	1.04	26.3	47.4	9.2	15.8	1.3
5	Many parents involved themselves as helpers in classroom activities.	1.74	0.86	46.1	42.1	3.9	7.9	0
6*	The knowledge and skills of parents are used in this school.	2.72	1.12	14.5	31.6	21.1	26.3	2.6

Note: * missing data

Table H-3. *Respondents' Beliefs about School Action to Involve Parents in their Schools*
(see Figure 7.5)

	Teacher beliefs about school actions to involve parents	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Structures are in place for the involvement of parents in decision making in this school.	3.84	1.18	3.9	14.5	11.8	34.2	35.5
2	Teachers report informally to parents on a regular basis about students' progress.	3.40	1.12	3.9	22.4	19.7	38.2	15.8
3	Regular formal reports are given to parents about students' progress.	4.30	0.83	2.6	1.3	3.9	47.4	44.7
4*	School activities are reported regularly through local media.	3.49	1.34	15.8	9.2	5.3	48.7	19.7
5	Regular newsletters inform parents about this school and student activities.	4.32	0.92	3.9	1.3	3.9	40.8	50.0
6	Regular social family functions are organised by the school.	2.88	1.26	14.5	31.6	17.1	27.6	9.2
7	Structures exist in this school to deal with parents' views, concerns and complaints.	3.81	1.09	2.6	13.2	15.8	38.2	30.3
8*	Home visiting is a common strategy for communicating with parents in this school.	3.49	1.18	7.9	11.8	21.1	38.2	19.7

Note: * missing data

Table H-4. *Respondents' Beliefs about Resources made Available to Schools*
(see Figure 7.6)

	Teacher beliefs about the level of resources in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Central Office allocation of staff is adequate for this school.	3.08	1.45	22.4	15.8	13.2	30.3	18.4
2*	Central Office support for special problems in this school is adequate.	2.53	1.30	25.0	31.6	17.1	14.5	10.5
3*	The School Grant is adequate for this school's needs.	3.21	1.29	13.2	17.1	18.4	34.2	15.8
4	Financial assistance through special programs (egs. PCAP, PSP, ESL) is adequate.	3.53	1.23	7.9	14.5	15.8	38.2	23.7
5	Some innovative programs in this school cannot be maintained because of lack of resources.	3.09	1.30	14.5	21.1	22.4	26.3	15.8
6	Some innovative programs cannot be considered in this school because of lack of resources.	3.29	1.43	17.1	15.8	14.5	27.6	25.0
7	District Office personnel are responsive to this school's needs.	3.94	0.94	2.6	5.3	15.8	48.7	27.6
8	District Office resources to support this school are effective.	3.56	1.15	5.3	15.8	19.7	36.8	22.4
9*	The parents and wider community are able to supplement school funds.	2.72	1.32	23.7	23.7	14.5	28.9	7.9
10	There is a range of community resources for this school to use.	2.58	1.21	22.4	30.3	19.7	22.4	5.3

Note: * missing data

Table H-5. *Respondents' Beliefs about Effective Use of Resources in Schools*
(see Figure 7.7)

	Teacher beliefs about the effective use of resources	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Staff have a high degree of expertise to meet any special needs in this school.	3.44	1.06	2.6	21.1	21.1	40.8	14.5
2	Staff are deployed effectively in this schools to meet the needs of students.	3.65	1.18	2.6	22.4	10.5	36.8	27.6
3	There is easy access to professional development for staff in this school.	2.66	1.38	23.7	34.2	9.2	19.7	13.2
4	Professional development meets the needs of all staff in this school.	2.73	1.40	26.3	22.4	19.7	17.1	14.5
5	In this school I am satisfied with my workplace conditions.	3.66	1.23	10.5	7.9	11.8	44.7	25
6	This school has a significant number of up-to-date equipment and material resources.	3.81	1.17	7.9	9.2	5.3	50	27.6
7	This school has a wide range of equipment and material resources.	3.60	1.27	9.2	15.8	6.6	43.4	25
8*	This school's equipment and material resources are well used.	3.86	1.00	1.3	13.2	10.5	47.4	26.3
9*	Systematic training for teachers for use of resources exists in this school.	2.79	1.28	18.4	27.6	19.7	22.4	10.5
10	The style of building of this school is functional.	3.30	1.34	15.8	14.5	7.9	46.1	15.8
11	Classroom design is appropriate for teaching and learning.	3.19	1.37	18.4	15.8	9.2	42.1	14.5
12	It is important in this school that the grounds are beautified.	4.00	1.11	2.6	11.8	10.5	32.9	42.1

Note: * missing data

Table H-6. *Respondents' Beliefs about Decision Making Processes in Schools*
(see Figure 7.8)

