

Centre for Aboriginal Studies

**“Promoting Aboriginal Employment in the Mining Industry: A Case
Study from the Goldfields Region of Western Australia”**

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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:

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, various efforts have been made to increase Aboriginal access to the employment and business opportunities offered by Australia's mining industry. Those efforts have been given greater impetus by the High Court's landmark Mabo judgment of 1992 and by the subsequent native title legislation (1993) and the judicial and negotiation processes and outcomes to which it has given rise, including negotiated agreements regarding mining industry access to and use of Indigenous lands. Such initiatives have placed Aboriginal people in a more equitable negotiating position with respect to mining industry developments. Nevertheless, in an overall sense, Aboriginal people remain essentially marginal to the mining industry, with their employment, career and business opportunities still very much underdeveloped.

My research examines a training initiative (the Aboriginal Training Program) designed to encourage greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. The central question addressed in my research is how effective the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) has been in advancing Aboriginal employment and career opportunities in the mining industry. This broad research question has given rise to a number of more specific research objectives:

- To identify and examine the background and characteristics of the ATP's enrollees and graduates.
- To document the experiences of the ATP participants, both within the program itself and subsequent to it.
- To examine the impact of the program in encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.
- To identify factors currently limiting the employment and career advancement in the mining industry of ATP graduates.
- To identify ways in which the program might be modified to enhance its effectiveness in promoting greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

In conducting my research, I have tried to present an Indigenous rather than non-Indigenous perspective on the program. To this end, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 recent ATP graduates, the matters examined ranging across the factors that initially aroused their interest in the ATP, the enrolment process, their experiences within the program, and their experiences subsequent to their graduation.

Emerging from my research is a picture of mixed success and mixed perspectives. Generally, all of the interviewees were supportive of the idea and ideals of the ATP, believing it to be an important and overdue initiative. There was also strong though not unanimous support for the ATP as it has worked in practice. Various viewpoints were in evidence in this connection, but there was a broadly-based feeling that the program could be made to work to better effect. There were also specific suggestions about how the ATP's effectiveness could be enhanced, both by changes within the program itself and by better back-up and support by mining industry employers and supervisors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Australian mining industry represents a still largely untapped source of employment and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Despite its potential importance, and despite the continuing disappointments with what has been achieved to date (RCIADIC Broome, Research Paper 5), there have been few in-depth studies carried out on Aboriginal participation in the mining industry, and fewer still on the effectiveness of programs designed to encourage such participation. My thesis is intended to help redress this shortcoming. In it, I explore the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia. I examine who the participants in this program have been, what their experiences in it have been, what they gained from it, and what impact it has had on their employment prospects. The research approach taken foregrounds the voices of the Aboriginal participants to present an Indigenous rather than non-Indigenous perspective on the program (Stringer, 1996).

1.2 BACKGROUND

The historical background

Historically, Aboriginal people have had a troubled relationship with mining companies in Western Australia. For decades Aboriginal people have been battling mining companies and the State government over land rights and land related matters. Until recently, successive State governments have opposed land rights and provided only limited protection for Indigenous sites of significance. Some of these sites have been disturbed by mining companies. One example of the latter led to the serious conflict between the Yungngora community of Nookanbah and the American corporate giant Amex over the mining of a significant spiritual site in the northern region of Western Australia (see Hawke 1989). These events happened during 1979

and 1980 and constituted “one of the most significant episodes in the history of Aboriginal/European relations in Australia” (Hawke, 1989:16). One enduring outcome of this drama is that now most mining companies recognise at least rhetorically the significance of Aboriginal sites and relationships to the land.

Until the High Court’s Mabo decision of 1992, *terra nullius* formed the conceptual basis of laws governing Aboriginal rights and interests in land. In this particular case, Eddie Mabo presented a case to the High Court that Indigenous people were the first inhabitants and had prior and continuing ownership of this land. In its historic Mabo judgment, the High Court recognised that Aboriginal people held a form of native title, thus overturning the notion of *terra nullius*. The Mabo judgment opened the door for Indigenous people around Australia to pursue their own claims. The following year, the Keating Labor government passed its *National Native Title Act* (1993). This legislation provided a process for such claims to be advanced, in the first instance, by a process of negotiation and mediation between interested parties. The legislation also provided for contentious claims to be referred to the Federal Court for resolution.

The Mabo decision and the subsequent native title legislation have had a profound impact on the position of Indigenous communities *vis a vis* mining companies. The communities gained a much stronger bargaining and political position. For the first time, non-Indigenous law recognised Indigenous rights and interests in land deriving from Indigenous customary law. The upshot is that Indigenous people are now seen as having a legitimate right to be involved in negotiations regarding mining developments on their traditional lands. Mining companies, for their part, have come to recognise the need to negotiate with local Indigenous people before proceeding with their planned developments. A number of land-use agreements have now been concluded between mining and Indigenous interests, and quite a number are now being advanced toward resolution. Such agreements usually contain a strong emphasis on Aboriginal employment and training programs (National Native Title Tribunal, 1994:170-1).

Accredited training programs within land use agreements have been aimed at enabling Aboriginal people to enter the mining industry. Such programs generally

cover the basic skills and certificates expected by the mining industry and include practical training and experiences on the minesite. Potentially these training experiences prepare Aboriginal people for employment in a diversity of occupations within the mining industry. Mining companies who have offered these employment and training packages for Aboriginal employment include: Anaconda Nickel Mine (Murrin Murrin), Argyle Diamond Mine (AGM), BHP-Billiton, Hamersley Iron Ore, Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines (KCGM), Paddington Gold Mine, Western Mining Corporation (WMC) Centaur Gold Mining, Granny Smith Gold Mine Laverton and Delta Gold Mine Kalgoorlie.

The increasing focus of mining companies on Aboriginal employment and training has coincided with Federal government programs in this area. Such programs were initially launched in the 1980s as part of the government agenda to overcome Aboriginal welfare dependency (Miller, 1984). During the 1990s employment and training packages were often incorporated by mining companies into deals with Aboriginal people about mining on their land. This resulted in more opportunities for Aboriginal people in the mining industry. However, a number of factors have restricted Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. These include lack of recognition by employers and fellow employees of Aboriginal social and cultural obligations and unacceptable social aspects of the work environment (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:29).

The Aboriginal negotiating position in relation to developments on their traditional lands was further strengthened by the activities of the Council for Reconciliation, launched in 1989 by the Prime Minister of the day, Mr Bob Hawke. In 1992, his successor, Prime Minister Mr Paul Keating supported the Council in establishing a sub-committee charged with developing practical strategies of reconciliation for the mining industry. The sub-committee proposed that “the development of better employment and enterprise strategies for Aboriginal communities would increase the levels of participation and involvement by Aboriginal people in the industry” (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:xiv). The sub-committee also suggested that greater understanding and communication between Aboriginal people and the Mining Industry was necessary (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:13).

Clearly there have been various important initiatives taken to promote Aboriginal participation in the mining industry, training programs among them. However, it remains unclear whether such initiatives have made participation in the mining industry easier and more attractive for Aboriginal people. My study explores these issues, with particular regard to the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) offered in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia.

Working in the mining industry: my personal experience

Since mining began on the Goldfields around 1892-1893, just about any able-bodied person could get a job on the mines. Until recently, all that was required were a basic education, a *Laboratory Certificate* from the local doctor certifying that a chest x-ray showed no signs of dust or spots on the lungs, and a *Birth Certificate* to prove that the applicant was at least eighteen years old. That's all you needed to get basic employment in the mining industry. Beyond these minimal requirements, you didn't have to have any formal training, skills or experience, only courage and the capacity to work hard. Once you had presented your two certificates, you were considered eligible to take up full-time employment, working on the surface or underground. You also had to be prepared to work three shifts.

The positions I filled underground were mostly as an offsider. My first job underground was an offsider to a gold sampler at the age of eighteen years old. Then I had various jobs underground such as installing ventilation, pipe fitting, plate laying, timbering, and general miscellaneous activities, and an offsider to diamond drillers, long hole drillers, bogger drivers, truck drivers, and machine miners. The experienced underground workers would train you on-the-job until you were able to operate a particular piece of machinery; then you were given a contract number for that position and the occupational title *miner*. All who worked on the mines were known as *miners*.

Being a miner is the same as being employed as a mechanic, carpenter, council worker, or a public servant. You can work your way up the ladder, starting from the bottom as a general labourer, and moving up to better paid positions. To work as a machine miner, you had to acquire the training and skills to allow you to work

unsupervised, sometimes under dangerous conditions. In doing so, you put yourself among the highest income earners in the Goldfields. My father (now deceased) was known as one of the best machine miners and rail bogger drivers on the Goldfields by senior supervisors and fellow workers. My three other brothers Albert, Peter and Basil (now deceased) are also working in the mining industry.

Back in the mining industry in the 1960s and 70s, some 800 to 1000 men worked underground in each major mine-shaft. With the introduction of today's modern technology, mining companies drastically reduced their manpower requirements. Today, they can now successfully operate a mine of similar scale with perhaps 400 employees in total, including administrative staff. As a result, the number of employees has dramatically fallen. There are fewer unskilled workers employed and fewer points of entry for those who, like most potential Aboriginal employees, are without formal training or prior industry work experience. Moreover the mining companies are fully equipped with their own trained and qualified staff such as engineers, technicians and so on, all of whom fill permanent positions. To have any hope of entering the mining industry in the future, potential Aboriginal employees will require better skills and qualifications, and to get these they will require better training opportunities.

I would like to see more and more Aboriginals employed in the mining industry to develop excellent careers by giving local Aboriginal people the income, satisfaction, personal pride and family security, which only long term careers can provide. Such employment would help them provide a better education for their children. So many of my Aboriginal friends and relatives are still unemployed and living below the poverty level. It makes me feel so embarrassed and sad. I've long asked myself, "what can I do to help them?" This question is still there, and very much a part of the hopes I bring to my present research into Aboriginal employment in the mining industry.

Most Aboriginal men don't like the mines because of health risks and the number of deaths that occur each year from working underground. Many Aboriginal men strongly believe that humans do not belong working underground and that "it's only for snakes, lizards and rabbits." When I first went underground I was nervous and

frightened at just the thought of being so far underground. Today, with the introduction of ‘open-pit mining’, most mining work is surface work and working environments are generally much safer than they used to be. Now Aboriginal men and women are starting to change their views about the mining industry.

My aim is to complete my studies and become a supervisor in the mining industry, hopefully working with other Aboriginal people. I think Aboriginal supervisors have an advantage over non-Aboriginal supervisors for cultural reasons. Also Aboriginal supervisors have a better understanding of the major concerns or issues relating to Aboriginal people. I suspect many Aboriginal people prefer Aboriginal supervisors to non-Aboriginal supervisors, because it makes them feel at ease and comfortable in the work environment. During my employment in the mining industry I have never seen or heard of an Aboriginal supervisor, as much as I would have liked to.

Until I injured my back in an accident in 1983, my goal was to become a supervisor. I would have probably become the first Aboriginal supervisor on the Goldfields if I had not injured my back. My father worked 45 years underground in the Goldfields and was approached by several senior supervisors as to whether he would be interested in becoming a shift-boss because of his valuable experience and work ethic. I wanted to pass my father’s record by working 50 years in the mines, with the last 20 years working as a supervisor. Unfortunately, I only worked 17 years in the mines. Now I see the opportunity to become a supervisor by an alternative route. My father passed away in 2002. I know he would have been proud of me and would want me to utilise my studies to advance myself and other Aboriginal people in the mining industry.

With Aboriginal people given expanded opportunities to find employment in the mining industry, I can’t see any excuse now why those opportunities should not be taken advantage of. By becoming a supervisor in the mining industry, I hope I can set the example for others to follow in the future. This would also be great for reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the mining companies to see that we can work together in the future.

Observing the problems at first-hand

In May 1997, I was permanently employed in the then Aboriginal Affairs Department now Department of Indigenous Affairs working in the Heritage and Culture Section. My brother Albert rang me and mentioned they were looking for Aboriginal Security Guards at Murrin Murrin, located between Leonora and Laverton. He informed me that the mine was paying better money than I was already on, and he encouraged me to think about applying for a job there. I thought about it for a couple of weeks, before ringing the manager of Minesite Security to inquire about possible employment. He was very positive, and arranged an interview time. At the interview the manager said “Yes there is a vacancy and we are looking for an Aboriginal Security Guard at Murrin Murrin. When can you start?” The next thing I was on an early morning flight to Murrin Murrin with a 6.00 am start that day.

I was employed with Minesite Security Consultants (MSC) between May and August in 1997 for a period of 4 months. My duties were to patrol the perimeter of the minesite and its grounds and facilities. The latter included the living quarters, the wet and dry mess areas, all water pump stations, and the airport. I was also required to work periodically on the main entrance gate overseeing check-ins and check-outs. Five security guards were on duty at any time, each working daily 12-hour shifts from 6.00 to 6.00. Guards were rotated between five locations: gate one, the main entrance gate; gate two, the entrance into the mine-site; gate three, the entrance into the camp; and the foot and mobile patrol.

We served three hours at each location. Security guards at the main entrance are required to check the Identity Cards (IDs) of everybody entering and leaving the site. The IDs have the employees’ name and photographs on them, along with details of their particular employers. Nobody was allowed on site without his or her ID.

When I was on duty on the main entrance, I noticed that a number of Aboriginal employees, both male and female, were leaving the minesite, apparently with little intention of returning. This was during the construction period. I used to ask them, “what’s wrong and why are you leaving?” Typical responses were, “I can’t put up with those fucken white supervisors” or “I can’t stand the fucken white people out

there” or “I didn’t like being given the fucken Jacky Jacky jobs,” and so on. I was amazed and disappointed to see them leaving, especially knowing that for some the work in the mining industry had represented a new beginning in their life.

After I’d been working for MSC for several months, there were rumours around camp it would lose its contract at the end of the construction period and that Murrin Murrin would take over its own security. I began looking for another job straight away. Again my brother Albert came to the rescue. At the time he had a contract with Fluor Daniel’s, an American company. He asked me if I would like to drive his fuel truck for his company (ARB Motor Mechanic). He mentioned his company would pay more money than MSC was paying me, and I accepted his offer. I worked for his company for about 8 months.

My duties as a fuel truck driver included maintaining fuel in the generators supplying electricity and fresh water to the entire camp. During my daily runs I used to stop and yarn with a couple of Aboriginal workers just to see how they were getting on. Some were employed by the Burnna Yurral Aboriginal Corporation (BYAC). BYAC is 100% owned and managed by an Aboriginal family corporation. Those working for BYAC were pretty much settled in their employment. They had had disagreements among themselves but their issues had been sorted out and things were “OK”. On the other hand, the Aboriginal employees working for non-Aboriginal contractors seemed to be having major problems, in some cases attributable to their supervisors having little knowledge of or empathy for their workers. This saw many Aboriginal employees just walk off the minesite. Aborigines working for Aboriginal companies also face termination, but not the racism or discrimination they experience.

All up, I worked on-site at Murrin Murrin for about twelve months, 4 months with MSC and 8 months with ARB Motor Mechanic. What I had seen and heard over that period from fellow Aboriginal employees disappointed me. I wanted to better understand why so many were leaving their jobs and not returning. I also wanted to know what could be done to reverse this trend.

While I was working at Murrin Murrin I also heard and read about agreements made between mining companies and local Aboriginal communities that offered

employment, training programs, business contracts, and royalties. I also became aware of various training programs and packages initiated by the government and taken on by mining companies (including Murrin Murrin) to assist Aboriginal employment in the industry.

During my conversations with the disgruntled Aboriginal workers, I had asked if they were aware that agreements had been made between mining companies and Aboriginal communities, and what they knew about their specific provisions. Most of them had heard something, but had little idea of what they contained. I have reflected since that perhaps if they had known more then, things might have been different now. Would we see Aboriginal employees just walking off the jobs or would they stand up and challenge their supervisors if they were treated unfairly?

The idea of doing research takes hold

In 1999, I was unemployed for about 4 months. I saw an advertisement in *The West Australian* newspaper advising of a job vacancy at the Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS). The job was as a ‘Caretaker’ at the Boomerang Hostel in East Perth. The Boomerang Hostel caters for homeless Aboriginal people. I applied for the position and was fortunate enough to get it.

While employed with AMS in 2000, I developed an interest in undertaking postgraduate studies at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University of Technology. I enrolled in the Masters of Arts (Indigenous Research and Development) program. Not sure of what to study at first, my thoughts turned to Murrin Murrin and what I had seen and heard there. Later during course work we discussed “Aboriginal employment in the mining industry”. My recollections of the problems I had seen at Murrin Murrin reinforced my prior feeling that more needed to be known about the effectiveness of the training programs now being put into place.

My growing interest in comprehending what was occurring at Murrin Murrin and other mining developments in the Goldfields was intensified by two other factors. First, I am a *Wonggai* man from the Goldfields. My mother, now deceased, was born

at Mount Margaret Mission, thirty kilometres north of the minesite. I am a native title claimant over that part of land, and am recognised as such, and I have a traditional right to be there. Secondly, and more specifically, I used to work at Murrin Murrin, along with my two brothers. My experience at Murrin Murrin and elsewhere in the mining industry, as detailed above, raised many issues in my mind about Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

The Aboriginal Training Program (ATP)

The focus of my research is a training program offered in Kalgoorlie in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia (see map - Appendix Seven). The Kalgoorlie training program is one of a number devised in recent years to promote Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. Western Australia is the most important state for mining in Australia, and Kalgoorlie the single most important mining centre in the State. Kalgoorlie has a population of approximately 30,000 people. It is of particular interest to me both because of its significance for the Western Australian mining industry and because of my own personal experiences and situation, as previously detailed.

The Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) was first offered in the Goldfields in 1997. Since then it has been mounted in seven different Goldfields locations. Typically, each program is run for a particular mining company by a local educational provider, of which the John Forrest, Vocational Training and Education Centre and the Kalgoorlie College (associated with Curtin University) have been the most prominent. The local education providers are government funded, and part of the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) network of providers. All are committed to providing world class industry based training in programs that are nationally recommended through their alignments to National Competency Standards in areas of metalliferous surface extraction and processing. The information presented below has been provided to me by officers of the Kalgoorlie College.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain comprehensive statistics on the ATP in the Goldfields. Apparently, a change in their computer systems has meant that old data are no longer retrievable. Compensating for this to some degree, Minara

Resources (the trading name for Murrin Murrin) has kept detailed statistics of the programs they have sponsored since 1997. Their statistics are presented as Appendices One and Two in the present thesis. I am grateful for Minara for their generous assistance in this respect.

From the start, the ATP has attracted strong industry support. Ten mining organisations with operations in the Goldfields have sponsored programs to date, some (notably Murrin Murrin) on repeated occasions. Those organisations are: Murrin Murrin, Cawse Mine, Bulong Mine, Sunrise Dam Mine, Granny Smith Gold Mine, Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines, Paddington Gold Mine, Centaur Gold Mine, and the Western Mining Company. From its Goldfields beginnings, the ATP has been taken to places much further afield. Other mining companies to have supported such programs in Western Australia include BHP-Billiton, Hamersley Iron Ore, Rio Tinto, and Argyle Diamond Mines.