	Teacher beliefs about decision making processes in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	There is a complementary approach to informal and formal decision making in this school.	3.49	1.14	5.3	18.4	17.1	40.8	18.4
2	Formal decision making in larger groups, such as a staff meeting, is marked by a sense of working together.	3.44	1.28	10.5	18.4	7.9	43.4	19.7
3	Decisions from both informal and formal meetings are followed through into actions.	3.62	1.08	6.6	9.2	17.1	50.0	17.1
4	Staff meetings in this school are regular, worthwhile and functional.	3.56	1.19	7.9	13.2	15.8	42.1	21.1
5	I feel free to speak my mind during the consensus decision making process in this school.	3.70	1.28	6.6	17.1	10.5	31.6	34.2
6	Teachers in this school work together to solve individual teacher problems.	3.61	1.26	5.3	21.1	11.8	31.6	30.3
7	School level decisions are mostly reached by consensus rather than by decree.	3.43	1.32	10.5	19.7	10.5	35.5	23.7
8	Staff cliques operated in the decision making process in this school.	3.03	1.35	15.8	25.0	18.4	23.7	17.1
9	Administrators are prepared to make and take responsibility for final decisions.	4.04	1.03	3.9	5.3	11.8	40.8	38.2
10	Students are involved in the decision making processes in this school.	2.29	1.18	34.2	23.7	25	13.2	3.9

Table H-7. *Respondents' Beliefs about Leadership in Schools*
(see Figure 7.9)

	Teacher beliefs about leadership in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Clear communication patterns are established between various staff members in this school.	3.47	1.21	7.9	17.1	15.8	39.5	19.7
2	Duties in this school are delegated on a rational, clearly understood and accepted basis.	3.69	1.09	5.3	10.5	17.1	44.7	22.4
3	Leadership in this school is marked by a sound educational vision which is communicated to staff, parents and students.	3.53	1.25	9.2	13.2	18.4	34.2	25
4	Leadership in this school is committed to improving student outcomes.	3.94	1.12	6.6	5.3	10.5	43.4	34.2
5	When appropriate, it is expected that decisions in this school should be taken by school leaders without consultation with staff.	3.44	1.19	6.6	19.7	15.8	39.5	18.4
6	Teachers in this school have faith in the decisions taken by school leaders without consultation.	2.99	1.26	15.8	25	23.7	23.7	11.8
7	Leaders in this school set a good example by working hard at their leadership role.	3.52	1.33	9.2	19.7	10.5	31.6	28.9
8	Leaders in this school always have time to support or counsel teachers, parents or students with problems or concerns.	3.60	1.26	7.9	15.8	13.2	35.5	27.6
9	Teachers are positive in their interactions with one another.	3.81	0.99	0.0	14.5	17.1	42.1	26.3
10	There is a high level of professionalism in staff in this school because they are trusted by school leaders.	3.61	1.24	6.6	18.4	9.2	39.5	26.3
11	Staff morale is very high in this school.	3.30	1.19	9.2	19.7	17.1	40.8	13.2

Table H-8. *Respondents' Beliefs about Achievement Oriented Policy in Schools*
(see Figure 7.10)

	Teacher beliefs about achievement oriented policy in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	This school has a clear and defensible view about what is important in the curriculum for students to learn.	3.84	0.96	1.3	10.5	15.8	47.4	25
2	This school's planning focuses on improving students' learning.	4.30	0.84	1.3	3.9	5.3	42.1	47.1
3	Learning programs from one year level to another are built on quality information about students' levels of achievement.	3.88	1.00	1.3	11.8	13.2	44.7	28.9
4	The school's policy on curriculum encompasses the full range of student development - intellectual, emotional, physical, social and cultural.	4.06	0.94	1.3	9.2	5.3	50	34.2
5	Parents, teachers and students appear to work towards the same goals in this school.	3.12	0.96	1.3	28.9	31.6	31.6	6.6
6	Collecting data to monitor students' progress is systematic in this school.	3.66	1.06	2.6	15.8	15.8	44.7	21.1
7	This school's documented plans are put into operation.	4.05	0.83	0.0	5.3	15.8	47.4	31.6
8	Programs of work developed in this school are relevant to the local and wider community's needs.	3.92	0.82	1.3	5.3	14.5	57.9	21.1
9	School priorities in planning are resourced to create improvement in students' learning.	4.26	0.73	0.0	2.6	9.2	47.4	40.8

(table continues)

Table H-8.   (continued)

	Teacher beliefs about achievement oriented policy in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
10	Students' life chances are enhanced through this school's policies and planning.	3.78	0.95	2.6	5.3	27.6	40.8	23.7
11	This school adds something of value to what students already have in their lives.	4.14	0.68	0.0	2.6	9.2	59.2	28.9
12	This school is able to develop in students a commitment to further learning.	3.21	0.98	2.6	23.7	31.6	34.2	7.9

Table H-9.   *Respondents' Beliefs about the Orderly and Caring Atmosphere in Schools*
                (Figure 7.11)