Programs offered in the Goldfields have attracted participants from around Australia, principally from the Goldfields itself and the Perth metropolitan area. The majority of participants have been men, reflecting the strong male bias in mining industry employment, but there seems also to have been growing female interest in the program and in mining industry employment generally (see Chapter Four for further details).

The ATP takes six months to complete. It is divided into two complementary parts. The first consists of coursework and the second on-the-job training. In class the students cover a range of pre-vocational modules. These are delivered by specialist training providers in areas of life management, communication and team skills, job seeking skills, first-aid, driving licence, occupational health and safety, numeracy and literacy, and workplace English Literacy and language. In the second half of the ATP, students are located to a minesite to start their on-the-job training. On-the-job training involves an introduction of the minesite of the safety rules and procedures then the students are placed into positions in just about all areas such as mill operators, store duties; basically they actually go out and do what they were taught in-class. The program is targeted at Aboriginal people hoping to gain employment in other mining operations and services industries in the area.

On successfully completing the ATP, the graduates receive a certificate that will enable them to take up full-time employment in many industries that recognise the certificate.

1.3 THE RESEARCH ITSELF

Positioning and approach

This is the first formal study undertaken by an Aboriginal (*Wonggai*) person on Aboriginal trainees and the Aboriginal Training Program in the Eastern Goldfields Region of Western Australia. No similar research seems to have been undertaken anywhere else in Australia, certainly not on training programs designed to meet the specific needs of the mining industry. My Aboriginality, my status as a local *Wonggai* man, and my 17 years experience working in the local mining industry have assisted me in the process of collecting and interpreting Aboriginal peoples' experiences in the ATP. Because of my pre-existing relationships of trust and rapport, I have had greater access to Aboriginal accounts of their life experiences. A researcher, positioned on the inside, can conduct an empathetic and culturally appropriate investigation into the relevant issues.

The present thesis documents the experiences of Aboriginal participants in order to present an Aboriginal perspective on employment and training programs in the mining industry. The approach taken foregrounds the voices of the Aboriginal participants to present an Indigenous perspective (Stringer, 1996). In keeping with this approach I have undertaken in-depth interviews with fifteen ATP graduates.

Objectives

The fundamental question behind my research is how can Aboriginal people participate more fully in the mining industry, now and in the future? The particular question explored in the present thesis is how effective has the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) has been in increasing Aboriginal participation in the mining industry?

The specific objectives of my research are:

- To identify and examine the background and characteristics of the persons who have enrolled in the ATP over the past decade.
- To document the experiences of Aboriginal participants in that program, both within the program itself and subsequent to it.
- To examine the impact of the program in encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.
- To identify potential obstacles to Aboriginal employment and career advancement in the mining industry.
- To identify ways in which the program could be changed in order to enhance its effectiveness in promoting greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

Significance of the study

The research is important for two main reasons.

First, the Australian High Court's recognition of native title rights in 1992 means that increasingly mining companies need to negotiate agreements with local Aboriginal people before development can proceed. It is expected that such agreements will continue to include provisions relating to the employment and training of Aboriginal people. However, while large mining companies are developing Aboriginal employment and training strategies, the effectiveness of the training programs upon which they are drawing is yet to be determined.

Second, my research will be conducted from an insider's perspective, by which I mean from an Indigenous perspective, a view from the inside. My 17 years experience as a mining industry employee in the Goldfields has provided me with awareness of issues and concerns affecting Aboriginal people working, or seeking to work, in the industry. To my knowledge, no similar research into Aboriginal employment and training issues has been undertaken by an Aboriginal person.

In my experience, many Aboriginal people want employment and training opportunities in the mining industry. Unfortunately suitable positions are not always available and working conditions are not always sufficiently flexible to accommodate Aboriginal needs. Regrettably, some non-Aboriginal employees continue to be prejudiced and culturally insensitive. Under these conditions it is very difficult to increase Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. As a result many Aboriginal people lose interest or walk away. For these reasons it is particularly important that Aboriginal people be asked about their experiences within the training programs associated with employment and training agreements.

Ethical considerations

Approval to carry out this research has been negotiated with the Aboriginal Mining Training Program located at the Curtin University of Technology in Kalgoorlie in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia. Approval has also been negotiated with the companies who have participated in this program.

The researcher has endeavoured to consult closely with the Aboriginal community throughout this research and to encourage community involvement wherever possible. This approach was necessary from the viewpoint of being respectful of local Aboriginal protocols and sensitivities.

Written consent for use of the material gathered has been obtained from the individuals who agreed to participate in the present research. Individual participants are not identified by name. Individual confidentiality is maintained. Participants were permitted to amend interview transcripts and withdraw from the study at any given time. None chose to do so.

Nothing from the thesis will be published without the written approval of the key stakeholders. Raw data will be held in a secure filing cabinet for five years at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University of Technology and thereafter will be destroyed. Results are not held in a form that identifies individual subjects. The above procedures comply with the NHMRC Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.

In the thesis proper, I include verbatim statements from the persons interviewed in relation to the matters I investigated, consistent with my commitment to foregrounding Aboriginal voices. I have, however, made one significant change to the statements in order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees and of the people and companies to which they referred. Wherever direct identifying information is contained in the statements, I have deleted the actual names and substituted general expressions such as “the named company”, “the minesite”, “the place” or “the named individual”. Wherever I have done this, I have included the substituted word or phrase in brackets to indicate to the reader that I have made such a modification to the original interviewee statements.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Six chapters comprise the present thesis. **Chapter One**, the present chapter, introduces the research undertaken for the thesis. It outlines the nature of the research planned and undertaken. It also puts that research into broad context, both in terms of how the research topic has emerged as a matter of policy significance, and in terms of my own personal background and developing academic interests. In this chapter, I also sketch the ideas that shaped how I went about the required research.

In **Chapter Two**, I examine in fuller detail the relationship between mining companies and Indigenous people touched upon in the first chapter. The major dimensions of that changing relationship are explored with particular reference to Western Australia, and more specifically still with reference to the Eastern Goldfields. In this chapter, I review past studies of how the mining industry has related to Indigenous people, all as it happens by non-Indigenous researchers. I then outline significant policy developments, both government and corporate, that are now encouraging a more constructive and forward-looking approach to increasing Indigenous participation in the mining industry.

In **Chapter Three**, I provide an account of how and why I went about the research as I did. I begin by describing the ideas and aspirations that influenced the approach I took to the intended research. I then explain how I went about developing my particular research project, taking into account the general considerations about

research methodology and design and the specific requirements of my research topic and research context. Finally, I reflect on how my experiences in the field have impacted on the understanding of Indigenous research needs and priorities that I will carry forward into future research endeavours.

In **Chapters Four** and **Five**, I discuss the information obtained from the interviews conducted. **Chapter Four** focuses upon the interviewees' participation in the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) itself. In it, I outline the general background and socio-economic characteristics of my interview population. I also explore how and why they were drawn to the ATP, what they experienced within it, and what they have taken from it. I also consider their thoughts and suggestions as to how it might be made to work to even better effect. My examination of research findings continues in **Chapter Five**. In this chapter, entitled *From Training to Work*, I examine the ATP graduates' transitions from the training program to the actual work situation. In this regard, I explore the experiences the interviewees had within the program, which prepared them or failed to prepare them for the employment challenges ahead. I also explore how, upon completing the ATP, the graduates went about seeking employment and the assistance they were given in this connection. My examination extends to a consideration of the interviewees' reported experiences in the mining industry employment after they had completed the ATP. Again, I focus upon how well the ATP actually prepared them for the sort of work and work experiences they have had since completing the ATP. In this context, I try to identify the factors that have both helped and hindered them in their quest for meaningful jobs and careers in the mining industry.

In my concluding chapter, **Chapter Six**, I review the overall results of my research. I also reflect on the nature of the research undertaken, noting its strengths and its limitations. I also briefly identify and discuss future research issues and challenges in connection with the mining industry's relationship with Indigenous communities.

1.5 CONCLUSION

We are living in a time of change. My thesis reflects that change. It is concerned with creating better futures for Indigenous Australians, and in this regard it hopes to make

a contribution to increasing the scope of Indigenous participation in the mining industry. My particular thesis topic is the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP), one of the measures put in place in recent years to provide expanded opportunities for Indigenous Australians to find rewarding places in the mining industry. In the following chapters, I first set the scene for my chosen research and then examine in detail how the ATP has worked for a sample of its graduates. As an Indigenous researcher myself, I am pleased to say that my research foregrounds Indigenous experiences in and perspectives on the ATP, on how it has worked, and how it might be made to work to even better effect.

CHAPTER TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINES AND THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MINING INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the changing relationship between Aboriginal people and the mining industry in Western Australia, emphasising particularly the Eastern Goldfields within which my own original research has been undertaken. It begins with a historical perspective of Indigenous people's involvement in the mining industry. It then outlines government policy initiatives on Aboriginal employment and training in the mining industry since the 1970s. Finally, it examines the developing academic literature relating to Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. This overview allows me to identify past, current, and potential obstacles to Aboriginal participation in the mining industry. In doing so, it sets the scene for my detailed examination of one particular training and facilitated entry program specifically targeted at increasing Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

2.2 IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since Europeans first arrived in Australia, colonisation has been about the exploitation of the natural resources of this country. "Land has always been at the centre of conflict between black and white Australians," says Reynolds (1987:133). The process of colonisation has meant dispossessing Indigenous people of their land. The circumstances of that dispossession have varied from region to region, and from one era to another. Often associated with that process have been forcible removal of people from their traditional lands, frontier conflict and violence leading to massacres in some instances, death from introduced diseases, and confinement of Indigenous people in government institutions, missions and reserves.

To many Europeans, Indigenous people simply stood in the way of progress. Across the country, Europeans started to clear the land to build their houses and move in

their livestock. Next were efforts to exploit the continent's rich mineral deposits. In 1892 gold was found near present-day Coolgardie and the following year where Kalgoorlie now stands. The subsequent goldrushes brought tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of newcomers to the Goldfields. Thus, in a sense, began the continuing struggle of the Indigenous people of this region to find a place in the new social order that was being created.

In Western Australia, the local Aboriginal people have been interested and involved in mining both directly and indirectly for centuries. Aboriginal people in the Goldfields were responsible for finding large deposits of gold and other minerals (Christensen 1990:3). Thus, for instance, Aboriginal peoples helped prospectors find gold in the early 1890s near the site of what became Mt Margaret Mission, and assisted them further with obtaining water to keep them and their operations going. Such contributions, it seems, were not recognised by the newcomers, and the dominant theme in the miners' approach to Aboriginal people became one of denial and exclusion.

Notwithstanding the considerable obstacles in their way, some Indigenous people found a small toehold in the developing mining industry. Even though they were denied employment in the mining industry, some managed to take out miner's rights and started their own mine shows. They managed to acquire and utilise some of the mining industry's equipment in the goldfields available at the time such as the dolly pots to crush the ore and the blow dryers, and adapt some of their own tools such as the yandy dish to pan the ore. Their small operations became the "bread and butter" of a number of Eastern Goldfields Aboriginal men and their families (Morgan, 1986:154).

In 1942 in the context of the labour shortages of the Second World War, Indigenous men were first recruited into employment in the Eastern Goldfields mining industry, replacing the white workers who were joining the armed forces. The employment restrictions imposed by the chief protector Neville were still in place, but were increasingly ignored by mine managements desperate to obtain labour. One mine manager wrote, "As you are aware, I have a team of men from your Mission working for me. I have found them very loyal and honest workers" (Morgan, 1986:258).

In 1948 Aboriginal people from the Pilbara area set up a private company, the Northern Development and Mining Company, registered under the names of the Beneficial Owners of Western Australia. They were helped and supported by a Don McLeod, a sympathetic and politically astute white man. McLeod insists that: “It was Blackfellows who played the main role in opening up the Pilbara to mineral exploitation” (McLeod, 1984:94). Commenting further on their success in becoming the first Indigenous owners of a private mining company in Australia, McLeod 1984:98 observed: “the Blackfellows marshalled all their strength and energy and moved mountains in order to achieve their cherished goals.” The mine meant more than economic freedom to the group; it also meant “freedom from slavery” (McLeod, 1984:99).

The successes of the Pilbara group were won against the odds. Repeated efforts were made by authorities to close the enterprise down. According to McLeod (1984:98), “a clique of powerful and unprincipled bureaucrats conspired, using every device and tactic they could, to smash and undermine the solidarity of the Blackfellow enterprise.” The determination of the Aboriginal owners of this business eventually prevailed. More than 600 Aboriginal people were involved in this business over a 20 year period, a remarkable achievement given the labour intensive mining methods upon which they had to rely on.

The mineral boom of the 1960s increased employment for Aboriginal people in the mining industry. Because much of this mining boom occurred on or near Aboriginal communities and reserves, some Aboriginal people were absorbed into the mining workforce, though far fewer than might have been expected or hoped for (Rogers (1973). It is interesting to note that, at the time of Rogers’ 1967 survey, 28 Eastern Goldfields tenements were held by local Indigenous people (Rogers, 1973: 3).

Rogers found that most Aboriginal people involved in the mining industry to that time were employed in unskilled and semi-skilled capacities. The limited training provided mainly took the form of on-the-job instruction, usually by a supervisor or fellow worker. However Rogers points out that on Groote Eylandt the Gemco mine had employed Aboriginal people in supervisory and managerial positions. His

research of 23 major companies revealed that only 193 Aboriginal people were employed across the country (Rogers, 1973:133).

Rogers (1973: 36-7) also refers to the effects of the mining industry's increasing presence near Aboriginal communities. By this device, he suggests, the mining industry "takes white culture" to Aboriginal "back doors." The questions of social impact and social change that he raises in this way have become of greater and greater concern to Indigenous communities as time has passed. Though they are not matters specifically explored in my own research, they are relevant to a broadly based appreciation of relationships between the mining industry and Indigenous communities.

It is impossible in the limited space available here to trace the full extent or ramifications of the changes that have been made in the mining industry's approach to Indigenous land and labour. For present purposes, it is sufficient to observe that a major shift has been underway for some time. The starting point for that shift was the mining industry's own version of *terra nullius*. As we have seen, in the early colonial years and extending well into the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant theme in the mining industry's approach to Indigenous matters was one of denial and exclusion, built around the expropriation of Indigenous land and the exclusion of Indigenous labour from mainstream mining operations. It has taken the mining industry a long time to move on from this negative approach.

A more constructive and forward-looking approach has gradually emerged over the past four decades. The new approach has taken quite some time to become fully entrenched and to produce noticeable beneficial impacts for the Indigenous communities affected. Initially, it took the form of simply allowing Indigenous people to find employment in the industry, without any special effort at providing incentives or removing disincentives for them to do so. Later, particularly in the aftermath of land rights and native title legislation, the industry's approach broadened and become more cognisant of specific Indigenous needs, values and problems. Many companies are now negotiating broadly based agreements with Indigenous communities and representative bodies, with the agreements covering land and land-related matters, along with employment, training and enterprise development. That

developing approach provides the context within which my own particular study has been carried out. In the following section, I explore the major changes that have contributed to the more constructive mining industry approach to Indigenous matters that is now increasingly in evidence.

2.3 THE CHANGING POLICY CONTEXT

In the post-World War Two years, there was a general trend across all Australian States and Territories to repeal the restrictive-discriminatory statutes and regulations applied to Indigenous people that had developed over the previous century. Associated with this trend was the gradual, though rather uneven, opening up to Indigenous Australians opportunities to seek citizenship and to gain access to the entitlements and benefits such as old-age pensions enjoyed by other Australians. Small steps were also being taken in this direction in the areas of education, health and employment.

The post-war trends intensified in the 1960s. Two events were particularly significant in this regard. One was the 1965 decision by the Australian Arbitration and Conciliation Commission to grant equal wages to Indigenous persons employed under the terms of the Federal Pastoral Industry Award (Howitt, 1990:6). The second was the 1967 Commonwealth Referendum. The referendum, in effect, guaranteed citizenship for all Indigenous Australians. It also authorised the Commonwealth government to enact legislation in relation to Indigenous people around Australia, and not simply in relation to the Territories directly administered by the Commonwealth. The Referendum thereby prepared the grounds for a new phase in the Indigenous Australian struggle for equal rights in education, employment, health and other aspects of day-to-day living (in effect, for civic equality with other Australians), while also facilitating the struggle for specific Indigenous rights stemming from prior ownership of the continent.

In 1972 the Whitlam government was elected, bringing with it a stated commitment to Indigenous “self-determination”. One expression of the new policy was the preparation of legislation (eventually passed in modified form in 1976 by the incoming Fraser government) providing for land rights in the Northern Territory.

More generally, efforts were made to involve Indigenous people in decision-making processes and to develop organisational vehicles (incorporated community agencies) by which they could do so. Despite the generally progressive nature of the policy changes being made, little on-the-ground progress was made in reducing the level of Indigenous disadvantage.

In the 1980s several Commonwealth reports examined the educational and training needs of Indigenous Australians. The Miller Report was particularly notable in this regard. A number of initiatives followed, involving both State and Commonwealth governments. Increasing emphasis was put on vocational education and training, with an associated emphasis on catering for the needs of mature-aged Indigenous people who had previously been denied access to such programs.

Increasingly, the aims of government policy coincided with the aspirations of mining companies to increase Indigenous participation in their operations. In 1987 the Hawke government set up a program aimed at a “fair go and a fair share for all Australians.” Its “Access and Equity Plan” was administered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Incorporated within this was an Aboriginal Employment Policy, specifically targeted at assisting Indigenous people to achieve equity with other Australians in terms of employment and economic status. The stated policy objective was to promote Aboriginal economic independence from government and to reduce Aboriginal dependency on welfare in accordance with their traditions, chosen way of life and cultural identity (Miller, 1985).

One part of the response sought from mining companies was to increase opportunities for Indigenous Australians to gain employment for them on terms similar to those enjoyed by other Australians. The second part of the response sought was assistance from mining companies for Indigenous communities to establish their own enterprises, for example, as sub-contractors to the mining company and its suppliers. In this respect, the Miller report had found that many Indigenous people prefer to work for their own organisations rather than for external agencies. In sub-contracting businesses because they provided more opportunities for employment in the mining industry. As a result Miller recommended that the “mining industry should also encourage Aboriginal communities to establish their own enterprises through the

provision of capital equipment, relevant training and preference to local and Aboriginal tenderers” (Miller, 1985: 324). Examples of these Aboriginal owned businesses include the Yirrkala Business Enterprises at Nhulunbuy and the Gagadju Contracting Company at Jabiru.

One outcome of agreements made between the mining companies and Indigenous communities was the offering of contracts to Indigenous organisations. Steady if unspectacular progress was evident on this front from the mid-1980s onwards. By 2002, some twenty nine Indigenous businesses were operating in various regions of Western Australia, nineteen of them in the Goldfields (*Indigenous People in Mining (IpiM)* report, cited in the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission Mining Expo bulletin, 2002). All are 100% owned by Indigenous people and communities.

Policies promoting Indigenous employment were complemented by policies focusing on Indigenous education. A new policy approach took effect from the 1 January 1990. The new Commonwealth policy aimed to include more Indigenous people in educational decision-making, to increase equity and access, and to develop mechanisms to monitor the achievement of the desired outcomes. In 1991, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Robert Tickner, announced that “The Commonwealth Government is committed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieve equity with other Australians in training opportunities, education, employment and income by the year 2001. The Government has adopted two policies – the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) and the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) – to ensure that the goal of equity with other Australians is met”. A significant feature of this policy approach is that it was designed in consultation with Aboriginal people, with the intent that Aboriginal people deliver the policy as well (Aboriginal Employment Development Policy: 1991). The two policies were subsequently endorsed by all State and Territory governments.