	Teacher beliefs about an orderly and caring atmosphere in schools	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Teachers, other workers and students feel safe at all times in this school.	3.71	1.18	6.6	11.8	13.2	40.8	27.6
2	The school has a clear and consistent policy for managing student behaviour in and outside classrooms.	3.97	1.12	0.0	18.4	7.9	30.3	43.4
3	Teachers in this school make an extra effort to help their students.	4.31	0.75	0.0	3.9	5.3	46.1	44.7
4	Incidents of teacher and student confrontation are few in this school.	3.39	1.20	5.3	26.3	11.8	38.2	18.4
5	Students' work is regularly displayed in this school.	4.29	0.65	0.0	1.3	6.6	53.9	38.2
6	Work displays are regularly changed in all classrooms in this school.	3.88	0.96	1.3	10.5	13.2	48.7	26.3
7	All teachers in this school care about their students and what happens to them.	4.14	0.93	1.3	5.3	13.2	38.2	42.1
8	Most teachers in this school are fair to their students.	4.34	0.68	0.0	1.3	7.9	46.1	44.7
9	Most teachers are patient with students who have learning problems.	4.23	0.78	1.3	1.3	9.2	48.7	39.5
10	Harmonious race relationships exist in this school.	3.96	1.13	3.9	10.5	10.5	35.5	39.5
11	This school has easy access to support agencies to work with student's problems.	3.07	1.18	9.2	26.3	21.1	31.6	10.5
12	Students fulfil expectations by keeping the school rules for behaviour.	3.24	1.11	6.6	23.7	15.8	44.7	7.9

Table H-10.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Preparation and Planning for Teaching*
(see Figure 7.12)

	Teacher beliefs about preparation and planning for teaching	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Goals for student learning are clearly evident in planning.	4.19	0.74	0.0	3.9	7.9	52.6	35.5
2	Students' experiences are considered in the planning of lessons.	4.29	0.76	0.0	5.3	2.6	50	42.1
3*	Planned teaching and learning strategies are interesting.	4.24	0.65	0.0	2.6	3.9	59.2	32.9
4	Time allocation is planned to cover all areas (or subject area) of the curriculum.	4.17	0.85	0.0	6.6	9.2	44.7	39.5
5	Students' learning style is considered in lesson planning.	4.18	0.77	0.0	5.3	6.6	52.6	35.5
6*	Appropriate amounts of homework are planned for students.	2.93	1.44	22.7	21.1	13.2	25	17.1
7*	A balance of informal and formal assessment is planned.	4.01	1.00	3.9	3.9	13.2	43.4	34.2
8	Considerable personal time is spent on planning and preparation.	4.58	0.64	0.0	1.3	3.9	30.3	64.5

Note: * missing data

Table H-11.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Learning Environments in Classrooms*
(see Figure 7.13)

	Teacher beliefs about the learning environments in the classroom	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Students have a clear motive for coming to school.	3.43	1.07	2.6	21.1	19.7	42.1	14.5
2	Students have fun in the classroom.	4.06	0.71	0.0	2.6	14.5	56.6	26.3
3	Students work hard in the classroom to complete their work.	3.40	1.07	2.6	21.1	22.4	39.5	14.5
4	Students are interested in learning new things.	3.97	0.92	1.3	7.9	11.8	50.0	28.9
5	Students would work even when left on their own.	2.71	1.11	14.5	32.9	21.1	28.9	2.6
6	Students in the classroom want to be friends with one another.	3.53	0.95	1.3	15.8	23.7	46.1	13.2
7	Students have a sense of belonging in the classroom.	4.01	0.73	0.0	2.6	18.4	53.9	25.0
8	Most students in the classroom care about each other's work.	2.99	1.09	10.5	23.7	25	36.8	3.9
9	Students are attentive in classroom activities.	3.26	1.01	3.9	19.7	28.9	39.5	7.9
10*	Students are challenged to fulfil potential.	3.84	0.82	1.3	6.6	14.5	60.5	15.8

Note: * missing data

Table H-12.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Classroom Behaviour Management*
              (see Figure 7.14)

	Teacher beliefs about behaviour management in classrooms	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Students are expected to attend school regularly.	4.71	0.56	0	1.3	1.3	21.1	76.1
2	Students are expected to be punctual.	4.62	0.69	1.3	1.3	0.0	27.6	69.7
3*	Students are expected to have good personal hygiene.	4.33	0.85	2.6	1.3	5.3	40.8	48.7
4	Students are expected to meet rules for behaviour.	4.55	0.64	1.3	0.0	0.0	39.5	59.2
5	Students are expected to perform to their capabilities.	4.45	0.64	0.0	1.3	3.9	42.1	52.6
6	Students are easily engaged on task.	2.99	1.19	10.5	28.9	23.7	26.3	10.5
7	Most classroom time is spent on students involved in learning activities.	3.90	0.91	1.3	7.9	15.8	50.0	25.0
8	Most classroom time is spent talking about what students need to do.	2.53	0.90	7.9	48.7	26.3	15.8	1.3
9	Out side interruptions to the classroom are few.	2.82	1.28	17.1	34.2	7.9	32.9	7.9
10	Classroom routines are organised and smooth.	3.94	0.78	0.0	7.9	10.5	61.8	19.7
11*	Students are able to self-manage task related behaviour.	2.99	1.05	7.9	26.3	26.3	34.2	3.9
12	Considerable teacher time is required to monitor and maintain classroom behaviour.	3.35	1.30	6.6	27.6	15.8	25.0	25.0

Note: * missing data

Table H-13.   *Respondents' Beliefs about The Organisation of Curriculum Content in Classroom Programs*
              (see Figure 7.15)

	Teacher beliefs about curriculum content in classrooms	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Curriculum content is taught to reflect viewpoints from different cultures.	3.73	0.91	1.3	10.5	19.7	51.3	17.1
2	Students' background knowledge and experiences form the starting point for teaching.	4.06	0.80	0.0	5.3	13.2	51.3	30.3
3	Links are made across subjects (or within a subject) through integrated topics.	4.19	0.80	1.3	2.6	7.9	51.3	36.8
4*	The application of language skills taught is prominent across the curriculum (or into subject area/s).	4.36	0.67	0.0	1.3	6.7	46.7	45.3
5*	Interesting lesson content is provided for students using various artefacts, media and technologies.	3.99	0.86	1.3	5.3	13.3	53.3	26.7
6	Students are assisted through curriculum activities to deal with prejudices.	3.52	0.91	1.3	14.5	26.3	47.4	10.5
7*	Great emphasis is placed on the accuracy of knowledge and skills in the curriculum.	3.26	1.05	2.6	23.7	31.6	27.6	13.2
8	Curriculum activities encourage students learning thinking skills.	3.79	0.83	2.6	5.3	15.8	63.2	13.2

Note: * missing data

Table H-14.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Teaching Practices*
(see Figure 7.16)

	Teacher beliefs about teaching practices in classrooms	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	All students know the goals for achievement for every lesson.	3.42	0.95	1.3	15.8	32.9	38.2	11.8
2	Student-centred learning is emphasised in the classroom.	3.81	0.96	0.0	13.2	18.4	43.4	25.0
3*	Most lessons cater for the interests and needs of students.	4.01	0.77	0.0	5.3	13.2	55.3	25.0
4	Teacher modelling of the skills being taught is prominent in the classroom.	4.23	0.65	0.0	1.3	7.9	56.6	34.2
5	It is easy to show students the application of skills learnt from lessons.	3.08	1.10	9.2	22.4	27.6	34.2	6.6
6	Models of learners are used through peers, teachers, parents and visitors in the classroom.	3.45	1.05	3.9	17.1	22.4	43.4	13.2
7	Students are able to do most of the talking during lessons.	3.16	1.08	5.3	25	26.3	34.2	9.2
8*	Socially appropriate language and behaviour are modelled in the classroom.	4.37	0.73	0.0	3.9	2.6	44.7	47.4
9	A range of situations for individual, paired, small group and whole class learning are provided.	4.25	0.81	1.3	3.9	3.9	50.0	40.8
10	Questioning techniques are taught to as a way to clarify their thinking.	3.96	0.82	0.0	7.9	11.8	56.6	23.7
11	Periods of consolidation of new skills taught areallowed for.	4.21	0.59	0.0	0.0	9.2	60.5	30.3
12*	The pace of teaching is appropriate for most students' needs.	4.05	0.76	0.0	3.9	14.7	53.6	27.6

Note: * missing data

Table H-15.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Monitoring Students' Progress in Classrooms*
(see Figure 7.17)

	Teacher beliefs about monitoring students' proress in classrooms	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1*	Feedback through regular conferences with each student about his or her academic progress is provided.	3.36	1.05	2.6	22.4	22.4	38.2	11.8
2*	Opportunities for monitoring through informal assessment such as games and quizzes are provided.	3.79	0.87	0.0	10.5	17.1	52.6	18.4
3	Opportunities are provided for students to be monitored by peers and parents.	2.81	1.09	5.3	47.4	18.4	21.1	7.9
4*	Students are encouraged to self evaluate.	3.54	1.08	3.9	18.4	11.8	50.0	14.5
5	Careful records are kept of students' progress.	4.00	0.89	0.0	9.2	11.8	48.7	30.3
6	Every effort is made to acknowledge each student's accomplishments.	4.38	0.63	0.0	1.3	3.9	50.0	44.7
7	All parents are regularly met, formally and informally, to report about their children's progress.	2.88	1.17	9.2	36.8	18.4	26.3	9.2

Note: * missing data

Table H-16.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Background Experiences*
(see Figure 7.18)

	Teacher beliefs about students' background experiences	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Students can take part in all school activities even if parents can't afford to pay.	4.25	0.88	1.3	5.3	5.3	43.4	44.7
2	Most students lack experience with Standard Australian English.	3.56	1.46	11.8	19.7	7.9	22.4	38.2
3	Most students have developed interpersonal skills appropriate for their age and situation.	3.22	1.20	10.5	21.1	15.8	42.1	10.5
4	Most students have rich conceptual experiences associated with success at school.	2.60	0.95	13.2	31.6	42.1	10.5	2.6
5	Many students have continuous health problems.	3.57	1.35	6.6	25.0	7.9	26.3	34.2
6	Many students truant from school.	3.25	1.37	9.2	30.3	14.5	19.7	26.3
7	Transience is prevalent with students.	3.45	1.30	2.6	11.8	9.2	28.9	47.4
8*	Many students have emotional problems which disrupt classroom activities.	2.99	1.34	3.9	30.3	11.8	23.7	28.9
9	Many students have emotional problems which disrupt the classroom.	3.08	1.29	6.6	40.8	10.5	23.7	18.4
10	Students have facilities at home to sustain teacher set work.	1.92	1.00	40.8	38.2	10.5	9.2	1.3