For its part, the Western Australian government re-stated its commitment to enhancing the range and quality of vocational education and training services available to Indigenous Australians. In this respect, the Western Australian Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Education and Training 1997-1999 was quite consciously

developed to complement the Commonwealth government's National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), established by the Commonwealth government in 1990, had its own objectives. They were:

- To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and training positions created through ATSIC programs expenditures.
- To promote and support the creation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders employment and training opportunities in the private and public sector.
- To improve inter-agency co-ordination in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders employment and training issues (ATSIC WA State Plan, 1977: 16-17).

ATSIC also administered the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) established some years earlier by the Commonwealth government. CDEP provides employment and training opportunities for Indigenous Australians, who voluntarily forgo their unemployment income support entitlements. CDEP also offers opportunities for Indigenous people and communities to establish their own employment creating businesses.

Until July 1992, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) administered community training support within AEDP as part of the training for Aboriginal and Torres Island people. The Miller Report suggested that the government ideas are a setup for failure towards Aboriginal employment. An evaluation of this program completed in November 1991 found that:

A common criticism of the training being provided to communities is that it is unstructured and does not form part of a more systematic approach to the development of the individual skills. Training is often limited and focused on an immediate community need. Such training can be frustrating for the individual being trained, as it may not enhance the individual's own employment prospects or career aspirations. It can also be of limited use to the community, as it does not consider the contribution to the community of the individual's longer-term skill development (Johnson, AEDP review, 78).

Differing views have been expressed about who is responsible for Indigenous training and employment. By and large, mining companies have been prepared to

shoulder part of the burden in this regard, but they have repeatedly emphasised that governments (both State and Commonwealth) should carry the major responsibility. In 1977 a Report to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was prepared by Mr. N. Butcher, Argyle Diamond Mine (ADM) Community Relations Officer in Kununurra. Butcher insisted that: “training and motivating is squarely a Government responsibility, and increased Government resources should be allocated for this purpose.” He continued: “companies are businesses aimed at profit making, not education centres or welfare agents” (cited by Dillon and Dixon, 1990:123).

The general policy developments with respect to Indigenous people, mining and training received a profound boost in 1993 with the passage of the Commonwealth’s native title legislation, the Keating government’s legislative response to the High Court’s Mabo judgment of the previous year. While it would take time for the changes ushered in by the native title legislation to take full effect, and indeed for mining companies to accept that those changes were here to stay, the nature of relationships between many Indigenous communities and mining companies would never be quite the same again. Whereas previously mining companies were prepared to grant concessions to Indigenous communities, whether out of a sense of corporate altruism or enlightened self-interest, the advent of native title meant that Indigenous communities had rights or potential rights in the land, and therefore had to be negotiated with to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes. The balance of power had thus shifted, in some cases quite dramatically.

From this point onwards, broadly based land-use agreements between Indigenous communities and mining companies became increasingly common. Such agreements have typically covered a wide range of matters, including employment and training (National Native Title Tribunal, 1994:170-1). Accredited training programs within land-use agreements potentially enable Aboriginal people to enter the mining industry. Such programs generally cover the basic skills and certificates expected by the mining industry and integrate practical training and experiences on the mine site. Potentially these training experiences prepare Aboriginal people for employment in a diversity of occupations within the mining industry. Goldfields mining companies who have offered these employment and training packages for Aboriginal

employment includes Murrin Murrin, Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines (KCGM), Western Mining Corporation (WMC) Granny Smith Gold mine and the Kundana Gold Mine.

The employment and training packages negotiated between mining companies and Indigenous communities have resulted in more opportunities for Aboriginal people in the mining industry. However, a number of factors have restricted Indigenous employment in the industry. These include lack of recognition by employers and fellow employees of Aboriginal social and cultural obligations and unacceptable social aspects of the work environment (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:29).

Also significant in expanding Indigenous opportunities in the mining industry, and more generally in Australian society as a whole, was the creation of the Reconciliation Movement. In 1991, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation recognised that “There are divisions in Australian society that only time and constructive effort would diminish” (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:1). Against this background, the Federal Parliament of Australia passed legislation which aimed to reduce the divisions and provide justice and equity for all Australians. This legislation established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. In 1993, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation identified eight key issues as crucial to reconciliation in Australia. These include:

- A greater understanding of the importance of **land and sea** in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.
- Better **relationships** between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.
- Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **cultures** are a valued part of Australia heritage.
- A sense for all Australians of a shared ownership of their **history**.
- A greater awareness of the causes of **disadvantage** that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples from achieving fair and proper standards in health, housing, employment and education.

- A greater community response to addressing the underlying causes that currently give rise to the unacceptably high **levels of custody** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Greater opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to control their **destinies**.
- Agreement on whether the process of reconciliation would be advanced by a **document** of reconciliation (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:2).

A sub-committee of the Reconciliation Council focused its efforts on the mining industry. Its aim was to “promote approaches through which the mining industry could benefit Aboriginal communities for employment opportunities” (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:19-20). The sub-committee proposed that “The development of better employment and enterprise strategies for Aboriginal communities would increase the levels of participation and involvement by Aboriginal people in the industry” (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:xiv). The sub-committee also suggested that greater understanding and communication between Aboriginal people and the Mining Industry was necessary (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:13).

Since the Howard government was elected in 1996, education and training policies have placed an even greater emphasis on outcomes, with measured outcomes tied increasingly closely to funding and accountability arrangements.

2.4 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE MINING INDUSTRY: THE VIEW FROM THE LITERATURE

In the late 1960s, Peter Rodgers carried out a major study of Aboriginal employment in the Australian mining industry. His study covered five States and Territories (Queensland, Northern Territory, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia). Data were obtained by a variety of means, including interviews and questionnaires. Fieldwork was undertaken at five missions, four government settlements, and four unsupervised Aboriginal settlements in Western Australia.

Rogers (1973: 110) found that Aboriginal employment in the mining industry was low, both in terms of job numbers and levels of appointment. He identified discrimination and lack of education as the major factors contributing towards this poor state of affairs. Commenting on the situation as he found it, he observed that most potential Indigenous employees: “lacked an industrial background, had poor education, and were mostly untrained and did not receive adequate training in employment” (Rogers, 1973:133). He also noted that there was a considerable amount of prejudice towards Indigenous workers by their non-Indigenous counterparts. Typical of the responses he obtained was one from a manager of a mining operation that had recently employed a number of Indigenous workers: “they have no respect for authority. The majority want too much for nothing. Employ one and the whole tribe moves in. Only three have been employed this year but collectively they gave more trouble than the whole work-force over the last seven years” (Rogers, 1973: 126).

Rogers (1973, 91-95) was informed by the Groote Eylandt Mining Companies personnel officer, that the company had no stated [employment] policy towards Aborigines and that they were treated equally to that of non-Aboriginal employees. He notes that the company was aware that poor education and lack of experience were disqualifying Indigenous people from applying for many positions, including apprenticeships, but did not accept that it was its responsibility to change this state of affairs.

In 1984, almost two decades after Rogers’ pioneering research, David Cousins and John Nieuwenhuysen conducted a survey of Indigenous employment in the mining industry in Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland. Their investigations covered ten mine sites. They discovered little had changed since Rogers’ time.

The case studies show that Aboriginals play only a small part in the operations of major mining companies....Aboriginals (constitute) only 2.6 per cent of the total workforce of the companies examined, even though they were previously the dominant group in all areas where mining now occurs except Mount Isa, Port Hedland and (to a lesser extent) the Argyle region (Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen 1984:1).

Speaking in relation to the Argyle Diamond Mine in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia, Dillon and Dixon (1990:122) had observed a similar disjunction between employment and local population statistics. They note, for example, that while Indigenous people represent almost 56 per cent of the local population surrounding the Argyle mine, they provide less than one per cent of its workforce (eight of a total workforce of over 1000, of whom only three are local).

Cousins & Nieuwenhuysen point out that part of the problem of low Indigenous employment levels in mining ventures in regional Australia can be attributed to the attitudes of the companies themselves. The companies, they record, had little trust in their Indigenous employees and little interest in employing more. Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen (1984:3) note in this connection that a number of negative themes were prominent in mining company attitudes toward Indigenous employment. These themes revolved around their reputed absenteeism, unreliability, lack of self-motivation, un-sociability and lack of job adaptability. In short, the common view was that Indigenous workers do not make good long-term employees (Cousins & Nieuwenhuysen, 1984:3).

Continuing obstacles to Indigenous participation in the mining industry

As we have seen, Indigenous people of the Eastern Goldfields have had limited and uncertain access to the mining industry as a place of employment over the past century. That, as we have noted, has started to change. However, Aboriginal people are faced with three major obstacles and issues in regards to seeking and maintaining employment in the mining industry. These obstacles are a lack of education, limited effective training opportunities and racism, which lead to unskilled jobs and unemployment. The influence of each of these factors needs to be acknowledged.

Education

Mining companies can state with some justification that Indigenous people's limited participation in the mining industry is based on their lack of education and training. Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen (1984:7) found that this was a common theme in what mining companies had to say to them about Indigenous employment in the industry:

“All mining companies indicate that because of basic handicaps of lack of formal Western education and industrial work experience or inability to adhere to normal work routines Aboriginals often could not obtain regular employment” (1984:7). In this respect, they echoed Rogers’ (1973: 81). “The very low educational standards achieved by Aborigines severely hampered any attempts to train them for employment in trades”.

What is often not acknowledged in respect of Indigenous under-achievement in the formal education system is how much it reflects past injustice and denial of opportunity. Seen in this light there is a strong inter-generational dimension to current disadvantage. Thus, for example, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADC) in its final report observed that, until fairly recently, “Aboriginal children were admitted to Government schools but only if they met the required standards of health and hygiene...and (the conviction) that they were only educable to the 3-5 levels were influenced by the belief that as a race they were dying out”. The report found that:

For many years Aboriginal people were not considered capable of receiving education and for some period of time were actually excluded from attending government schools (WAAECG, 1987:9; RCIADIC Transcript, Kalgoorlie, 1990). Then they were only allowed to be educated up to grade 3 level (RCIADIC Transcript, Kalgoorlie, 1990). It was not until 1949 that Aboriginal children were first generally allowed into the schools of Western Australia (WAAECG, 1987:8) and in the 1960s it was largely at missions that Aboriginal people received any education. (Regional Report of inquiry into underlying issues in Western Australia - 12.1 Historical perspective).

In the past mining companies still held enormous negative attitudes towards Aboriginal people. There is still a widespread stereotype that Indigenous people do not fit into the mining industry employment environment and that they are unskilled and unreliable, especially if they’re from the remote areas of Western Australia. There is also a view that the costs of training Indigenous people are too high for the outcomes therefore they have very little chance of obtaining employment in the industry (The Mining Committee of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993:27).

Racism

Racism is a serious factor restricting Indigenous participation in all facets of contemporary Australian society. As Commissioner Dodson states, racial prejudice is passed down from generation to generation particularly in country areas (RCIADC 1991, report, 11.1.2.2). School curricula too have influenced the stereotypes held about Indigenous people (see, for example, Morrison, Chaney, Sherwood and Jackson, 1982).

Speaking specifically in relation to the mining industry, Howitt (1987) claims that continuing racism in the industry has marginalised and isolated Indigenous people. Also speaking specifically in regard to the mining industry, Rogers (1973) found many employers considered Aboriginal employees “were incapable of acquiring industrial skills”. The Regional Report of Inquiry into underlying issues in Western Australia found that on-going education for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is fundamental to addressing marginalisation and to overcoming the contribution of previous decades of racism, neglect, inappropriate policies, and entrenched patterns of inequity. Howitt (details in Dodson) found this to be the case in both Government and private sectors of the economy. The RCIADC underlined this point:

Findings contained in the report presented to me by the Aboriginal Issues Unit (1990:21) stress that: ‘Racial prejudice by employers, both Government and private, was regarded as the primary cause of Aboriginal unemployment. It was suggested that in country areas many employers were descended from pioneering families and had inherited their racist attitudes. Because of their status in the community they easily influenced newcomers to think the same. Jobs tended to be given to white people either within the community or from elsewhere’. (Regional Report of inquiry into underlying issues in Western Australia - 11.2.2 Racism and work).

It seems self-evident that racism and the negative attitudes to which it gives rise are factors in the present under-representation of Indigenous people in the mining industry. My research, while not directly addressing this topic, points to its continuing significance, as will be evident in later chapters of this thesis.

Training programs

Before the 1980s, mining companies had no special training programs in operation for Aboriginal employment. Indeed, as we have already seen, many actively discriminated against potential Indigenous entrants to the industry (see Rogers 1973: 106). Some companies provided on-the-job training for new workers, but most did not. Such on-the-job training was the only option for most Indigenous people. “Training was limited to on-the-job instruction by an operator delegated to teach the trainee. Some Aborigines were taught by others of their own race” (Rogers, 1973:95). The few Aborigines employed by mining companies filled the unskilled non-production positions (Cousins & Nieuwenhuysen, 1984:2).

Dixon and Dillon (1990:124) found in their case study of the Argyle Diamond Mine that: “Despite the promises of the ERMP (Environmental Review and Management Plan), there has been no significant development of Aboriginal training programs as a result of the development of the mine” (brackets added). On the other hand, non-Indigenous persons could walk straight into employment in the mining industry without experience, training or education. “There was no such thing [experience, training or education required] for white employees” (Rogers, 1973:106). Put simply, mining companies had little or no interest in providing training to prospective Indigenous employees (see Cousins & Nieuwenhuysen, 1984:3).

Aboriginal people were cast aside; in the present climate they are denied access to employment owing to issues such as racism, lack of culturally appropriate industries, inadequate training, and ineffective government policies. Today, they are the most unemployed group of people in this country. (Regional Report of inquiry into underlying issues in Western Australia - 11.1.1 From rags and rations, to dole money and inactivity).

In the midst of such attitudes and policies, it is difficult to see change for Indigenous people in the mining industry. On the positive side, things are certainly changing, as already noted. Some mining companies have been successful towards employing Aboriginal people whereas others have not been so successful. Various training programs have been put in place, but with relatively little to show for their efforts until now. Training programs clearly have a major role to play in advancing the interests of prospective Indigenous entrants to the mining industry. It is crucial,

therefore, that we get more information on how those programs are now working and how they can be made to work to better effect. My thesis research will help fill that gap.

In Western Australia, the mining industry has played a major role in promoting reconciliation between Indigenous people and the wider Australian population. Better communication and understanding between the two over land rights and mining has improved relationships. According to Simon Williamson, mining companies have offered training and employment programs to assist Aboriginal people to gain employment.

“... over many decades, mineral explorers and miners have developed very close ties with local Aboriginal groups and communities. In more recent times... individual companies such as Argyle, Hamersley, and BHP have developed extensive communication, training and employment programs. Other companies offer contracting opportunities assist in the establishing of outstations, provide infrastructure support, buy properties and leases and invest them in their local groups and communities. They also provide professional and legal advice to assist those groups and communities to become better established” (National Native Title Tribunal, 1994:171).

Ongoing communication and employment and training compacts between mining companies and Indigenous communities set the scene for better relationships in the future. Ensuring that Indigenous people had the same opportunities in education and training as their non-Indigenous counterparts would undoubtedly set the right example for reconciliation and a better way of life for all peoples (Dixon & Dillon, 1990:123).

GEMCO and BHP are aiming at setting up an all-Aboriginal shift with Aboriginal supervisors. Their ultimate aim to have an all-Aboriginal shift including Aboriginal supervisors. This would see a whole lot of improvement towards employment and increase the percentage of Aboriginal participants in the mining industry. Furthermore, this also would better the relationships between the mining companies and Aboriginal people. Hopefully, this will encourage other mining companies to work along similar lines.

The Groote Eylandt Mining Company (GEMCO), a BHP subsidiary, has instituted a range of special recruitment and training initiatives to provide opportunities to the nearby community. The result is that GEMCO has achieved over 10 per cent Aboriginal participation in its work force, is now focussing on an opportunity program and developing for an all-Aboriginal shift, including supervisors (Dixon & Dillon, 1990:123).

Aboriginal people would prefer to work with Aboriginal people. To encourage an all-Aboriginal shift and Aboriginal supervisors would require community agreements with other mining companies in Western Australia. With the agreements and contracts set up for Aboriginals in today's mining I can't see why not.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have provided a perspective on changing relationships between the mining industry and Indigenous Australians. My examination has focused particularly on the situation in Western Australia. I have noted that a major shift in attitudes and policies toward Indigenous Australians has been developing over a number of decades, a shift that has been given added impetus by the 1990 Mabo judgment and the Reconciliation Movement of the 1990s. The evidence of change for the better is growing, but much more work remains to be done. Education and training programs have a vital role to play in producing better outcomes for Indigenous people in the mining industry. We need to know more about how such training programs are working and to what effect. In the following chapters, we will turn our attention to one such program and to the detailed research I have undertaken in relation to it.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One, I described the personal factors that led me to commit myself to investigating the chosen research topic. I also sketched the ideas that shaped how I went about the required research. In the present chapter, I provide a fuller account of how and why I went about the research as I did. I begin by describing the ideas and aspirations that influenced the approach I took to the intended research. I then explain how I went about developing my particular research project, taking into account the general considerations about research methodology and design and the specific requirements of my research topic and research context.

3.2 CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE RESEARCH APPROACH

My approach to the research required for the present thesis was shaped by two main considerations. One was my desire to do research consistent with the “Aboriginal terms of reference” approach promoted by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin. Below I explain what is entailed in the Aboriginal terms of reference approach and how it is intended to guide the planning and execution of research. The second major influence was the need to develop a research instrument suitable to my chosen topic and field circumstances. That required, in turn, choosing a particular research strategy, developing and refining that strategy with specific reference to my topic and field situation (a major part of which was preparing a semi-structured questionnaire addressing the major issues of interest), and then preparing myself professionally for the task ahead. Those challenges eventually gave rise to an approach with a heavy but not sole reliance on open-ended questionnaire research. In the following section, I discuss the various steps and tasks involved in this process. In the present section, I focus upon the Aboriginal terms of reference and other generalised hopes and aspirations that shaped my work.

Aboriginal terms of reference

The major influence over my thinking about research is the “Aboriginal terms of reference” (ATR) approach advocated by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin, within which I completed my undergraduate degree and within which I am now enrolled as a postgraduate student. ATR is a shorthand expression referring to a set of principles and protocols developed by the Centre to guide Indigenous professionals in their work within and on behalf of Indigenous communities. From the Centre’s viewpoint, ATR constitute a preferred way of “doing business” in Indigenous contexts. “Doing business” includes participating in Indigenous community affairs, developing and implementing policies and programs, and undertaking research. ATR are taught in all of the courses taught by the Centre, and they are heavily emphasised as embodying best practice principles and protocols. My thinking about Indigenous research has been shaped to a large degree by the Centre’s advocacy of ATR.

Oxenham outlines ATR in the following way:

The concept of ATR incorporates a set of principles, core values and a process for applying a framework to determine an Indigenous viewpoint on an issue in an Indigenous context.