Note: * missing data

Table H-17.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Motivation to Learn*
(see Figure 7.19)

	Teacher beliefs about students' motivation to learn	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Most students are keen to come to school.	3.79	0.83	2.6	3.9	19.7	59.2	14.5
2	Most students have a desire to succeed in their school activities.	3.65	0.89	2.6	7.9	19.7	59.2	10.5
3	Most students have interests outside of school.	3.77	1.04	2.6	11.8	17.1	43.4	25.0
4	Most students see learning as relevant to their lives.	2.88	1.03	7.9	30.3	30.3	27.6	3.9
5	Students come to class able to concentrate and be attentive.	2.61	1.13	17.1	35.5	18.4	26.3	2.6
6	Students' geographic location limits their aspirations to succeed at school.	3.40	1.33	11.8	15.8	18.4	28.9	25.0
7*	Students' geographic location limits their job prospects when they leave school.	3.82	1.21	6.6	9.3	16.0	32.0	36.0
8	Most students have a positive sense of their identity.	3.99	0.99	3.9	14.5	31.6	39.5	10.5
9	Most students fulfil homework requirements.	2.43	1.17	27.6	27.6	21.1	21.1	2.6
10	Many students appear to spend too many hours watching TV or videos.	4.03	1.06	2.6	6.6	19.7	27.6	43.4

Note: * missing data

Table H-18.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Students' Language Development*
(see Figure 7.20)

	Teacher beliefs about students' language development	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Most students have adequate fluency in the spoken form of the language of instruction in the classroom.	3.17	1.25	13.2	21.1	9.2	47.4	9.2
2	Most students use an adequate level of Standard Australian English in their reading and writing during classroom activities.	2.95	1.16	10.5	30.3	18.4	43.2	6.6
3*	Time has to be allocated in the classroom to speaking and listening activities.	4.36	0.60	0.0	1.3	2.6	53.9	40.8
4	Constant clarification of students' understanding has to be considered due to their poor use of Standard Australian English.	3.45	1.33	9.2	21.1	13.2	28.9	27.6
5*	Most students easily understand my use of vocabulary.	3.61	1.07	6.6	9.2	17.1	50.0	15.8
6	Vocabulary has to be constantly taught to students.	3.94	1.02	1.3	14.5	3.9	50.0	30.3
7*	Specific grammar forms have to be taught to students.	4.28	0.56	0.0	0.0	5.3	60.5	32.9
8	Students require practice in correct pronunciation of words.	3.99	0.90	0.0	10.5	9.2	51.3	28.9
9	Students are able to extract meaning from pictures.	4.22	0.68	0.0	2.6	6.6	56.6	34.2
10	Most students are able to extract meaning from written texts.	2.84	1.05	9.2	35.5	19.7	34.2	1.3
11	Most students are confident to ask questions for their clarification.	3.06	1.14	9.2	28.9	14.5	42.1	5.3

Note: * missing data

Table H-19.   *Respondents' Beliefs about Student' Achievement*
(see Figure 7.21)

	Teacher beliefs about students' achievement	Mean	SD	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5
1	Many students fear rejection by their peer group if they improve their accomplishments.	3.08	1.16	6.6	30.3	22.4	28.9	11.8
2	Most students strive to improve their performance in class activities.	3.26	1.01	5.3	19.7	25	44.7	5.3
3	Most students enjoy competing against their peers in their classroom activities.	3.34	1.07	6.6	17.1	20.0	48.0	8.0
4	Many students are afraid of making mistakes in their work.	3.68	1.20	2.6	22.4	10.5	35.5	28.9
5	Most students are capable of succeeding in their school work.	4.38	0.80	2.6	0.0	3.9	43.4	50.0
6*	Most students aspire to complete compulsory schooling.	2.99	1.06	7.9	23.7	35.5	23.7	7.9
7	Many students have the potential to complete upper secondary education.	3.79	1.26	6.6	13.2	13.2	28.9	38.2
8*	Many students are capable of entering post secondary school training or tertiary education.	3.63	1.24	6.6	14.5	18.4	28.9	30.3
9	Most students have the potential to get a job.	4.30	0.96	2.6	5.3	3.9	35.5	52.6
10*	There are some academically able students in the classroom.	4.54	0.74	0.0	3.9	2.6	27.6	64.5
11	Many students have artistic or sporting talents.	4.51	0.74	0.0	2.6	6.6	27.6	63.2
12	Most students meet their expected year level outcomes.	2.39	1.24	27.6	36.8	13.2	15.8	6.6

Note: * missing data

APPENDIX I

An Example of a Classroom and Teacher Observation Schedule

Classroom and Teacher Observation Schedule

School   School D: Kindergarten
Teacher   Jessica (pseudonym)
Date   June 1997

Preparation and planning for teaching

The teacher arrived at 7.00am each day to set up the classroom and left at 4.00pm. Each weekday evening some form of record keeping was attended to. Students took self-chosen library books home to read as their form of homework. Books were changed on a daily basis.

Various levels of documentation showed a very thorough approach to planning for 20 students. At the end of each week, the teacher had a review and planning session with the AEWs so that they shared their observations about students and made the necessary plans for the coming week's program. Everyone's role in the program was clearly set out for each day and indicated which adult would work with which students. Whole group activities were organised and individual work contracts were set out for the week. Any necessary communication with parents about their child's progress was planned: what needed to be reported, why it needed to be reported, and which adult would communicate with the parents.

Classroom learning environment

Students in this classroom laughed and smiled most of the time and enjoyed many different activities. Everyone knew what he or she was meant to be doing. Many students were able to work on their own for up to 20 minutes without direct adult intervention. All work set for a session of work was completed, and if not, students continued their project the following day. Everyone had his or her own storage space for personal belongings and pieces of work to take home to parents. The classroom space was generous and allowed unimpeded movement of students around the classroom. Students moved frequently around the classroom as they moved from one activity to an another, mostly by their own choice. Students were friendly towards one another and few incidence of friction between students were observed over a half-day session. The teacher had a respectful approach to the students and always addressed each student by name in every teacher - student interaction. The students showed great affection towards their teacher and the AEWs. There was a sense of cooperation between adults-adults, adults-students, and students-students in the classroom.

Classroom behaviour management

The classroom was a calm, orderly work environment for students. All the classroom routines were smooth and transitions between different activities occurred without fuss. Students knew exactly where and how to find and put away all their work materials. Students' attendance in the classroom was mostly regular and students arrived at the expected time to commence class. Students were well cared for and well dressed. Part of the daily classroom routine was fruit and a drink for a mid-morning break. Students were easily engaged in task and knew the rules for movement around the classroom and the protocols for communication between student-adults and student-students. Classroom rules were few, but were constantly maintained, with few reminders given about them. When indiscretions occurred, students usually only needed "a look" from the teacher or AEWs to be reminded about expected behaviour. Students self-managed their activities as the adults facilitate the learning process. There were few interruptions to students' learning due to the teacher not having to stop the whole class to reiterate classroom rules and codes of behaviour.

Organisation of curriculum content in classroom programs

A work program contained statements about personal beliefs about teaching, classroom management policy, weekly timetable, and long and short-term goals set for the school year. The goals were set for the cognitive,

emotional, creative, and physical domains of learning. Weekly outlines of work showed teaching goals to achieve, curriculum content, and daily activities for teaching and learning for each subject area. The weekly program across the subject areas was thematically integrated and drew on topics of local and student interest. Family and community topics were the trend in the plans.

Language was strongly featured across all the subject areas. Oral communication in SAE was stressed so that students could hear and see a teacher model of speech and action. "Big Book" reading occurred in groups on a daily basis to draw attention to the concepts of print (sentences, words, word spacing, letter, etc), interpreting meaning from pictures, and talking about the meaning in the written text. Writing was a free choice activity for students but most students were expected to complete some form of writing each day. Literature was read to students on a daily basis.

An outdoor session of about 35 minutes allowed for mathematics, science, and physical activities to be pursued in a large space with equipment strategically placed for self-chosen activities. The outdoor area was really an extension of the indoor classroom. The activities were self-selected by the students but over the week each student would have been directed to complete all essential activities. This same procedure existed for the self-selected indoor activities.

Teaching practices in classrooms
Teaching was student -centred. Whole group activities provided direction for new learning which was followed by self-selected activities by each student from a range of options. Often students worked on the same activities in self-chosen pairs or small groups but each student achieved differently because of his or her stage in development. All of these activities were monitored for students' progress especially looking for signs in reaching developmental milestones.

In large group activities students were able to watch, listen, and imitate what the teacher was modelling. Also, the teacher fostered students' responses to how and why questions which helped students to work with non-indigenous learning techniques. Some students were asking these types of questions. The activities were well paced. Whole group activities only lasted about 15; individual, and small group activities were longer and lasted up to 45 minutes. The whole timetable flowed in a circular system: whole group, small group, individual, whole group.

Learning Processes
Students learnt by doing, watching, and imitating the adult models and what their peers were doing. Students asked an adult or peers if they required help with anything. Peers usually said what needed to be done. The adults directed the request with helpful questions to create a problem-solving situation for the students. Students in this classroom were able to retain their independence and autonomy. At the same time, when something of significance needed to be shown or told, signals were obvious for the students to look and listen to what was happening. There was learning using the five senses and a strong emphasis on the Aboriginal students using their preferred styles of learning.

Monitoring students' progress in classrooms
A range of assessment procedures were used: daily monitoring of students was conducted by making anecdotal notes in the weekly work program, checklists were kept to note observations about students' progress each week, individual student record cards were regularly used to note anecdotal comments of significance, and portfolios of students' work were added to with notable pieces of work showing students' achievements.