This encompass the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practised. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from within local settings or specific contexts. (Aboriginal Community Management and Development Workbook, *Workshop 2: Aboriginal Ways of 1, 1996*, pp.25). (Oxenham, 2000:8).

The ATR approach has many implications for the doing of research in Indigenous contexts. Later (in sections 3.3 and 3.4), I describe its practical implications for the carrying out of my research. Here, I reflect on its broader conceptual significance, and I indicate how my overall orientation to research came to be shaped by it.

Writing from an ATR perspective, Abdullah and Stringer (1993:143) emphasise how Indigenous knowledge has either been ignored or undermined by much of the research undertaken to date:

We have recently become more sensitive to the understanding that knowledge does not exist in objective, decontextualized forms, but is intimately linked to specific contexts, people and issues. This understanding is particularly relevant for indigenous people whose systems of knowledge have been subordinated by the forces of colonisation that have worked to subvert their social and cultural life.

Rigney is another Indigenous scholar to argue in similar terms. He writes:

There is little evidence that research epistemologies and the ways of knowing in Australia were modelled on any learnings from the Indigenous population or that it was produced from presumed equals...The cultural assumptions throughout dominant epistemologies in Australia are oblivious of Indigenous traditions and concerns. The research academy and its epistemologies have been constructed essentially for and by non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians have been excluded from all facets of research (Rigney, 1997:6).

Historically, Indigenous society has passed down traditional knowledge orally and in performance. While there have been many studies of Indigenous Australia, there have been few that have explored Indigenous viewpoints as pertinent to contemporary issues and problems. As a result, such studies have tended to reinforce the historical process whereby Indigenous ways of knowing and managing the world have been subjugated. Anthropological accounts of Indigenous Australia, though undoubtedly of much value, have often been as guilty of this failing as other, less culturally informed accounts.

Indigenous people have also been known through departmental reports, academic studies and statistics. The information gathered and presented has, to a substantial degree, been framed by non-Indigenous persons and perspectives. Wittingly and unwittingly, they have usually excluded Indigenous voices and views of history, thereby reinforcing a colonial interpretation of Indigenous lives.

In thinking about and preparing for my own particular research project, I placed a heavy emphasis on making sure that the voices of the Indigenous participants would be heard. I have also wanted to recognise the significance of “story telling” and “yarning” within Indigenous Australian society and to design my research to give the fullest possible scope for that “story telling” and “yarning” to be heard and recorded.

Reading Indigenous views has increased my knowledge of the way in which research has been conducted in the past and how non-Indigenous researchers have often exploited and subjugated Indigenous knowledge, in the process misinterpreting and misunderstanding Indigenous culture. I have also gained an understanding of the protocols and principles to which researchers are now required to adhere. I have also gained an appreciation of the efforts being made to privilege Indigenous knowledge in the research process, to give voice to Aboriginal people in regards to their issues and concerns. Rigney (1997:8) advocates “an anti-colonial cultural critique of Australian history in an attempt to arrive at appropriate strategies to de-colonize epistemologies and to create new ones”. By developing these strategies and de-colonizing epistemologies and creating new ones, Indigenous knowledge can be privileged in the research process.

Throughout my academic years of studying, I have read many books, articles, magazines, and so on. Most have been written by non-Indigenous people. The way they interpret ‘our culture’ has, in my view, been very different from the way ‘we’ view our culture. I believe that much of that non-Indigenous research has exploited and excluded significant aspects of the Indigenous culture. Incorporating Indigenous voices and lived experiences into the research process serves the Indigenous battle for self-determination. As Rigney (1997:11) puts it, “Indigenist research is research which focuses on the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australian”.

“Positioning” and the role of the researcher

Increasing attention is now being given to the “positioning” of researchers in the research context. By this I mean the way that researchers orient themselves to the people with whom they are working and the goals they are seeking to achieve. ATR

make one more sensitive to such positioning and how it can impact upon how others respond to you and your work.

In thinking about my particular role as a researcher, I started with the deeply held conviction that my research had to be able to make a difference for the better for my community. As I have already explained, I could see some things were improving for Aboriginal employment, but it seemed to me that progress had been too slow and uneven. My worry was that opportunities missed now might not come again. I was also inspired by the idea that, as an Indigenous person, I could do things by way of research that others had not done before, certainly not in my particular area of interest.

I am not sure if, in the end, the work I have undertaken is greatly different from that which might have been undertaken by a non-Indigenous researcher. I do know that, for all concerned in my particular research project, there was a certain novelty to having an Indigenous person leading the research process. Without being able to quantify it with any precision, I believe my Aboriginality has had an impact on how the research has proceeded and will have a positive impact on how it is ultimately used. It has certainly been a factor in the partnership approach I have tried to develop in relation to my chosen research topic. Working with the fifteen interviewees and staff at the Tjuma Centre and various mining companies was a collaborative effort by all who participated in this research project. Without this respect for one another and working collaboratively together, I could not have finished my fieldwork and ended up with the outcomes I have.

Qualitative approaches to social research

Dovetailing with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies' advocacy of ATR is much of the recent discussion of qualitative research methods, particularly as evidenced in the work of Stringer (1996), Denzin (1989), Lincoln and Guba (1985). All favour qualitative research methods that give primacy to the lived experiences and perspectives of those being researched. Their shared aim is to encourage collaborative and democratic processes of inquiry that empower the weak and marginalised. They thus put a heavy emphasis on ethnographic and other forms of

research that speak to the needs and interests of those currently with limited power and influence, and they emphasise the importance of building this aspiration into the design and conduct of research. Living up to that goal requires systematic and well-constructed research. As Denzin (1989:123) puts it: “the goal of interpretation is to build true, authentic understanding of the phenomena under investigation”.

The arguments put by Denzin and others about “democratic” research have particular resonance in the Indigenous Australian context. Martin Nakata is one Indigenous scholar who stresses this point in his work. Nakata (1998:23) argues that:

to strongly advocate our own ideas, we have to first understand how others understand our position, in order to speak back in the face of it and add our own perspectives that have arisen from our own experiences and our knowledge of our position.

Ethical considerations

I adhered to the University’s ethical standards by agreeing to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants in my research project. I also adhered to the University protocols to prevent any harm to my research participants during and after the research. All participants were fully informed in advance about what the interviews would entail, how long they would take, and what would be done with the data obtained. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Their written consent was obtained.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I read out and explained to the interviewees what the Information Sheet and the Consent Agreement Form contained (see Appendices Three and Four). They were then were asked to sign the Consent Agreement Form (CAF) giving me their permission to interview them. I also encouraged participants to feel free to ask me any questions during and after the interviews. I also indicated to the participants that they could ask me to stop the tape at any point during the interview if, for whatever reason, they would prefer that their responses not be recorded.

Approval to carry out this research has been negotiated with the Aboriginal Mining Training Program located at the Curtin University of Technology in Kalgoorlie in the

Goldfields Region of Western Australia. Approval has also been negotiated with the companies who participate in this research program.

I have endeavoured to consult closely with the Aboriginal community throughout this research and to encourage community involvement wherever possible. This approach was necessary for me to be respectful of local Aboriginal protocols and Terms of References. To this end, I have maintained regular consultation with an Aboriginal reference group consisting of local Aboriginal people drawn from the Kalgoorlie community. This Aboriginal reference group has guided and monitored the progress of the research to ensure that the interests of the participants and Aboriginal people are served at all stages of the project, especially in ensuring that I adhere to appropriate Aboriginal ways of working.

Nothing from the thesis will be published without the written approval of the key stakeholders. Raw data will be held in a secure filing cabinet for five years at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University after that they will be destroyed. Results are not presented in a form that identifies individual subjects. The above procedures comply with the NHMRC Guidelines on Ethical Matters in ATSI Health Research.

3.3 DEVELOPING MY PARTICULAR RESEARCH DESIGN

In the previous section, I outlined the ideas and commitments that shaped my attitude to the research process in Indigenous contexts, and I indicated how they influenced my overall research approach. My broad research orientation was, in effect, my starting point in developing a specific research instrument appropriate to my chosen topic and to the practical circumstances within which I would have to operate in doing my postgraduate research. But there also had to be a lot of hard thinking about the particular research topic I had in mind and about the best means of exploring the many questions to which it gave rise. There was also the question of the circumstances in which the required research would be conducted and of my own preparedness for the work ahead. In this section, I focus on these issues, beginning with the refinement of my research topic.

Choosing and defining my research topic

In Chapter One, I recounted the personal experiences that caused me to be concerned about Indigenous participation in the mining industry in Western Australia, and more specifically about how effective specially designed training courses (such as the Aboriginal Training Program serving the Murrin Murrin minesite) were in bringing about change. The conclusion I drew while working at Murrin Murrin was that Aboriginal people were still very poorly placed in the mining industry, and that training programs were making very little difference. As I started to think about the issue as a potential research topic, I had to ask myself whether or not my impressions were accurate. I also had to start thinking about degrees and types of success and failure, and about the factors that determine whether or not a particular training program will produce the desired results. As these questions became clearer in my mind, the general shape of the intended research also became clearer.

As my work progressed further, I distinguished five major research objectives:

- To identify and examine the background and characteristics of the persons who have enrolled in the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) over the past decade.
- To document the experiences of Aboriginal participants in that program both within the program itself and subsequent to it.
- To examine the impact of the program in encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.
- To identify potential obstacles to Aboriginal employment and career advancement in the mining industry.
- To identify ways in which the program could be changed in order to enhance its effectiveness in promoting greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

Now armed with clear sense of my direction, the task before me was to settle more of the practical issues to do with what, when, how and where of research. The following sections describe how these issues were settled, step by step.

Determining the empirical focus

The Aboriginal Training Program I had become familiar with through my work at the Murrin Murrin minesite is run in the large regional centre of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the predominant population centre in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. The twin towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder, once rivals but now united under a single local government authority, have a combined population of approximately 30,000 people (information from Council of Kalgoorlie/Boulder, 2005). Kalgoorlie/Boulder City is famous for its wide streets, many hotels and TAB's, race rounds, bush "two-up" (a form of gambling), brothels and mining. Kalgoorlie/Boulder City is the single most important mining centre in Western Australia (WA). WA, in turn, is the leading state in Australia in terms of mining and associated industries. Kalgoorlie/Boulder City was of added interest to me because of my own personal experiences and situation. I was born in Kalgoorlie and worked in the mining industry for 17 years, as previously noted.

The Kalgoorlie training program is one of a number devised in recent years to promote Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. Over the years, the Aboriginal Training Program offered in Kalgoorlie has attracted many participants and produced many graduates. Information on the ATP is contained in Chapter One and in Appendices One and Two.

Determining research methods and strategies

My chosen research strategy puts heavy emphasis on recording Indigenous viewpoints and perspectives. Among other things, that means that I had to be careful not to impose my own or borrowed viewpoints and categories. That concern lead me when I was first contemplating field research to think in terms of a completely open-ended interview situation that would allow survey participants to simply "yarn" about their experience with a minimum of interference or direction from me. My research strategy, therefore, was principally about "capturing" the research participants' lived experiences. I recognised from the start that my research would also require me to gather background and contextualising material and to speak to what I've come to think of as "secondary participants" in my

research (namely, the usually Non-Indigenous persons involved in recommending, delivering, drawing upon, and in other ways influencing the various Indigenous training programs offered in the Goldfields). I also recognised the importance of gathering and reviewing the existing documentary sources about those training programs. Among the “secondary” material I would seek were:

- Statistical information from the teaching and training establishments offering the ATP.
- ATP enrolment information, information on graduate employment in the mining industry.
- Information from Indigenous employment agencies about the general employment situation of Indigenous people in the mining industry.
- Records of past legislation and programs impacting upon Indigenous employment in the mining industry.

Together, the “primary” and “secondary” dimensions of my research would give rise to a composite research approach embracing:

- Open-ended interviews with a chosen sample of past participants in the ATP.
- Discussions with employer representatives and other stakeholders.
- Document analysis.
- On site observations.

Such were the expectations I carried with me when I embarked on the first phase of my field research.

Making contact and negotiating entry into the field

Influenced by my earlier experiences, I decided fairly early in the piece to pay particular attention to participants in the ATP who were sponsored by the Murrin Murrin mine. Murrin Murrin, as I have previously indicated, is located between Leonora and Laverton. It is the biggest nickel mine in Australia and the second biggest in the world.

I telephoned the company to introduce myself, to explain my intended research, and to obtain their moral support for the project. I also hoped that they would be able to provide practical assistance in providing the names of past participants in the program and information on their subsequent employment records in the industry. My first point of contact was with the Community Development Officer (CDO) at Anaconda's head office in Perth. I briefly outlined my research proposal and explained, as best I could, who and what was to be involved. The truth is that I was still unsure about how the research would be undertaken. The CDO indicated that he could not offer support or encouragement for the research until he and Anaconda's head office knew more about what was proposed. I provided him with a copy of the candidacy proposal approved by Curtin University's graduate studies committee.

Having studied the candidacy proposal, Anaconda came back to me expressing some disquiet at what seemed to be proposed. They were particularly troubled by my references to the past influence of racist policies and practices, and were anxious to avoid being tarred by this brush. The CDO suggested that my candidacy proposal carried the inference (he spoke of "innuendo") that racism was rife at Murrin Murrin. In point of fact, my discussion of racism was not directed at one company. Nor was it intended to impugn the efforts now being made by companies to build stronger and more productive relationships with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people generally. My purpose in speaking of racism was to account for past discrimination and denial of opportunity. Whether or not, racism operates in the present context was (and is) to me an open question, a matter to be investigated, not something on which one can jump to conclusions in advance.

Trying to ease the company's concerns, I made further amendments to the proposal. The company was still not satisfied. Concerned that I was getting nowhere, I decided in conjunction with my supervisor to look elsewhere. Eventually, I settled on the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) running in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. This program served various mining companies.

I also had to renew links with the Indigenous people whom I would be working with. Apart from the stint working for Murrin Murrin in 1998-99, I had been away from my hometown Kalgoorlie for the better part of seventeen years, following a serious

mining injury that initially took me to Perth for medical treatment. I had to show respect to certain elder people, visit them and let them know that I was back in town and why. That included advising key members of the Indigenous community about what my research involved and how I intended going about it. I visited and reintroduced myself to people that I already knew working in Aboriginal organisations such as ATSIC, Indigenous Employment Agencies, and the Tjuma Centre, in Kalgoorlie. Through this process I informed people of what I intended doing and what I hoped to my research would contribute.

Networking amongst individuals working in these Aboriginal organisations was significant for me to gain support and advice on how to conduct myself and to find out if any protocols had changed over the past years. Furthermore it was important because people could tell me about whatever issues were topical or sensitive to the community; for example; who had passed away, who had married whom, and who was conflicting with whom. Understanding protocols was an important aspect of conducting my research during this time, as the local *Wonggai* people were involved in major political discussions of Native Title claims.

When interviewing all participants whether in the comfort and privacy of their homes or work place or at a university I was fully aware of ATP and protocols at all time. I showed respect to all participants, key stakeholders and the community throughout conducting my fieldwork, both in the Goldfields and in Perth.

A pilot study

In March 2002, I travelled to the Goldfields to organise a meeting with past participants in the ATP. The meeting was held at the Tjuma Centre, Curtin University of Technology in Kalgoorlie. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce myself and to explain to the graduates what my research involved and how this research might benefit Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. I also wanted to make arrangements to interview a number of graduates when I returned for my next field trip.

I initially made contact with the Tjuma Centre (*in Aboriginal terms, Tjuma means learning place*). The Tjuma Centre is open to the community. It supports Indigenous students enrolled or enrolling into higher education. It also provides information to the community. In addition, it provides a meeting place and facilities for Indigenous students. My first contact was with the Aboriginal Community Development Officer. I introduced myself and briefed her on my proposed research. I asked if I could have a study space within the Tjuma Centre, along with access to a computer and Internet, e-mail, phone, fax and photocopy facilities. I explained my desire to have a meeting with ATP graduates, with one-on-one interviews to follow. I reinforced the telephone call with a letter containing a copy of my candidacy proposal.

The Tjuma Centre was very supportive of my proposed research. I was granted the requested study space and facilities sought. I was also given a room in which to hold meetings. The Tjuma Centre also provided me with the requested list of ATP graduates and their contact details. As it transpires, some of those contact details were out-of-date.

My next step was to post a letter to the graduates, introducing myself and inviting them to the planned meeting. All of these efforts were necessary preliminaries to the intended research. As Stringer (1996: 40) explains: “The preliminary activities include ways of establishing contact, establishing the researcher’s role in the process, identifying stakeholding groups and key people within them, and constructing a preliminary account of the research context.”

A week before the planned field trip to Kalgoorlie and the scheduled meeting, a number of my letters were returned to me with the Post Office’s advice “Return to Sender - Not at this Address”. I began to worry about the viability of the planned meeting and follow-up interviews. The following Monday morning I met with staff at the Tjuma Centre, and was shown to the study space, computer, and other facilities.

The meeting with graduates was scheduled for 10.00am. Disappointingly, only two graduates turned up. I went ahead with the meeting despite the small turnout. The two attendees expressed their support for the proposed research. I arranged to meet

with them again on my next visit to Kalgoorlie and I established interview times. I also asked for their help in making contact with other graduates. Having thus made a start, I returned to Perth to prepare for my next trip a fortnight ahead.

Two weeks later I was back in Kalgoorlie, as planned. In the meantime, I had set up appointments with ten graduates. I planned to spend a full week, and longer if necessary, conducting open-ended interviews. Despite the careful preparation and reminders, things did not work out quite as planned. One by one the interviews were cancelled or postponed as day-to-day exigencies took over. In the event, I managed to conduct four interviews. While this immediate outcome was disappointing, I had learned a great deal from the experience and would be better prepared and organised next time round.

3.4 A NEW START AND A REVISED RESEARCH DESIGN

After my initial foray into the field which I later came to regard as my pilot study, I was forced to put aside my study plans for an extended period. I had accepted a new job and it required all my time and energy. My postgraduate studies were formally suspended, to be resumed when circumstances allowed. As it turns out, I was not able to return to my studies until the middle of 2003. Complicating matters, my original supervisor had by this time left Curtin University and there was no obvious replacement. Fortunately for me, a little while later (July 2003) a senior staff member experienced in my area of research returned to teaching and research duties at Curtin after an extended period working in other parts of the University. I approached him and he agreed to serve as my supervisor. This was to mark a new beginning and a revised research approach.

The first step in the new direction was to review the prior research experience, to take what lessons we could from it, and to prepare for the solid research still ahead. My review of the prior field experience led me to reflect on two aspects of what I had previously attempted.

One lesson I took from my “pilot” study had to do with the nature of the open-ended questionnaire I had used for the four graduates I had interviewed. My hope, as I

expressed it earlier, was to give graduates the opportunity to open up about their experiences in the ATP and subsequent employment, and to do so with a minimum of prompting or direction. The results I obtained in this respect were disappointing. The graduates were not expansive in their answers, and the information they gave me was quite limited. Also I discovered that the questionnaire I had been using did not allow me to obtain enough basic information about the graduates to enable me to see them and their experiences in the ATP into an appropriate context.

The second lesson I took from my “pilot” study had to do with my own readiness to administer the questionnaire. I lacked confidence and my uncertainty about the role I was playing was abundantly evident to the people I had interviewed. I was also poorly prepared by way of being able to encourage the graduates to share their experiences with me. Both of these aspects had to be addressed as I planned and prepared for the next phase of field research.

My new supervisor and I started to work together in July 2003. We looked again at the questionnaire and decided to make it much more structured, though still leaving considerable opportunity for those interviewed to give open-ended answers to the issues being explored. I also worked with him in terms of preparing myself for the interviewing process. We role-played and he encouraged me to role play with others, each time reflecting upon whether or not particular questions in the revised questionnaire were working and what I could do as an interviewer to make my respondents more relaxed and forthcoming about their experiences. This was an extremely useful process, giving me greater insight into the interviewing process itself, while also allowing me to think more critically about how particular questions were being posed and the overall questionnaire was being structured. The role-playing also increased my confidence and helped reassure me that my research was going to be worthwhile.

The process of rethinking the research led to a very different sort of questionnaire to the one I had originally used. The original 30 questions were expanded to 94. The expanded list of questions allowed for more basic information to be obtained about the respondents. Issues that started to come into focus in my pilot study were specifically addressed in the expanded questionnaire. Multiple questions were also

asked about the major issues of concern, allowing more opportunities for the respondents to reflect upon their experiences, both within the ATP and after. The expanded list of questions also gave me more opportunities to tease out information from the respondents. Under the old format, I had been left with nowhere to go if the respondents simply gave me yes-no or abbreviated answers.

In all, the revised questionnaire allowed me to better explore the factors that were significant in determining how well the ATP was working, including factors that had not been tackled the first time round. Thus, for example, questions were asked about the process by which the graduates had been drawn to the ATP in the first instance, about what they expected to get from it and how their experiences matched their expectations, and about the steps between the finishing of the ATP and actually finding employment in the mining industry.

The revised questionnaire has six major sections. The first focuses on basic background information on the respondents. The second focuses on the process of enrolling into the ATP. The third focuses on graduate experiences while in the ATP. The fourth focuses on their subsequent transition to employment in the mining industry. The fifth focuses on their experiences while working in the mining industry. The sixth explores the situation of the ATP graduates who failed to make or to take the jump from the ATP to mining industry work.

All in all, I believe, the revised questionnaire gave many more opportunities for respondents to discuss and describe their experiences in the ATP and employment experiences in the mining industry. It also allowed me to explore issues (such as the transition from the ATP to actual employment) underestimated or ignored in the original questionnaire.

Starting the interview process again

The change of approach meant that decisions had to be made about a new sample of interviewees. It also meant that the original interviewees had to be advised that the original plans had altered, and that there would be a new round of interviews commencing. An associated issue to be addressed was whether the original

interviewees could be included in the new survey sample. The decision reached in this regard was that they could be, provided they had the situation explained to them, and were willing to participate in the new survey. In this connection, I wrote and subsequently telephoned the original four interviewees, explained the situation, and asked if they wished to participate in the planned follow-up survey. I explained also how the new questionnaire differed from its predecessor. All four expressed their willingness to participate and all subsequently completed the new questionnaire.

In conjunction with my supervisor, I decided that there would be 15 interviewees in the new sample. The sample would be stratified to ensure that there was a balance of male and female respondents, along with a balance between ATP graduates (i) now employed in the mining industry; (ii) no longer employed in the mining industry; and (iii) those who had not found employment in the mining industry after completing the ATP. Table One below summarizes the sample eventually obtained.

Table One: Summary of Interview Population

Gender	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Male	4 (4/0)	3 (3/0)	3 (3/0)	10 (10/0)
Female	-	4 (0/4)	1 (0/1)	5 (0/5)
Total	4 (4/0)	7 (3/4)	4 (3/1)	15 (10/5)

Fifteen graduates, ten men and five women, contributed their stories as primary participants for this research. They ranged in age from the late teens to the mid-forties. Most were in their twenties.

The fifteen interviewees had completed the ATP at different venues and in different years. Three had completed the ATP twice. All had received the required certificate that would make them eligible for employment.

Conducting the interviews

The new round of interviews commenced in August 2003. It turned out to be a drawn-out process, with many missed interviews and postponements due to a variety of family and community circumstances affecting both me and the interviewees. The first interview was conducted in Perth September 2003. Then six interviews were conducted in Kalgoorlie between February and March 2004. In April 2004, four interviews were conducted in Perth. One interview was conducted in Kalgoorlie in May 2004, followed by the last three in Perth in June 2004. Overall, eight interviews were conducted in Perth and seven in Kalgoorlie. Each interview took a minimum of an hour; some took up to twice that time, depending on the willingness of interviewees to open up on the subjects covered.

My local community knowledge was a helpful factor in selecting and gaining access to the 15 interviewees. Four of the fifteen were around my age (49-50 years old at the time of the interviews), and our paths had crossed at various points in the past. The other 11 were younger and not known directly to me, though in each case I knew members of their families and friends, and they knew mine. That, incidentally, would also have been true if other persons on the ATP graduates list had been chosen for interview. I am confident that the prior contact and knowledge added to rather than subtracted from the quality of the research undertaken.

Of the 15 interviews conducted, nine were carried out in the privacy and comfort of the interviewees' homes, two in their work places, two at the Tjuma Centre in Kalgoorlie, and two at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, at Curtin University in Perth. In each case, participants in the survey signed Consent Agreement Forms, and were given a written statement about the project with University contact numbers for those who might want to make further contact. All interviews were taped recorded with the prior approval of the participants.

Recording and analysing the information obtained

When all fifteen interviews were completed, I started the process of transcribing the data. Each transcript took about ten hours to complete. I offered copies of the

transcript to each participant, but no-one took up the offer. After I had completed all transcripts I started the process of coding the data. The results of this process are presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

In the process of analysing the data for this research, I numbered the respondents 1 to 15 and then further categorised them in terms of the three components of my stratified sample, using the designations A, B, and C. The As are those who were at the time of the interview working in the mining industry; the Bs are those who had worked in the mining industry after completing the ATP but were no longer doing so; and the Cs are those who after completing the ATP had not found or taken employment in the industry. The A/B/C distinction recurs in my analysis of results.

3.5 LOOKING FORWARD TO FUTURE RESEARCH

Completing my Masters of Arts (Indigenous Research and Development) program at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies puts me in an elite group of professional academics. It puts me in a position as an Aboriginal researcher to conduct research for Aboriginal organisation or communities. I am looking forward to that further opportunity.

In the process of completing the present thesis, I have learned much about research and professional work generally. I have learned how to write-up and structure questionnaires, to conduct in-depth interviews, to transcribe and analyse data, and to prepare a thesis. I have also gained valuable computer skills, and enhanced my capacity to gather and use information from libraries, books, and articles. All of this was way beyond me when I started out on the postgraduate road.

It wasn't until I was finally in the field that "doing research" really started to make sense to me. It was only then that I started to realise what it was all about. My experiences in the field have enlarged my understanding of research, and made me even more convinced of the value of good, policy-oriented research in Aboriginal contexts. In this respect, I hope my present research experience will serve as a foundation for other, and perhaps more extensive, work to follow. In the following chapters, I analyse the information I obtained during my postgraduate research.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ABORIGINAL TRAINING PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter is one of two devoted to discussion of the results obtained from my survey of (ATP) Aboriginal Training Program graduates. In this chapter, I focus on the graduates' participation in the ATP itself, and in Chapter Five I explore the graduates' transition from the ATP to the mining industry workforce. In the following (section 4.2), I examine the characteristics of the interview population chosen for the present survey. In section 4.3, I explore how and why they were drawn to the ATP. In section 4.4, I focus on their recollections of the organisation and delivery of the program itself, and in section 4.5, on their views on how the ATP could be made more effective as an instrument of Aboriginal advancement. In the conclusion (section 4.6), I reflect generally on the interviewees' ATP experience.

The questionnaire I administered provided opportunities for both open-ended and fixed choice responses. The interviewees seem to have had little difficulty in responding to the questions, though their responses were often not quite as expansive as I would have liked. That might have had something to do with the overall length of the survey, though no negative feedback was received in this regard. My impression is that the lack of expansiveness was partly a product of sensitivities in relation to some questions, and partly a product of their diffidence about seeming to pass judgment on the ATP and those involved in delivering it. My strong impression, reinforced by favourable comments by the interviewees, is that the responses obtained are a good reflection of what the interviewees now recall about their ATP experience. Because of the relative recency of that experience, it seems reasonable to conclude that the information volunteered is pertinent to an evaluation of the ATP's effectiveness.

Without exception, the interviewees participated in the survey willingly and with an understanding that their responses would be helpful in future Indigenous training program development. My analysis of the results obtained is presented in that light.

4.2 THE INTERVIEW POPULATION: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fifteen ATP graduates constitute the interview population for the present survey. The fifteen are broadly representative of the ATP graduate population as a whole. The interview population has been drawn from various cohorts of the ATP. Inadvertently, there is some bias toward those who undertook the Murrin Murrin offerings of the program. This bias reflects in part my own contact base, and in part questions of availability and unavailability of potential interviewees. One third (5 of 15) of the interview population are women and two thirds (10 of 15) are men. This ratio reflects the general preponderance of male enrollees in the ATP. Unfortunately, there are no official statistics referring to the gender of program participants to which I could gain access, as previously explained. For general information on ATP enrolments, refer to Chapter One and Appendices One and Two.

In all, 11 “background” questions (questions 1-11 in the questionnaire) were put to the 15 interviewees. The first nine sought basic demographic information, covering such matters as age, gender, place of birth, family situation, and so on. The information obtained is reported below. Questions 10 and 11 sought contextualising information relevant to the interviewees’ participation in the ATP; question 10 asking interviewees when and where they undertook the ATP; and question 11 asking about their prior work experience in the mining industry. These two “contextualising” questions could perhaps have been put right at the outset of the questionnaire, but it was felt that their present placement would ease the transition into the next section (questions 12-40) dealing directly with the interviewees’ experiences in the ATP.

Tables Two and Three below summarise the general characteristics of the interview population. In a number of these tables, a distinction is made between graduates who (a) at the time of the survey were working in the mining industry; (b) at the time of the survey were not working in the mining industry but had done so since graduating

from the ATP; and (c) at the time of the survey were not working in the mining industry employment and had not done so since completing the ATP.

In Table Two, I use the abbreviation M.Murrin for the Murrin Murrin mining company and location. Curtin University (Kalgoorlie Campus) is abbreviated as the Curtin U, and the Western Mining Corporation as WMC.

Table Two: The Interview Population: Year and place of ATP enrolment

Year	Agency	Location	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
			Now employed	Not now employed	Never employed	Total
1997	Granny Smith	Laverton		1		1
1998	M.Murrin Curtin U.	M.Murrin Kalgoorlie	2	1	1	2 2
1999	M.Murrin	M.Murrin	1			1
2000	M.Murrin Curtin U. WMC	M.Murrin Kalgoorlie Kambalda	1	1 2	1	2 2 1
2001	Delta Gold Mine WMC	Kalgoorlie Kambalda	1		1	1 1
2002	M.Murrin	M.Murrin	1	1		2
2003	M.Murrin Curtin U.	M.Murrin Kalgoorlie			2 1	2 1
Total	M.Murrin Curtin U Delta G.M. WMC Granny Smith	M.Murrin Kalgoorlie Kalgoorlie Kambalda Laverton	4* 2* 1	3 2 1	2 1 2*	9 5 1 2 1
Total			7	6	5	18

Note: Three members of the survey population (asterisked above) completed two separate offerings of the ATP.

An interesting aspect of the ATP has been its attractiveness to women participants. Women enrollees have constituted about a third of all participants. While this is still some way short of the 50% enrolment one might expect on the basis of population numbers alone, it does mark a shift in an industry until now overwhelmingly staffed

by men. For Aboriginal women in particular, the shift seems to reflect a very big change in employment aspirations.

Table Three: The Interview Population: Gender (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Gender	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed	Not now employed	Never employed	Total (M/F)
Male	4 (4/0)	3 (2/1)	3 (1/2)	10 (7/3)
Female		4 (3/1)	1 (0/1)	5 (3/2)
Total	4 (4/0)	7 (5/2)	4 (1/3)	15 (10/5)

It might have been thought that age would be a major factor determining interest in or availability to enrol in the ATP. That does not seem to be the case, as is evidenced in Table Four below.

Table Four: The Interview Population: Age at time of ATP enrolment (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Age category	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
24 and Under	1 (1/0)	5 (3/2)	2 (1/1)	8 (5/3)
25-44	1 (1/0)	2 (1/1)	2 (1/1)	5 (3/2)
45 and Over	2 (2/0)			2 (2/0)
Total	4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)

As Table Four reflects, age at enrolment in the ATP varied from late teens to late 40s. Just over half of the interviewees, both male and females, were under 25 at the time of their ATP enrolment, with most of them in the 25-44 age range. Two (both males) were 45 or over when enrolled in the ATP.

Table Five: The Interview Population: Place of birth (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Place of Birth		Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
		Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Western Australia	Goldfields	2 (2/0)	3 (2/1)	2 (1/1)	7 (5/2)
	Perth		2 (1/1)		2 (1/1)
	South-West of WA		1 (1/0)	2 (1/1)	3 (2/1)
	Other WA	2 (2/0)			2 (2/0)
Queensland	Atherton		1 (0/1)		1 (0/1)
Total		4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)

Interestingly, under half of the interviewees (7 of 15) were born in the Goldfields itself. One might have thought that Goldfields people would have predominated. That surprising figure might be explained in terms of sampling bias. Alternatively, it could be explained in terms of the Goldfields' attractiveness as a place of work and residence for Aboriginal people from around Western Australia, and particularly from the South-West of the state, both metropolitan and non-metropolitan.

Table Six: The Interview Population: Place of upbringing (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Place of Upbringing		Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
		Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Western Australia	Goldfields	2 (2/0)	4 (3/1)	2 (1/1)	8 (6/2)
	Perth	1 (1/0)	1 (1/0)	1 (0/1)	3 (2/1)
	South-West		1 (1/0)	1 (0/1)	2 (1/1)
	Other, WA	1 (1/0)			1 (1/0)
Queensland	Atherton		1 (0/1)		1 (0/1)
Total		4 (4/0)	7 (5/2)	4 (1/3)	15 (10/5)

Two of the interviewees not now resident in the Goldfields had been reared there (compare Tables Five and Six above). The suggestion is that many people from outside the Goldfields are drifting towards it in search of employment and training

opportunities, while some Goldfields people are drifting away from it, principally it seems to Perth.

Table Seven: The Interview Population: Place of current residence (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Place of Current Residence		Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
		Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Western Australia	Goldfields	3 (3/0)	3 (2/1)	2 (1/1)	8 (6/2)
	Perth	1 (1/0)	4 (3/1)	1 (0/1)	6 (4/2)
	South-West			1 (0/1)	1 (0/1)
Total		4 (4/0)	7 (5/2)	4 (1/3)	15 (10/5)

Table Seven shows a roughly equal split between those at the time of the survey living in Perth and those living in the Goldfields. The absence of other places of current residence could be seen as an outcome of the selection process used in the present survey.

Table Eight: The Interview Population: Current household arrangements (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Current Household Arrangements	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Single, living with parent(s)	2 (2/0)	2 (2/0)	2 (1/1)	6 (5/1)
Single, living by self or in shared household		1 (0/1)		1 (0/1)
Living with partner, no dependent children		1 (1/0)		1 (1/0)
Living with partner, with dependent children	2 (2/0)	2 (1/1)	2 (1/1)	6 (4/2)
Living alone with dependent children		1 (0/1)		1 (0/1)
Total	4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)

It is clear from Table Eight that the respondents to the present survey are living in a variety of household arrangements. No comparable data exist for the ATP enrolment population as a whole. Just under half of the interviewees (7 of 15) were living with partners. All of the others described themselves as “single”. All bar one of those

living with a partner were responsible for dependent children. One of those without a partner was also responsible for dependent children.

Table Nine: The Interview Population: Primary and secondary schooling (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Level of Schooling Obtained	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Primary (1-7)	4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)
Lower Secondary (8-10)	4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)
Upper Secondary Schooling (11-12)	1 (1/0)			1 (1/0)
Completed only year 11 of Upper Secondary Schooling		5 (2/3)	2 (2/0)	7 (4/3)
No Upper Secondary Schooling (11-12)	2 (2/0)	3 (2/1)	2 (2/0)	7 (6/1)

All fifteen interviewees had completed seven years of primary school. All fifteen interviewees had also completed their lower secondary schooling (Years 8-10) prior to enrolling in the ATP. Only one of the fifteen had completed upper secondary schooling (Years 11-12). Seven others had gone as far as Year 11 before leaving school. Seven had not completed any Upper Secondary schooling at all.

Table Ten: The Interview Population: Post-school education and training (male/female breakdown shown in brackets)

Level of Qualifications Attained	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed	Not now employed	Never employed	Total (M/F)
On-the-job training	1 (1/0)	1 (1/0)	2 (1/1)	4 (3/1)
Technical and Further Education Qualification	2 (2/0)	3 (3/0)	2 (0/2)	7 (5/2)
Special University Entry		4 (3/1)	1 (0/1)	5 (3/2)
University Undergraduate Enrolment		4 (3/1)	1 (0/1)	5 (3/2)

It is interesting that seven of the 15 interviewees had gone on to various forms of training and post-secondary education, notwithstanding their earlier indifferent schooling records. Four had completed on-the-job training programs, specifically in relation to bobcat, forklift and storemen tasks. Another had got his motor drivers license in the (four-wheel driving) program. One received the Metalliferous Certificate and the other completed his Engineering & Processing Certificate, TAFE (Technical and Further Education) programs, two getting as far as completing their Certificate II in Engineering, one receiving her Clerical-II Certificate another completing a Certificate in general Education for Adults. Five had enrolled in though not completed undergraduate programs at university (or degrees). Two others had completed pre-University entry programs (such as the Aboriginal Bridging Course offered by Curtin University), another had completed a work-based traineeship, and others had various work-based qualifications and certificates. On the whole, it seems that the ATP graduates had shown an above average commitment to their education and training. All fifteen graduates received the Industry Vocational Certificate upon completing the ATP.

Table Eleven: The Interview Population: Prior mining industry experience (male, female breakdown shown in brackets)

Pre-ATP Experience in the Mining Industry	Post-ATP Mining Industry Employment			
	Now employed (M/F)	Not now employed (M/F)	Never employed (M/F)	Total (M/F)
Prior Experience	2 (2/0)	4 (2/2)	2 (1/1)	8 (5/3)
No Prior Experience	2 (2/0)	3 (2/1)	2 (1/1)	7 (5/2)
Total	4 (4/0)	7 (4/3)	4 (2/2)	15 (10/5)

As Table Eleven shows, just over half of the interview population had had prior mining industry experience. The smallness of the sample size makes comparison difficult, but it seems that the male participants in the ATP were more likely to have had prior mining experience than the female participants.

4.3. ENROLLING IN THE ATP

In this section, I explore the circumstances by which the interviewees came to enrolled in the ATP. The information presented here comes from their responses.

Finding out about the ATP

Prior to enrolling in the ATP all fifteen respondents to my survey had filled in an application form and sat for an interview. They had found out about the program by a variety of means. Word of mouth seems to have been the most powerful factor. Further information was obtained from Joblink agencies and from the Tjuma Centre at Curtin University's Kalgoorlie campus. A number of the interview population found out about the program almost by accident while they were working on the Murrin Murrin minesite when the program was in progress. Their interest aroused, they subsequently enrolled in it, hoping to advance to more secure and rewarding positions in the industry.