APPENDIX J

An Example of a Teacher Story

Jessica's Story

I value the story told by Jessica who participated in a case study of a Kimberley school during phase three of the study. Some of Jessica's story was confessional in our first formal interview and she talked about the difficult situations that existed in the community and the school. However, over several conversations and a follow-up interview, Jessica revealed more and more about the intricacies of living and working in the Kimberley. Jessica had been teaching in Kimberley schools for much of her lengthy career and had been in her current school for several years and the community had become her home. Jessica knew how her community worked, knew the people well, and knew when things changed in the community. When changes occurred in the community she was able to make anticipated adjustments to her classroom program. The community went "up and down" as different influences took hold and she believed that sweeping visits made by visitors give a "rosy" picture of the community because of its Kimberley location. Jessica said:

> I have seen this community at "rock bottom" but now I see it starting to rebuild itself and I can see a more positive view of the community again. There are cycles of change in this community which tend to occur over 3 to 4 years. Something happens to cause tension, the community cohesion disintegrates, and then it gradually comes together again. Alcohol is often the cause of the tension because families start to feud. The family feuding spills over into the school and affects cooperative learning strategies in the classrooms for example. It's not so obvious at the junior levels but as the children become older teachers have to keep family groups apart.

New homes were being built in the community and Jessica said that families were able to have air-conditioning, refrigeration, and microwaves in their homes; they could have every modern appliance they needed. But the people in the community still planned on a day-to-day basis. People went to the local shop for daily needs and did not bulk buy or plan the household on a long-term basis. Jessica thought that courses could be run for families on household management. So articulating anything other than short term-goals for the students in class was always the starting point for activities. Any long term goal, like preparing for an Assembly presentation had to be constantly referred to and placed into a daily context of time: "We are going to do our play at Assembly soon and today we are going to practise our song".

Jessica believe that the home-school relationships at the time of the study were strained and parents were reluctant to be seen at the school unless they come together as a group such as they did on Sports Day. The Aboriginal people in this community had to like the teachers at the school before they would enter into any dialogue with them.

> If the people in the community don't like the Principal the community just runs parallel to the school. If the people don't like Principal they stay out of the way. At the moment, the community do not come into the school because they avoid the Principal who they don't like. The community accepts and doesn't question because this is the Aboriginal way. Who do they complain to anyway? The community just goes along with Principal. My eyes see people being friendly and cordial but my ears give me different messages. Also, the community can take a whole negative view of the school because of their ideas about one staff member who might do something against the community. I speak to all parents and other community members because I live here. Currently, most of the teachers enjoy good relations with the community.

It appeared that people in the community would not tolerate disrespect and authoritarian communication with them and when something unjust was meted out to students the Community Council would immediately be at the school. [During a visit to this school my supervisor and I witnessed a disturbing and physical confrontation between the Principal and an angry father because of the way a teacher had disciplined a child]. Jessica thought that there were many barriers to overcome when trying to get parents involved in the school's program. In the main, parents were unaware of the educational program in the school because they were not informed. They knew about special events held at the school and special activities associated with children's classrooms but Jessica described this as a "different level of knowledge". Parents were given notice about events or their children told them about what was happening at school but parents only understood the educational program in terms of their own school experiences. Jessica thought that one of the bigger barriers between the school and the parents was that:

> Our use of language alienates the community from us. The educational jargon confuses the parents so we need to use simple words which convey the large ideas. The issue for teachers is how to use simple words which are not used in a patronising way. Teachers have their own culture. Some teachers, who may be respected by parents, tend to take on all the white-school-teacher concepts to explain their programs. Even the AEWs get mixed messages which creates confusion amongst the parents. The AEWs in this school represent the two main family groups. In the end they don't know what is going on because the gossip hides the reality.

Jessica loved her school but also revealed that when things were not smoothly operating at the school level, classroom life was a way to escape. "I just go into my classroom, shut the doors, and get on with doing a good job with my students".

> We have plenty of money in our school budget and we don't want for many resources except for teachers who really know how to teach and know how to work with Aboriginal students. Teachers have to like these kids. During your visits here you must be able to see how some teachers treat the students here but they won't last very long in the community because the kids will give them too much trouble.

Yes, I could see what Jessica meant.

Jessica believed that leadership was an issue in most of the Kimberley schools because of the information she received through her extensive personal and professional networks in the region. She thought that most teachers in schools did not see that the grievance committee process was worth following in schools because then teachers suffered the consequences in isolated communities. According to Jessica, the wrong leadership style in these schools created great distress, anger, and a crushing sense of despair amongst the staff.

> This school works reasonably well because of individual effort but it doesn't work in a united way. The strength in the school is the teachers because of what they do. School planning is just playing the game in this school. We have no real needs analysis to determine real priorities so teachers work hard in their own classroom trying to do their best for the children day-by-day. Maths and language should not be priorities in these schools. They should happen all the time;

everyday. Science and social sciences are a real need in these schools to learn about code switching in culture. The students do not recognise school as a sub-culture which is not "real culture". School is a sub-culture they step into because they have to; they then go out into the real world.

Jessica thought that many teachers were unhappy in the school because they felt disempowered by the leadership style.

The staff potential is not being realised here; so the teachers transfer out. The Principal only deals in negatives and does not value teachers' positive achievements. We were collecting information on students' discipline to form a behaviour management policy. We filled in "Discipline Slips" and sent them to the Principal each week. The Principal made such a drama out of the slips that teachers stopped filling them in. The decline in information didn't mean we had better behaved kids but the Principal highjacked the system we wanted to implement. In the main, teachers manage discipline and do a good job but we wanted a consistent approach so the information would have told us what problems existed and then we could have worked on a policy to address the issues.