The interviewees were questioned about the information given to them in advance of their ATP enrolment. It seems that their information came from a variety of sources. Some graduates had spoken to an Aboriginal guidance officer from ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), and others to staff from the Tjuma Centre (Curtin University, Kalgoorlie) and the Swan College of TAFE in Perth. Some had obtained additional information from on-site contractors and supervisors. Strikingly, half of the interviewees had not spoken to any guidance or enrolment officers prior to their ATP enrolment, relying solely on the information they had obtained themselves.

The information generally sought had to do with the availability of mining industry apprenticeships, traineeships and career opportunities. Few questions, it seems, were raised about the ATP itself—what it would include, how it would be organised, who would be involved in delivering it, and other questions of that sort.

Deciding to enrol in the ATP

One graduate said he had been unemployed, and was bored with “not doing anything”, and was thinking of going to university. He decided to approach Delta Gold Mines for employment and was asked to do a test. He sat the test, was told he had passed it, and was offered a traineeship, all on the same day. He completed the ATP and now has a full-time job with that company. Another graduate said he wanted to earn “big money”, better his self-esteem, and provide improved living conditions for his family. Other interviewees stated that they wanted to try “something different” and were interested in finding out what jobs were available “out there” in the mining industry. All fifteen graduates stated clearly that their intentions were to complete the ATP and to gain full-time employment in the mining industry. Quite a few mentioned their desire to escape the boredom associated with their prior unemployment.

At the point of their own enrolment, nine of the interviewees had known someone who had already enrolled in the ATP; six had not.

Interviewees were asked about their thoughts on the ATP enrolment process. Most had little to say, eleven not commenting at all and another saying that “everything was OK”. The other three were more critical. One put his thoughts in these terms:

“They should have explained it to us more clearly before we applied for the ATP. Like even speaking with the Aboriginal officers who recommended the ATP. Like even they said we were guaranteed jobs at the end of the ATP. They only had positions for a couple of us and a lot of us missed out big time”.

Another stated: *“...they should have told us that there was not a job at the end of the ATP, because most of us thought that we were all getting jobs at the end of the ATP. That’s why we did the ATP hoping for a job as previously promised.”*

Another said: *“I would have liked to have seen more information about the course given out before the interviews and the selection process.”*

Expectations of the ATP

Various answers were given to the question about what they had hoped to get out of the ATP. Common answers were to gain knowledge of the mining industry and its opportunities, to get a job in the mining industry, to get a qualification that would allow them to earn more money, to learn about the mine safety, and to try “something different.” Some wanted to gain on-site experience in the industry, especially in the engineering and the processing plant side of things.

A major issue for all interviewees before their enrolment was the employment advantages the ATP would confer. All fifteen graduates, it seems, believed at the time of their enrolment in the ATP that its successful completion would bring full-time employment in the mining industry. Some reported being told before the course started that they would have “a 100% chance” of getting a job once they had completed the ATP. The general feeling was that they would be guaranteed employment. Some now feel that this promise has not been kept.

The interviewees were also questioned about what they had been told about prior to joining the ATP, and specifically what they were led to believe about their eligibility to work in the mining industry after completing the program. Twelve out of the fifteen interviewed said that they had been told that they needed a police clearance and would have to undergo a drug and alcohol test before they could start working in the mining industry. One student responded: “Yes we needed a police clearance and we had to sign a consent form for the information to be released for a Drug & Alcohol Test.” Another indicated that “we didn’t need a police clearance only a drug and alcohol test.” Another respondent questioned whether any clearance was required.

4.4 EXPERIENCE IN THE ATP

The information obtained in this section of the thesis comes from interviewee responses. The focus here is upon interviewee perceptions of the ATP itself—what it covered, how it was organised and what participants got out of it.

Structure and content

The ATP takes six months to complete. The first four months covers class work and the final two months covers on-the-job training. It seems, however, that this structure may be adapted to suit the circumstances operating at the time. Seven interviewees reported that they sat in class for 3 months. Four said that they sat in class for four months. One said that he only did six weeks coursework and no on-the-job training. One said that he did two weeks of classes only *“because not many people turned up for class”* and another said *“I did two weeks at one mine site, eight weeks at another mine site and I think I only did two weeks in class”*.

The varied nature of the ATP offerings seems to have been reflected in differing induction arrangements. Eight of the interviewees described induction sessions that covered the mine safety and work rules. Some reported that their inductions occurred prior to the formal commencement of their particular program, some reported that it was during the coursework section of it, and some reported that it was during the on-site training portion of it. Seven said they hadn't had any formal induction. It is possible that further questioning of these respondents would have revealed that they had indeed had inductions to the program, though not necessarily recognised as such or described by that label.

The ATP is designed to upgrade the student's skills and knowledge and to be able to meet the requirements of the National Competency Standards in the areas of Metalliferous surface extraction and processing. These subjects covered include: Life Management; Communication and Team Work; Job Seeking Skills; First Aid; Motor Driving License (four wheel drive); Occupational Health and Safety; Numeracy and Literacy skills; Computer Skills; and a Markstar. I asked one of the students to explain to me what Markstar is. He explained: *“an overall induction to the safety of the mine site. The mines are starting to get rid of it now. One student said “I didn't have to do the ATP because I did a three months traineeship on site.”*

Table Twelve below records the places where the interviewees undertook their on-the-site training for the ATP.

Table Twelve: Place and duration of on-the-job training

Location of mine site	A: Now Working in the Industry	B: Not Now Working in the Industry	C: Never Worked in the Industry
Delta Gold Mine	▪ (3 months probation)		
Murrin Murrin	▪ (1 month) ▪ (3 months)	▪ (3 mths) ▪ (3 mths) ▪ (1.5 mths) ▪ (2 mths)	▪ (2 mths) ▪ (3/6 mths)
Cores Nickel & Murrin Murrin	▪ (1 month each)		
Paddington & KCGM		▪ (3 mths)	
Kanowna Belle		▪ (3 mths)	
Granny Smith Gold Mine		▪ (11 mths)	
KCGM			▪ (1 mth)
Kambalda			▪ (1.5 mths)

Interviewees were then questioned about the work they undertook during their on-the-job training. Their answers were as follows:

“I was doing utilities jobs that were going around looking after the plant. We had to be interviewed for certain jobs that were available on site and I got picked for utilities. They included looking after the plant like the generator-plant, turbine-plant and so on that provides the whole camp with fresh clean water.”

“I didn’t do any training at all. It was a traineeship, and they trained me up on the surface action when I got the job. They trained me to be a process technician.”

“It was a 12 months traineeship... with 3 months probation. I passed that and they offered me full-time employment.”

“Tour of the plant about safety issues, collecting samples, cleaning up, forklift driving, storeman, pit work, sampling driving skills and pit licence.”

“We were doing “picking and receiving.” They call it in the store. Like, it was construction stage at the time. We were assisting the contractors. They would send in their orders and we would pack the pallets to whatever they needed to go out on site. So that would go out to them, then they would come in and pick it up with a invoice and they would be wanting something, we were working in the warehouse at the stage.”

“(Named place). I did the cyclones runs in on the mills. I did the normal runs checking the tanks, and they put me in the crusher for two days. And then the company put me up on the CIO tanks for two rounds of my shift and then after that I went into the CIO tanks by myself because they were low on staff at that time.”

“The induction was to get an idea of what the mine site is all about and about safety issues. They took us underground, and showed us around the mill. We toured the

whole minesite for a couple of days for eg; the mill, lab, workshop, the offices and how the processing plant worked.”

“I was working in the Mill at the time as a crusher operator for the (3 months) I was there. I was like a TA operator and after my 3 months was up I ended up working as a crusher operator.”

“Kitchen-hand, also the training they taught us in the kitchen was the same work we do in the kitchen at home every day so I didn’t really learn much.”

“They put me with an operator, like process operators assisting helping him cleaning vessels, taking readings, cleaning up the site, house keeping and on calls when they needed valves switched on.”

“We were stuck with an operator who had been working there, not much longer than me. I took notes on different section of the mine, shovelling, beginners’ work I suppose, gas operator, and general duties.”

“They split us into two groups and we were supposed to go and learn the operator certificate and instead when we got there they didn’t know that we were supposed to be in that area. So they just handed us these jobs. Like we had to pick up rubbish right through the area, just picked up all rubbish for two days in the first area that we went to....We shifted to the next area like we had different areas to go to every two days....We was supposed to be doing the geo-tech training there, but we were in the crib room for a couple a days doing nothing. They were going to take us out and show us something about the geo-tech. That was the first couple of days there. No-one wanted to take us out....We ended up going out there a couple days after. (Interviewer: “now tell me about the geo-tech?) It’s doing sampling, like getting samples from out off the drill rigs and putting into sample bags. About 20% of the samples are recorded, and then we file each sample from where it all came from. And then it is taken to the lab to process the different types of ore to find out which is good and which isn’t good to put through the mill.”

“Showed me around the mine site on a tour.”

“As part of the training they told us we would be doing some practical work, like driving trucks or learning to driving trucks but that was all verbal. But when it all came down to it, we didn’t get the opportunity to get work experience. So it was all theory in the class, but they didn’t give us the opportunity to get practical work experience which they said that we would do.”

“General labour in the plant and refinery, shovelling dirt onto the conveyer belts, testing temperature valves and so on.”

It is clear from the above responses that the interviewees have quite different memories of their on-the-job training. There is always the issue in making sense of such responses of the extent to which the memories are accurate reflections of what was experienced at the time. I was in no position to check the interviewees’

memories as against their actual experiences, and to this extent I am forced to rely upon recollections as a guide to actual experiences. Nevertheless, the detail provided to me by the interviewees suggests to me that their current memories (that is to say, their memories at the time of their interview) are a good guide to their actual experiences.

A number of themes are clearly evident in the interviewees' responses to questions about their on-the-job training. One is that many were disappointed by this aspect of the ATP. It seems in this regard that on-the-site training dimension was not always well-planned or supervised, and that insufficient effort was made to ensure that the on-the-job training complemented and extended the earlier classroom component of the ATP. A related point is that many of the tasks assigned during the on-the-job training seem to have simply been a matter of finding work to do, with little regard apparently being given to the training and skill extension aspects of the work involved. That clearly seems to have frustrated and disillusioned quite a number of the ATP participants.

Areas of particular interest and perceived value

One student said: *"I liked on-the-job training because we would talk in class about a certain section of the plant and actually go and look at it so we could see for ourselves"*. Other students commented that they preferred computer skills, four wheel driving skills, mapping skills, and first-aid skills. One would have preferred hands on work and not class work. Two indicated they got the most out of the Occupational Health and Safety parts of the coverage.

Interviewees were asked about whether or not they consider the ATP was "organised in a professional way." All said that it had been good.

Questioned further about how well the program content had been explained to them, most respondents (14 of 15) reported that the course material had been explained to them clearly. One of the 14 expressed her thoughts in the following way: *"Yes I actually got more understanding out of it than I thought I would. Like in regards to, I didn't know you had to do mapping and navigation on a mine site, you know. I thought it was all mechanical stuff, but they actually taught me a lot. Like basic*

English and maths, communication skills and I didn't know you needed all that knowledge to get a job in the mining industry. Yeah so I got more out of it than I expected." One commented "*not really or maybe*", indicating that he felt he had not got much out of the program and that the coordinators did not explain everything to him clearly enough.

Interviewees were then asked to compare what they got out of the program with what they had expected to get out of it. Perhaps surprisingly, given their prior positive answers about the ATP experience, seven reported that they had not got what they had expected out of the ATP. When asked to be more specific about where they had been disappointed, their answers related more to their employment prospects after completing the ATP than to its actual content. All four who are currently working in the mining industry indicated they got what they expected out of the ATP, namely employment. One of them said: "*I got training and knowledge about the mining industry.*"

Mixed responses were obtained from those who had not found employment in the mining industry after completing the ATP or had subsequently left it. Three of the 11 in these two categories said they had got out of the ATP what they had expected; the other eight said they had not. Follow-up questions gave them an opportunity to provide more information on what had disappointed them most about the ATP. The eight who had indicated that their expectations had not been meant said that they had expected to get a full-time job after completing the ATP. Three of them gave more expansive responses:

"I expected to be treated equally. I done the ATP and the only reason I left because I was on less money. I was actually on the job and I had to train these two new blokes, white-fellas, that had never been on site before and they were on 10 grand more than I was. Yeah that's why I left."

"I expected a job straight after we finished the ATP, but they sent us home. I didn't get a job until four months later. And that was only because this other bloke and me kept ringing them for four months and my phone bill came to almost \$600. After four months we finally got a job and if I hadn't made those phone calls I would be like the rest of the Aboriginal people, unemployed, let down, and feeling frustrated."

“I expected to be trained so I could go straight into a position equal to anybody else. Like I was doing the engineering course and I thought it was just the basics of engineering.”

All fifteen graduates reported receiving a certificate (the Industry Vocational Certificate) upon completing the ATP. They were asked whether they had been given information on the value of the certificate. Ten said they were informed about the value of the certificate and three said no. Two said “yes” and “no”. One put it in these terms: *“Yes and no. I didn’t use the certificate. They said this certificate acknowledges that you are a qualified operator but no one actually recognised it because it was one of those things. Now I don’t put the certificate at all on my resume.”*

When asked whether or not they would have liked to have received more information on the certificate, most (13 of the 15) said “no”. That response is rather surprising given the disappointment already expressed about the certificate, but it might simply reflect disenchantment with the process as a whole.

The interviewees were then questioned about the aspects of on-the-job training that they liked and valued the most. They were asked to specify the three things they most liked. Some listed one thing, some two, and others three. All bar one found something to like. One person did not respond to the question. Their responses are recorded below.

“Technical side of it was challenging and I liked it. Problem solving, like when things broke down.”

“Store man. Pit technician. Process technician-collecting samples.”

“Driving skills 100%. Sampling, and Packing.”

“Probably the work experience, probably both of them I would say. The course I thought was short. It could have been longer and instead of going to one place and doing work experience we should have been given the opportunity to go in other areas as well, like the control rooms ...Instead of given us the options of getting multi-skilled we didn’t have that option. We were put with the contractors and I didn’t think that was relevant.”

“The people on my shift I enjoyed working with them. The responsibility I enjoyed working with them and the things that I learnt. I liked the education they gave me out there and the understanding of the circuit system.”

“I liked working in the lab. I liked working underground, especially surveying. I also liked the Mill, because there is more opportunities.”

“Learning knowledge about the mining industry. The money was good. The roster I was on was 9 days on and 5 days off.”

“The food. The cleaning. The people.”

“Learning the process flow of how the mines operates in stages. Taking sample reading of each vessel. Sitting in the controls room and watching how it all operates.”

“Learning about the acids and soda; it was interesting stuff but I wouldn’t like to work with it because it’s too dangerous, and I didn’t have much knowledge about it, but it was interesting learning about the dangerous chemicals.”

“Geo-tech. Taking samples.”

“Being in the control room. Flotation section. Crushing.”

“I liked being on site. Touring of the (named) mine-site. Meeting other people.”

“I liked the Aboriginal people out there. I liked the haulage area & truck driving and conveyer belts and surveying.”

It is clear from the above responses that many of the ATP participants believe that they actually got a good deal out of the on-the-job component. Their responses are varied, reflecting individual circumstances and experiences. There seems to be a common theme of valuing tasks that stretched them but not so much as to strain their confidence and self-belief. These latter aspects are clearer (discussed later) when the interviewees were asked to nominate the three things about the ATP’s on-the-job training that they disliked the most.

The interviewees were then asked to identify the things of value they got out of their participation in the ATP. Varied responses were forthcoming. One person did not respond.

“The mining industry knowledge that I didn’t know before which was very handy to know. Also hands on stuff because I was only there about a month after the ATP finished.”

“Knowledge about the mining industry.”

“I got a lot out of it, like working in some new areas. I didn’t work in before like working on a minesite. I got a lot out of the course, not a lot but I would have preferred to work in different sections in the minesite instead of just the one place. I came out knowing something.”

“100% driving skills.”

“One, they actually trusted me enough to leave me unsupervised there by myself. Two, I would then check the cyanide levels and the carbon levels and everything that involves with carbon leaks tanks like the normal rounds. And then mainly it shows you how it’s operated and just being by myself. Yes, me being a trainee they’re not supposed to put you up there by yourself, but they actually trusted me to do it.”

“4-wheel driving, gaining a motor driver’s licence, and operating the forklift. I enjoyed working in the lab, which involved using computing skills, samples, testing, reading maps and weighing things and so on. And we spent a couple of days in each area which was good, but I enjoyed the lab the best.”

“The crusher, I liked that job. Yeah I pretty much learnt everything on that job.”

“Knowing that I completed the course.”

“The practical side of the processing of the mine site, it was more interesting than the study. The study wasn’t even relevant for the job I was trying to get.”

“Knowledge about mining.”

“More knowledge about the mining industry.”

“General information and the operational side of the mining industry.”

“Knowledge about the mining industry and knowing that you are good enough for the job.”

The responses of all interviewees are broadly similar, regardless of whether the interviewee had subsequently found continuing employment in the mining industry (the first four responses above), had found employment in the mining industry but are not now working in it (responses 5 to 11) or had not found mining industry employment after completing the ATP (responses 12 to 15). Perhaps not surprisingly, those who have found employment in the mining industry after completing the ATP were more likely to emphasise the value of the concrete skills obtained.

Having identified the things they had most gained from the ATP, the interviewees were asked to be more specific about the knowledge that they had gained that had

been of most value to them, whether in mining industry employment or outside. Their responses were as follows (one interviewee did not respond):

“The problem solving skills I learnt were very helpful to me it made me think a lot on the plant. Because before this job I didn’t use to think a lot.” (and he laughs)

“Process-technician, four wheel driving, pit license and motor driver’s license.”

“Every certificate I learned knowledge about the mining industry, communications skills and people skills.”

“Probably work place community, and working in a multi-environment place. Although I had that experience before, the males were always the majority than the females out there. Yeah, I reckon it was good.”

“How to run the carbon and leaks tanks. In the future if I want to go back onto the minesite I know how to interact with other people, if I want to go back onto the mills like the plant, well then I have got the skills for a CIL position. Yeah experience on the CIL circuit but I also know how to communicate better with the guys and women on a minesite.”

“Motor driver’s license, forklift ticket and general knowledge about the mining industry.”

“Nothing really. Everything we learnt relates to the mining industry.”

“First aid certificate, cleaning skills, and cooking skills.”

“Communications skills.”

“Experience in the mining industry.”

“Learning about what goes on, how they do the job, and what they do.”

“My certificates.”

“Nothing, no new information apart from OHS.”

“The general knowledge on the mining industry in regards to different minerals and the processing from a piece of rock to a briquette of nickel was interesting for me”

“Senior First Aid certificate.”

From the above comments it seems clear that the interviewees all believed they had taken something away from the program that would be of use to them in the future, especially skills and knowledge directly relevant to mining industry employment. The particular areas mentioned in this respect were problems solving skills, process

work, four wheel driving, communication and people skills, how to run certain section of the plant, first aid, OHS, cleaning and cooking. All seemed to think that they would have the skills to return to the mining industry if they chose to do so sometime in the future.

A further question probed whether the interviewees felt that they now knew more about the industry. Most answers were very brief, and almost all either “yes”, “yes definitely” or “yes, a lot.” Two responses stood out. The first comes from someone who has gone on to find employment in the mining industry; the second from someone who has not found that employment and is rather disillusioned with the whole experience.

“Yes, no I actually have more experience on the mines now than I had before, like a fair understanding of how to gain them skills and what I need to do to help myself to get on a mine site again with confidence. Like if the mines rang me up and said can you come and drive a dump truck, I would say no. Because I am scared of heights, but with the confidence and the stuff that I have learnt, I am an easy learner and I will take anything on now.”

“Yes, one thing that I found out about the mining industry now is that Aboriginal people have to work twice as hard because the mining companies are reluctant to place Aboriginals in productive position. Because of the pressure that comes from the other workers, and they don’t trust Aboriginals operating equipment by themselves without supervision.”

The interviewees were also given the opportunity to identify aspects of the ATP that they didn’t like. They were encouraged to identify three things. Some had no difficulty doing so. Others restricted their responses to one or two dislikes. Their responses were:

“The pays weren’t good”

“Cleaning up and hosing down all day. Being left alone without supervision.”

“Dangerous areas. Noise. Pollution and the smell of poison gases.”

“No I think it was facilitated by the fellow that was doing it. It was kind of TAFE, and well the guy that did it like he really did help us. None of us had left school for a long period and we needed a brush up. So he did help us out. He worked with us. He didn’t put us down or anything; he was excellent. No I couldn’t complain about him. If all lecturers were like him, well you know you would go a long way. No he really helped. He was a white fellow, so it was well structured. Like I really liked the course

itself, the modules, and just going out on work place. I think I didn't get enough out of that, you know, help."

"The hours, the smells like an almond and it kind of turns you off and the weather and heat."

"I didn't like the workshop."

"I didn't like the way the people made you feel like you wasn't meant to be there. Trust, like you never get to trust anybody out there. Racism, I guess; that's the biggest thing out there."

"I didn't like some of the white-people out there, like being treated like a second grade citizen. I didn't like doing other people's work for them. I didn't like the hours."

"Cleaning up the filters; it was a dirty job. Cleaning up of over-spills. And house keeping."

"Learning about the dangerous chemicals. Some of the guy didn't like their jobs and didn't give a shit. They gave you these jobs just to keep you out of their way. They would give you a job like shovelling dirt. When I was working in the utilities section they ask me to go and pull up some fucken weeds (and he laughs). They said here is a shovel and wheel barrow and go and pull some weeds. And I looked at the guy and said 'I'm not your gardener'. I told the supervisor I am not doing that, and I think he may have got offended. Yeah I told him 'I am not gonna shovel shit and to pull up weeds.' I thought it was a joke. I thought it was pretty dumb of him to ask me to pull weeds. See, given Jacky Jacky Jobs again."

"Down where all that gas work is. The travelling up there and being away from home and the kids. The fellow workers, like some of the blokes there (white-fellas) are up themselves. Some of them are not even from Australia. They're all pommies and mixed races. They need to do what we did, like we did our Aboriginal study course with (an Aboriginal coordinator who does the cultural awareness course). They need to do the same course like we did. All them white-fellas need to be educated more about Aboriginal ways."

"Hosing down."

"No work experience. No practical activities. No commitment from (the company). It wasn't worth the paper it was written on regards to Aboriginal employment because only two people got jobs out of eleven of us."

"Shovelling dirt onto conveyer belts, doing dirty work, jacky jacky work. Being left alone unsupervised and not knowing what to do next."

The first four of the above responses were given by those who have remained in mining industry employment since completing the ATP, the next seven by those who worked for a while in the mining industry after completing the ATP but who are not

now in mining industry employment, and the final four by those who have not worked in the mining industry since completing the ATP. No sharp contrast can be drawn between their responses, but there are differences of emphasis. The dislikes of those in the category A (still employed in the mining industry) relate principally to the practical aspects of mining industry employment (the pay, the physical environment, and the unattractiveness of certain tasks like cleaning and hosing). The dislikes of those in category B (those no longer in the mining industry) seem to be rather more deep-seated. Much more stress is placed in their responses on the racism and other indignities experienced by the trainees. This is also true of the dislikes of those in the category C (those who've not found employment in the mining industry after completing the ATP). In their cases, there also seems to be a sense of abandonment, of being left alone without adequate supervision and support.

4.5 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The interviewees were questioned about what, if anything, they would do to improve the ATP. Their responses are summarised in Table Thirteen below.

Table Thirteen: Suggested improvements to the ATP (post-ATP status in brackets)

<p>No response (A)</p> <p><i>“Just the relations between employees and employers needs to be improved. Even after I have been doing it for six years now, like on the other mines like Bulong and Murrin Murrin, the supervisors find it hard to communicate to me. And more training is needed. I think we need more training because they gave me enough knowledge and skills in the head, but when it came to hands on skills there wasn't enough of that until I went to Bulong. That's when I got more skills and had a bit more confidence. That was second to the supervisor.” (A)</i></p> <p><i>“More training on the machinery and helping people to get their motor driver's licence.” (A)</i></p> <p><i>“During the ATP take students to different mine sites for experience. They did this before where they took other trainees to different mine sites and it really broadens their minds. Out of this, one bloke scored very well and was offered a job in South Africa. Yes train them on different minesites. They start you from the bottom and it's up to you to advance to the top.” (A)</i></p>
<p><i>“Yes probably longer in the modules, longer time you know, time frame, like everything was sort of pushed into one and the other we would be when we were going out on work experience. We would be given the opportunity to have one week here and one week in another area, like on the same minesite. But one week in the reception, one week in the lab, one week in the warehouse or in the control rooms and see what the whole mines all about and the whole plant.” (B)</i></p> <p><i>“To ask each individual what part of the mine they would prefer to work on and train them in that area instead, but it's more the fact to because you do the mapping and navigation everything you learnt within the college. Half of that does count for when you actually go onto the mine-site. I mean</i></p>

you need your English, maths and communication skills, but it's like you been put into something and you got to learn from start to finish. But whereas if they actually sat you down and told you what this and that is and what the equipment is and what it involves in and how the circuit runs. Then I guess the student who is actually going into that area will have more understanding of that circuit or that area, you know what I mean. When I was doing the ATP, mapping and navigation never came into it when I was on the CIL circuit, four wheel driving had nothing to do with it CIR circuit. You are actually walking around on top of the big tanks. I mean if they ask you what you want to do within the minesite. I guess that person will come out a better person and more understanding on the minesite if they taught just that section to that person. I am not saying break it down. I know it's hard like breaking it all down because you got all different sections on the minesite. But I mean, I guess, if someone taught me, like gave me a book with CIL circuit in front of me and told me what that tanks used for and how it was run and what it involves and all the parts of the circuit well then I would have more understanding went I go out onto the minesite and if something goes wrong with a machinery I know how to fix it up. Because I didn't know anything about mining I did the training at Curtin University. Then they put me onto the (named mine) plant and I had to learnt from that and I didn't know about that area or I mean they trained me in (named place) on the crusher. But the crusher was boring, you know normal hours and that, and I didn't learn much out there. But when they put me out there onto the plant I didn't know anything. They explained to me what happens and all that there and how it runs but then they end up given me a booklet so I had more understanding of it." (B)

"Yes, more training on the job." (B)

"No, I think it was OK." (B)

"No." (B)

"Yes, that metal training, the engineering certificate that they operate shouldn't have been there at all. It's nothing to the mining industry. With the mining industry you got to be a tradesman or an operator or you're nothing. And the only reason why they ...that the certificate might give me trades assistant or a job as a lackey or a labour and that's it, like it's not going to give me an engineering position or an apprentice or anything. (Named mine) does not give apprentices, well in the engineering side of it anyway. That's the position I was trying to slot into, the engineering side of it but I wanted the processing position side of it to I would have taken anything at the time." (B)

"I think more hands on training than sitting in class because it's a waste of time." (B)

"Yeah more on the job training, yeah because we only had two day in the area it was like spread out. We need about two weeks in there to get to know the place in that one area before we shift off to the next area to pick it up to give us more confidence to go back and ask them for a job in that position to tell them what you know." (C)

"Yes." (C)

"Definitely more practical work and a commitment from mining companies to employ more Aboriginal people." (C)

"Aboriginal people should be running the ATP. More training 8 to 10 months. Not enough information given at ATP." (C)

Interviewees were asked directly about whether or not their participation in the ATP had given them the knowledge and confidence to be able to get a job in the mining industry. Their responses are summarized in Table Fourteen below.

Table Fourteen: The ATP as a help to employment (post-ATP status in brackets)

<p>“Yes.” (A)</p> <p>“Knowledge and skills Yes, and confidence yes. Now I am trying to go for a supervisor’s job and probably overseas (laughs)” (A)</p> <p>“Yes.” (A)</p> <p>“I am sort of half-hearted. I am the sort of person that will go out and look for a job. And it’s that feeling of being knocked back because I’ve been knocked back so many times before. I have got that ticket now, you know what I mean I’ve got that blackfellow way in going forwards then backwards.” (A)</p>
<p>“No out there at the time. Yes and no, I think. That’s why I would have preferred the ATP a bit longer.” (B)</p> <p>“Yes, it gave me more confidence.” (B)</p> <p>“Yeah, with myself, but I don’t know if I will be able to get a job in the mine. No I haven’t got enough confidence, but compared to others no. But if I applied for another job I don’t think I would have enough confidence and skills if I went out for a job and someone has got a better education than me. Not enough and I would have preferred more training on the job to be able to have more confidence. This ATP didn’t give me enough training and knowledge to be able to have enough confidence to work in the mines.” (B)</p> <p>“No.” (B)</p> <p>“Yeah.” (B)</p> <p>“Yeah, maybe if they took me in as a trainee and trained me up more, yes.” (B)</p> <p>“Yes.” (B)</p>
<p>“Yes.” (C)</p> <p>“Yes, more confidence.” (C)</p> <p>“Because there are so many different positions available and they didn’t let us know the basics about your markstar, drug and alcohol testing and health surveillance cards. We didn’t even know those basics, and they didn’t tell us, and obviously they weren’t committed to getting an outcome.” (C)</p> <p>“Yes, but I can’t use it. It’s no good to you if you’re unemployed.” (C)</p>

The interviewees were asked to reflect on the ATP as a whole in terms of whether or not it had been worthwhile for them. Their responses are summarized in the following two Tables Fifteen and Sixteen below.

Table Fifteen: The worthwhileness of the ATP as seen by interviewees (post-ATP status in brackets)

<p>“Yes.” (A)</p> <p>“Yes. It gave you the kick start, but it needed a bit more time to get more people into it.” (A)</p> <p>“Yes.” (A)</p> <p>“Only money-wise for me no, but in knowledge-wise, yes I learnt a lot more about the mining industry in general.” (A)</p>
<p>“Yes.” (B)</p> <p>“Yes.” (B)</p> <p>“Neither (laughing)...like not enough confidence and that but it wasn’t a complete waste of time.” (B)</p> <p>“For me I was just coming out of school so no, I feel it was a waste a time in the classroom learning basic things, like stuff I already done in high school.” (B)</p> <p>“Yes.” (B)</p> <p>“On the serious side of it, no.” (B)</p> <p>“No, for some people it was because they were told they were guaranteed a job and they didn’t get it. They would say there were jobs coming up or there were jobs, there were vacant jobs that you would get, and yet the white-fellas would end up working there, and they would say the jobs are taken now and they would just cross that off the list.” (B)</p>
<p>“Yes, I think so.” (C)</p> <p>“Yes.” (C)</p> <p>“No.” (C)</p> <p>“Yes.” (C)</p>

Finally, the interviewees were asked if there was anything else they would like to say about the ATP. Most felt that they had already said what they wanted to say in this respect, but a few took the opportunity to reply more fully. The responses received were:

Table Sixteen: Further reflections on the ATP (post-ATP status in brackets)

<p>“No.” (A)</p> <p>“No.” (A)</p> <p>“No.” (A)</p> <p><i>“Yes, they should give jobs to the trainees straight after they finish the ATP to keep the knowledge still fresh in the head. Otherwise if they are away from the industry for a long period of time they can forget that knowledge. Because the mining industry went out of their way to train us and gave us this knowledge, it’s only fair that we return this through employment. For example when they sent me home after completing the ATP I had to rethink a lot of things, like what was that, what was this all about, you know what I mean. Because a lot people can give up hope, like they are not giving Aboriginal people a fair go out there. And why are others getting jobs out there without training and they get better jobs than we get. There was one white-fellas; he was working with (named company) with me and he couldn’t reverse a trailer, yet they gave him a job over me, knowing my knowledge and experience in driving trucks (the interviewee had been a bus driver for 10 years). And this other fellow as well, they gave him a job as well before me, and all they have been cleaners all their lives. And there are not other Aboriginals working in there either, who I think should be looked at going by what they looked at. I think it’s about 20%. And there are a lot of Aboriginal people need another Aboriginal to talk to because of the understanding between one another, but they got no one to talk to out there and that’s why they walk out the site.” (A)</i></p>
<p><i>“Yes, I would like to say about most ATP nowadays are for the younger generation. They offer more in a way of trade so that the younger person gets the trade. Like engineering, diesel mechanic or plant operators or lab technicians. On site have got into that working area and have on-the-job training or block release training coming down to here Perth to further their knowledge. And I think most Aboriginals, all people, you put them into study and let them study the whole way through. They got to have a bit of hands-on training in the mining industry.” (B)</i></p> <p>“No.” (B)</p> <p>“No.” (B)</p> <p>“No.” (B)</p> <p><i>“Yes, after the ATP the people should have got jobs, just like they were promised.” (B)</i></p>
<p>“No.” (C)</p> <p>“No.” (C)</p> <p>“No.” (C)</p> <p><i>“Yes, I think 6 months is a bit too short to know everything about the mining industry. I think 8 to 12 months at least to absorb all the knowledge in, because 6 months is a bit short. It got a bit crowded in there as they had two programs running at the same time.” (C)</i></p>

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined the circumstances of fifteen graduates of the ATP. My interview population, though not randomly selected, can be considered broadly reflective of the enrolment population as a whole. In this regard, it includes both men

and women, young and middle-aged, those with prior experience in the mining industry and others without prior experience, persons from varied geographic origins and differing levels of prior educational attainment, and persons living in a variety of household arrangements.

My principal concern in this chapter has been examining what the interviewees, all ATP graduates, said to me about their experiences in the ATP and what value it has had for them since. The starting point for much of my analysis of the results obtained was the distinction between those who moved into the mining industry after completing the ATP and are still there (there are four in this category), those who worked for a time in the mining industry after completing the ATP but who are no longer there (there are seven in this category), and those who have not found employment in the mining industry after completing the ATP (there are four in this category).

A variety of views were expressed in relation to all of the questions asked. In part, the diverse responses can be seen as reflecting the differences of experience and attitude that those interviewed brought with them to the ATP and to the subsequent employment challenges. In part, they also seem to reflect different experiences within the ATP and the employment market. In this respect, there is quite a marked contrast between the responses obtained from those in the three categories identified above. Those who obtained and have stayed in mining industry were, on the whole, much more positive to the ATP and more ready to see its continuing benefits. Those who have not found employment since completing the ATP were more disappointed by the program and more disillusioned about the mining industry's efforts to promote Aboriginal employment. Interestingly, their expressed concerns have less to do with deficiencies in the program, real or perceived, and more to do with lack of follow-through and support in making the transition from the program itself to the employment market. The other category consists of those who obtained work in the industry after completing the ATP but have since left. Their viewpoints and reported experiences fall somewhere between those expressed by their counterparts in the other two categories. Worthy of note, their disappointments are focused less on questions of transition into employment and more on the conditions of employment and the lack of "real" job opportunities and career pathways.

My interview sample is too small for me to speak definitively about other contrasts within the interview population. One such contrast that certainly deserves more attention in this respect is that between men and women. Reinforcing that point, my data suggest some significant differences between the respective situations of men and women in and after the ATP. None of the five women in my sample, for example, had obtained and stayed in mining industry employment after graduating from the ATP, whereas 4 of the 10 men had. Likewise, 2 of the 5 (40%) have not found mining industry employment at all, contrasting with 2 of 10 (20%) for the men. The smallness of the sample make such comparisons rather unreliable, but it is hard to ignore the conclusion that the women have been served less well in terms of expanded employment opportunities by the ATP than have their male counterparts.

Whatever the differences between the interviewees with respect to their views and experiences of the ATP and its employment value, they seem to be in agreement with respect to a number of issues of particular interest to this thesis. One such matter concerns the ATP itself. There is clearly very strong support for programs such as the ATP. The ATP is seen as serving an important and valuable service in offering expanded employment and career opportunities for Aboriginal people. The criticisms of the ATP, such as they are, are not that the program is unnecessary, poorly conceived or poorly delivered. Rather they have to do with ways of making the program serve the intended purposes even better. In this respect, the message from the interviewees is that more care needs to be taken in explaining what the ATP can and can't deliver by way of guaranteed employment prospects, that there needs to be more meaningful integration of its coursework and on-the-job training dimensions, and that there needs to be more follow-through with respect both to the initial transition into employment and to longer-term work and career issues.

In responding to my many questions, the interviewees had much to say about the ATP and about the mining industry. They also revealed much about their own hopes, frustrations and vulnerabilities. Two strong themes were particularly evident in this regard. One was that they want "a chance", a real chance to improve their situations, and that means good information, meaningful opportunities for "decent" jobs (not the "Jacky Jacky" jobs that some now feel they are being restricted to), respectful and equitable relationships in the workplace, good continuing supports from those

involved in the ATP and from the industry itself, and genuine prospects for career advancement. The second theme is one of being disadvantaged by being Aboriginal, both in terms of racist attitudes and in terms of their own lack of confidence. The themes speak to how programs such as the ATP can be best planned, delivered, and embedded in a broader industry commitment to social justice for Indigenous Australians.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM TRAINING TO WORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine the interviewees' experiences in the mining industry since completing the ATP. Here, I examine the situation both of those who have gone on to work in the mining industry, those who have not, and those who made a start in the industry and have since left it. The discussion of results in the present chapter begins with a consideration of the initial point of entry into the industry (section 5.2: *Finding Work for the First Time*). It then proceeds to an examination of the work experience of those (11 of the 15 interviewees) who were successful in obtaining mining industry work (section 5.3: *Working in the Industry*), and then investigates the factors behind the departure from the industry of seven of that eleven (section 5.4: *Leaving the Industry*). It concludes in (section 5.5) with a number of general observations about the interviewees' reported experiences in the mining industry.

5.2 FINDING WORK FOR THE FIRST TIME

The transition from education and training program to employment is a topic of increasing concern to educationalists, industry and government (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993). It has frequently been assumed that employment in an industry flows more or less automatically from the associated educational and training programs. That assumption, while possibly reasonable in some instances, is arguably not something upon which we can rely in relation to special compensatory or enabling programs such as the ATP. That, in essence, is the question I will explore in the current section.

Initial expectations

Interviewees were asked about their expectations of finding employment after completing the ATP. I started by asking how confident they were about finding work.