Another problem we have is that the curriculum is not presented very well in this school. We need a developmental framework in whole curriculum to base teaching strategies upon and I think this framework should be about intellectual, social, and cultural awareness. We need a consistent, relevant, curriculum framework throughout the school so we can plan for continuity but we don't seem to be able to discuss these sorts of ideas at staff meetings. We don't have mentoring in the school and we don't even talk about best practices for our school and students. We have no teamwork.

While Jessica found that the school could work in better ways she was still able to exude her great joy in her teaching and express her great faith in her students. She did say, however, that keeping learning relevant for the older students was a challenge.

The kids are delightful. The little ones do love coming to school but as the kids get older they become more tuned into the wider context of their lives They come to school but their attitudes change. I think they see that school is totally irrelevant to their lives in this community.

APPENDIX K

**Letters Sent to Parents to Seek Permission for their Children to
Participate in the Study**

Notice in a Section of School E Newsletter

Kimberley Schools Study

Mrs Joan Gribble, from Curtin University, is researching in Kimberley schools during 1996 and1997 to identify how effectively these schools work for their communities and students. From 19 August to 30 August Joan is working at [school name] as part of her study. Several teachers are participating in the study and it hoped that parents who are contacted will agree to their children working with Joan. Joan has many years experience in schools as a teacher, principal, superintendent and consultant. If you are interested in talking to Joan about her work please contact her at the school.

Letter sent or hand delivered to parents at this school

Dear

My name is Joan Gribble and I take this opportunity to introduce myself. I have been involved for 30 years in government schools in Western Australia either as a teacher, deputy principal, principal, superintendent, or consultant. Currently, I am conducting research for my doctoral thesis which involves examining the effectiveness of government schools in the Kimberley District. My study will be conducted during 1996 and1997. The purpose of my study is to describe how effectively Kimberley schools work for their communities, especially their students. I believe that all students, irrespective of where they live, should receive the best education possible and this education should provide them with options and choices which lead to further opportunities in life. Recommendations from my study will be made to schools, the Kimberley District Education Office, and policy makers.

Many staff at [school name] have agreed to participate in my study and over two years. Also, I would like to work with a number of children at the school. I would like to track their progress in reading and writing. I will collect samples of children's work based on tasks that I have designed for them. After children complete their task, I will collaborate with their teachers to confirm that children have performed at their best level. Tracking a number of children's learning progress at [school name] will allow me to describe the effectiveness of the school.

Several staff have assisted me to select some children who could participate in my study. Your child has been nominated to work with me. Importantly, I require your consent to work with your child. If you are agreeable to your child participating in my study, please return this consent form to me at the school as soon as possible. I am available in the school from Monday, August 19 if you wish to discuss my work with me. Thankyou for your time and consideration and I look forward to your help with my work.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) JOAN GRIBBLE

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I give my consent for my child _____ to participate in the research called *Kimberley Schools Effectiveness Study* conducted by Mrs Joan Gribble, Curtin University. I understand that Mrs Gribble will collected samples of work from my child in reading and writing during 1996 and 1997.

PARENT/CAREGIVER   _____
                                                      (Signature)

Letter hand delivered to parents in remote schools

Dear

My name is Joan Gribble and I work at Curtin University.

In 1996 and 1997 I will be visiting your school to see how it works for your children.

I would like to work with your child during my visits. I would like to see if the school is helping your child learn.

During my visits I will ask your child to read, write, and ask them what they like about their community and school.

Please could you sign this letter to give me permission to work with your child:

<div style="text-align:center">

_____

Child's Name

_____

Parent's Signature

</div>

Thankyou for helping me with my work.

Yours sincerely

Joan Gribble

APPENDIX L

Assessment Tasks 1996 and 1997

YEARS K-2

1.   Draw a picture of where you live and where your family lives.

2.   Put names/labels on the picture.

3.   In the picture put a circle aound your favourite place where you like to go.

4.   Write about your favourite place.

5.   Choose a book you can read. Read the book to me.

6.   Tell me about one of the pictures.

7.   Tell me about the story and people in the story.

6.   Write down these words: your name, dog, cat, camp, tree, family, community.

YEARS 3-8

1. Draw a map of your community. Try to show as much detail as you can. You can take some time to make the map attractive.

2. Show place names on the map and label them. Put a key or legend on the map if you know how to do this.

3. Mark in blue your ONE favourite place that you like to visit that you have shown on your map.

4. Mark in red the TWO places on your map that are important to the community.

5. Choose ONE of the important places and write about it.

6. Choose 10 environmental words students know the meaning of and ask them to spell the words dictated. If students are familiar with dictation of a short sentence, choose one sentence from one student's story for the purpose.

APPENDIX M

Examples of Three Students' Profiles in Reading and Writing

Note: For privacy reasons Appendix M has not been reproduced.

(Co-ordinator, ADT Project (Bibliographic Services), Curtin University of Technology, 30/09/03)