All of the graduates were confident that they would get employment at the end of completing the ATP. Most gave short “yes” or “no” answers. Others had this to say:

“Yes, I was confident I would get the driving part of it given my 10 years experience in driving MTT (Metropolitan Transport Trust) buses and trucks in Perth.”

“A little bit confident because there were so many others in the course and so many mining jobs going at the time and, yeah, waiting for jobs I wasn’t that confident at the time.”

“Yes, they told me so.”

“Maybe.”

“Yes, pretty confident.”

“Yes, they offered me a trainee draft position at (company). I spoke to the lady in HR and we discussed the position and they took me details and I was excited and ran it past me husband that I would have been the first Aboriginal trainee draft position. So I approached the supervisor and accepted the position. Soon after they took all information required and I applied for the position. And then they told me because I previously had a position in business before, I wasn’t able to do the traineeship as a draft person because this position has a different criteria but they never came back and offered me another position.”

“Yes, at the start of the ATP they didn’t necessary say we would get a job. They said that with some of these qualifications you might be liable for a job or good enough to get a job.”

The interviewees were then asked about how they felt at the time. This question was intended to give them the opportunity to expand upon their earlier answers. Most reported being very positive about their ATP experience and their future prospects. One said:

“I was really happy especially after completing 50 hours training; like they trained me and I would get something out of the ATP”.

Three said they had felt disappointed at the time. They reported feeling:

“Terrible, because the information was misleading.”

“I was upset at the time because there was no support there.”

“I felt really let down because they offered me a position and then they turned around and said no.”

Assistance making the transition to work

It seems that most ATP graduates were offered employment almost straight after completing the ATP. Seven reported having been assisted by their ATP instructors and counselors. Four said they had not been helped. Four did not respond or were unsure.

The seven who reported being helped said:

“Yes they helped us with everything, like filling out an application, help fix our resumes, organising interview for us and their help was great”.

“Yes, they helped me with everything and I had to sit for an interview.”

“Yes, I had to fill out an application and I had to sit for an interview at (company) Mine”

“Yes, I had to sit and do my resume and I think I had an interview and I had to put my resume in and the lady helped me do it.”

“Yes, I was offered an 8 week contract work experience with (company). It was like a contract within the Curtin University, the 8 weeks work, but you actually got paid for it. This was included in it. (The company) asked me if I wanted employment, but I said no because of the fact I had no-one to look after my two little brothers and sisters at the time. Because my father passed away six weeks into my work experience program out there, so I got an extension on my contract. A staff member from an ATP said this to me when I was experiencing family traumas. She said if I ever wanted employment just to give her a call instead of getting an application and I will fix everything up for you.”

“No, we did all that during the ATP when we were at Curtin, but before then the work experience, like they just showed us how to fill out forms.”

“Yes in the process at the time.”

The four who stated they had not been helped in finding work said:

“There wasn't any support.”

“No, I handed my resume into several mines and didn't get any reply back.”

“I didn’t fill out an application. I just signed a contract and I was only working on probation for 3 months.”

“Yes, I did apply for some jobs in the mines but they never got back to me, so I done the ATP (twice) again at a different minesite. I went to (named mine).”

One interviewee who had completed the ATP twice had this to say about her experience:

“No, at the end of the course (the company) told us that there are potential employment opportunities and vacancies coming through (the company). And we were told what those vacancies were and we were also told we had to compete against non-Aboriginal people for those positions.”

Interviewees were then asked whether they would have liked more help when applying for jobs in the mining industry. Most responses were short “yes” or “no” answers. Eight just said “yes” and three just said “no”. Four partial exceptions to this rule were:

“Not really. They helped me enough at the time.”

“Yes, everything possible and they sent us no information at all.”

“No, but to look for a job yes.”

“Yes, because they told me I blew a couple of shifts whilst I was in training. And that I wasn’t going to get a job at the end of it anyway and the day before graduations of the course they put me on a plane and got me out of there.”

Getting a job

In this part of the questionnaire, the interviewees were asked about the mining industry jobs they had worked in since completing the ATP. Eleven of the fifteen interviewees had found work in the industry. I started by asking them about the time taken to get jobs after completing the ATP.

The eleven who had found jobs in the mining industry had found jobs more or less straightaway, and had been placed in different mines around the Goldfields. Among the positions to which they had been assigned were: process technician, sampling, eltro-winnery (making nickel), fork-lift driving, robotics machinery, packing and handling goods, working in the warehouse doing store-duties, working in the

laboratory doing sampling and testing, crusher operator in the mill, scaffolding, assisting tradesmen, vehicle maintenance, general cleaning, and working underground with the service crew doing general duties.

Of the fifteen four had found permanent employment and were still employed in the industry when interviewed. The other seven worked in the industry for shorter periods, eventually either leaving voluntarily or having their jobs terminated by their employers.

The eleven were then asked how they had found their first jobs. They had this to say:

“I spoke to an Aboriginal officer from ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) just for something to do and then she got a phone call from a lady from another job agency saying she told me that they were looking for apprentice trainees at (named mine). Like they use to offer them every year and it was a year traineeship, through ATSIC.”

“(Named mine) and (named mine) have the same kind of nickel plant. (Mine) wants to do the ATP but over east in Bundaberg. They want to get that ATP put it in, but had no money so they just offered a few positions. I finally got a job through the course.”

“Mines Department and (named company) asked if anyone wanted a month training. Three of us went out there and I was the only one ended up with a job.”

“After completing the ATP, they sent me home with a window seat on the plane (and he laughs) and I was out of work for four months. For four months I kept ringing and ringing the supervisors. My phone bill was \$600, and they said they were trying to get us back on site for work and it wasn't till 4 months after. And I used to ring him every Monday morning for four months asking him for work and ask him to ask the big bosses for work, and a friend of mine was doing the same thing. (Named workforce agency) rang us up and said we have got some work for you in the laboratory, so four of us who was in the ATP got jobs back there in the laboratory.”

“From BYAC Contractors (an Aboriginal owned organisation).”

“What I did at the end of the training program, they placed us on the minesite, like on the job experience, and what (named mine) did they chose two people from our group to get a full-time position and I was one of them. The other three that didn't get a position there and what Curtin did was they rang around other mines sites and placed them anywhere. I didn't even know the program was over. It just kept going for me. It didn't really feel like I had a real job. The ATP itself, told us during our training.”

“They asked me and gave us a few areas were we wanted to work like, in the pits, geology or the mill which area that fascinated you the most.”

“They rang me up and said one of the coordinators went and organised a meeting for me and I sat for an interview.”

The interviewees were then asked whether completing the ATP had helped them getting work. All said “yes”, a number adding that they would not otherwise have been able to get the job. A follow-up question probed whether they had since had other jobs in the industry. The question was generally answered in terms of their subsequent progress in the industry, starting with learning about the basics of how the mines work, and progressing from there to different sections and expanded responsibilities in, for example, the crusher, the mill, the warehouse, underground operations, and assisting tradesmen. Here is what some of the interviewees had to say:

“In the first year we were expected to learn how to run the crusher works and how to operate it by yourself. And you’re all expected to know how to run the mills by yourself and the same with the calcium circuit which is how the leaks tank circuit operate, you’re expected to learn that and to be able to run that section by yourself. That was within the first year. After that we were expected to learn the flotation circuit, the roasting circuit, the tails down circuit, the gold room pace plant circuit, and also you’re expected to learn all these circuits to become number one operator.”

“Process technician is the only one.”

“(Named mine) four years working on this mine-site, sampling, process-tech, eltro-winnery (making nickel), operating fork-lifts and a robotics machine.”

“I have had one job and that’s packing and handling.”

“I completed the training course and I did work in the warehouse doing store-person duties and construction had close down, or had gone into production by then. I then went onto another mine site doing cleaning for six months, and then I went back to (contractor) which was store duties as well so I just have the two jobs.”

“Straight after the training they said you can choose where you want to work, so I chose the lab and they gave it to me. (Interviewer: What were you doing in the lab?) I was taking samples and testing the ore.”

“I was a crusher operator at (named mine), and from there I when to (another mine) as a storeman and from then on is was pretty much general labour working in the store for a half a year. And after that we lost the contract and when over to (contractor) and I started doing cleaning.”

“I was assistant tradesman to welders, boiler makers, mickey fitters, and general house keeping around the plant, also forklift driving, scaffolding, vehicle maintenance, storeman duties and a cleaner.”

“I was working underground on the service crew, doing all the general maintenance.”

“It was pretty good were I was working. I was doing ‘Century work’ standby.”

“Yes for six weeks, after the ATP in class then two weeks working experience at (named mine) and they actually put me onto another (named mine) where I was actually getting paid, so if you want to call that employment or not, I mean I was still getting paid. Just once, we did 8 weeks works and one staff on my shift ask me to go and they wanted me to work there and they told me to go and ask the big boss but I got custody of my young brother and I had to leave”

“Yes, two jobs, I was employed for a brief time at (named mine) as a crusher operator. I was casual and after my time was up they didn’t need me any more and they told me I was finished and made me redundant. And I went off to (named mine) as a general hand and that was through (agency) and I was lucky to get up to (named mine). Since completing the ATP A few of us did get employment straightaway.”

Four of the fifteen interviewees did not find employment in the industry after graduating from the ATP. Three responded to the question asking them why they had not got jobs. This is what they had to say:

“No, I went home to Leonora. The manager of the mine site at (place) he told us that he would be calling us because we did it with (company) the catering service. And that he would be calling every Aboriginal person to start employment after they completed the ATP and received their certificates. And he started doing that with some of the people there but then he didn’t. Because when (the mining company) first started up we all went out there to do the catering services and do the food and stuff and some of them people but he didn’t keep his word.”

“I completed the course and got the certificate. I left beforehand and I was basically booted out (and he laughs) and I went back and finished off the shut down”

“I didn’t want to work at (place), so I left the mining industry and applied for another job but I still put my name down to various mine.”

Some were offered short contracts, of eight weeks work and then told to leave. Some were put on 3 months probation and then had their employment terminated, and did not receive a reply to other job applications. Three did the ATP twice, doing it at different minesites in the hope of boosting their employment prospects. One interviewee handed his resume into several mining companies and did not get any

reply. Some graduates reported that ATP coordinators told them that they would be contacted when positions became available. They were then sent home to wait, in a number of instances without hearing anything further.

The ATP's market value

The interviewees were asked about whether or not the ATP had been a help to them in finding mining industry employment. Most interviewees (10 of 15) answered in simple "yes" (six) or "no" (four) terms. Others were slightly more expansive:

"There should have been more help when applying for a job."

"Yes, there should have been more support and help for us all after completing the ATP in getting employment."

"Yes it was a help to me in certain parts like in mining but not in other parts."

"Yeah, it was hard for me because it made me aware of the safety issues within the minesite and because it was a chemical plant, so we had to be aware of all safety issues. So the course did help me in a way."

Difficulties getting jobs

Interviewees were asked whether they knew of any difficulties other ATP graduates had experienced in getting mining industry jobs. Their responses were as follows:

"Yes some of them had no Motor Drivers License and didn't pass the drug and alcohol test and found it very difficult to get employment."

"Four other blokes, they put a party on for us, gave us the certificate and a window seat on the plane and sent us home and said "that was it" and they laughed at us. We even asked the question, "where to from here?", and they just said, "when a position becomes available we will let you know" and that was the last we heard from them."

"Yeah, probably most of them, yeah. They had short term work in the training course there. Like I said, there's just no other way, what would we call it, a career path or something down the track you know."

"There was one lady that I was doing the course with. Every time I would see her up the street and I would ask her was she working. But she didn't have a job because she was one of the groups like me at (named place). Because she didn't have a position, so she was finding it hard to get a placement anywhere, and she was older than me."

“Yes, they experienced the same as me, knocked back for work after completing the ATP.”

“Yes, there wasn’t enough support when it came to family issues, people were really unbalanced by the end of the course.”

“Some times the coordinators had no experience with Aboriginal people and some did but some didn’t know us. They don’t know us well enough to understanding our way or about the Aboriginal culture.”

“Same as everybody like me, no job.”

“They had the same problems as I had, trying to find employment in the mining industry and the same disappointment.”

“Yes the same problems I have had, no response from the mines whatsoever after telling us that they would contact us if anything comes up. But whilst we were down here in Perth we was hearing that there were vacancies out there (named minesite) but they didn’t contact us. When we left (the minesite) that’s the last we heard from them.”

“Yes, many Aboriginal people are in the same boat as me.”

“Yes, one other lady who done the ATP with me found it hard to find employment.”

“Yes, 10 went through the ATP and 3 got jobs and 7 didn’t get jobs and I was one of them.”

“No, only one fellow got a job at (named minesite).”

5.3 WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY

In this section, I explore the nature of mining industry jobs obtained by ATP graduates. I began by asking the interviewees about their current work. It is necessary to recall here that only four of the 15 interviewees were still employed in the mining industry at the time of my survey.

Current work

Interviewees were asked what work they were now doing. The same question was put to all fifteen interviewees. The four working in the mining industry at the time responded:

“I am process operator with (company).”

“I am a process operator with (company) at (place)”

“I am plant operator with (company)”

“I am employed at (place) working in the packing section.”

All four indicated that they were happy with their present jobs.

Seven of the fifteen interviewees had worked for a time in the mining industry, but were not employed there now. Most had found other employment. Two were working in Perth, one an acting Manager in a large Indigenous service organisation, and the other as an Aboriginal Employment Consultancy Officer for a government agency. As chance would have it, the latter now negotiates employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in the mining industry. She insisted: “I try and get them into real jobs”. Two others are now studying at a Perth university, one in a degree level program and the other in a special entry or “bridging” program. Three are currently unemployed, as are all four who failed to find employment in the mining industry in the first place.

Failing to get started in the industry

Of importance is why some ATP graduates made the transition from training program to work and others didn't. The four who had never found mining industry work were of particular interest to me. They were asked about why they considered they were still unemployed. Their responses were:

“I couldn't find a job; there were no jobs out there.”

“I honestly thought that course was a foot in the door for somebody who wanted to enter into the mines who didn't know anything about it. So after finishing the ATP I felt disillusioned about it all and I didn't want to get a career in the mining industry, especially when they treated Aboriginal people like that.”

“The coordinators told us when you finish this ATP we will contact you if anything pops-up. And I heard of a lot of things did pop-up at the mine but none of us were informed.”

“Nobody wants to employ me.”

I then asked the four whether in fact they had sought employment in the industry after graduating from the ATP. Two said they had, and two said they hadn't. The two positive responses, both now framed by disappointment and a degree of disillusion, were as follows:

"Yes I applied for a motorbike mechanic job, and I haven't heard back from them yet or I haven't received a letter from them or anything."

"No, but I applied for a few jobs in different mines and I thought the certificate was enough to get me a job but obviously its not."

All four were then asked whether they had received help in looking for work. Two said they had received no help after their initial failed efforts. The other two indicated that they were still getting support:

"Yes a woman from job futures she rings up all the time if any jobs are coming up and no success so far."

"Yes, through an Aboriginal officer from Job-link."

They were then asked whether they had ever been offered mining industry employment, and if so why they hadn't accepted it. Three said they had not been offered work. One reported differently:

"Yes, they offered me a trainee draft position at (company), I spoke to the lady in HR and I approached the supervisor and accepted the position. Soon after they took all information required and I applied for the position. And then they told me because I previously had a position in business before and I wasn't able to do the traineeship as a draft person because this position has a different criteria, but they never came back and offered me another position."

A further question was intended to explore how useful the ATP certificate had been for the four in their search for work. They were asked whether they had ever been knocked back for jobs for which the ATP had qualified them. Given their earlier responses, this question was rather redundant. In the event, three said no, and the other had this to say:

“Yes, from (company at place). There are not too many mines recognising the certificate. I don’t even know if it’s national accredited. The certificate doesn’t get you a specific position in the mines; it only says that you have completed the ATP.”

The four were then asked about jobs outside the mining industry they might have held since completing the ATP. Two had and two hadn’t. One had done some casual work in the building industry and the other worked with a government agency.

They were then asked to reflect upon the value the ATP had had for them in finding work. All four said that the ATP had not been of value to them in this respect. A follow-up question allowed them to comment on any other value the ATP might have had for them. Two didn’t respond. The other two responded in negative terms:

“No, because they don’t care about you once you leave the minesite.”

“No, not enough information and being left out in the cold and no feedback and no interest in us at all.”

They were then asked what obstacles had prevented them from obtaining employment in the mining industry. All seem to have quite definite views in this respect.

“The colour of my skin and I think it’s because I am Aboriginal. Because most of my whites mates I went to school with and around my age all have got jobs, except me and I have the same education as them. So, yes the color of my skin is an obstacle.”

“I honestly believe that (named mine) they don’t follow their commitments through their Indigenous Employment Policies. I think they fall short and I think it’s a numbers game because if they see we’re running this great ATP for Aboriginal people so we must be trying to solve the employment problem for Aboriginal people. They don’t follow through their commitment employing Aboriginal people in full-time jobs. We did ask (named supervisor) why don’t you earmark jobs specifically for Aboriginal people and his response was. ‘No we can’t do that because there would be an outcry in the mining industry. It would be just chaos and non-Aboriginal people believe that Aboriginal people should apply for jobs like non-Aboriginal people do’. And really that’s the way it is and what he basically said to us. And when we did the course they had this big poster stuck on the wall saying ‘(Company) Indigenous Employment Policy’ stuck on the wall and I honestly think it’s racism also.”

“I have done everything they wanted of me, like I passed the ATP, yet I still can’t get a job and yet all the white-fellas don’t need any training like us but they still get jobs. I know a couple of my white-mates I went to school with that got a job and they have

never worked on a mine in their life before, but they get jobs, so yes, I think its racism.”

“Racism is a big part of it and it doesn’t matter what qualifications you have you’re still treated like second class people. I have got qualifications and I reckon I can get a job there but it racism again that’s preventing me from getting a job at (named mine).”

The respondents’ emphasis on racism as a factor in company employment policies and practices is confronting. The fact is that all four identified racism as the single most important factor preventing them from gaining employment.

The interviewees were then asked whether they would like to work in the mining industry in the future. Their responses indicate that their negative perceptions of the industry had not turned them away altogether. All four indicated that they would like to go back and work in the mining industry and two said that location would not be a problem.

“Yes, I would like to work at (named mine), working in the plant.”

“Yes, I wouldn’t mind a job as a mechanic out there or work processing in the mill and any location it doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, a fair go for our-mob and if the mining industry have made agreements to employ Aboriginal people then they should stick to it and give Aboriginal people real jobs, not promises or training positions.”

“Yes, definitely I would like a job in the mining industry and I would work any way.”

Almost concluding the questions specially targeted at the ATP graduates who had not subsequently found employment in the mining industry, the interviewees were asked whether they would recommend the ATP to any other Aboriginal person wanting to pursue a career in the mining industry, and if so why. Their responses were:

“No, because they will end up like us, unemployed and disappointed, and hold no trust in the mining industry because of the false information they give you.”

“Yes, to get an understanding of the mines and to see if they would like to work in the mining industry.”

“No, because knowing what I know now and being an employment consultant, I would recommend Aboriginal people to contact mainstream HR and be recruited to the mining industry through mainstream agencies. Because we have been approached by various mining companies that have come to us and said we want Aboriginal people who are job ready. But they don’t give us a commitment to employing Aboriginal people. And we say we would like a commitment from you to say that you will employ Aboriginal people but they don’t give us a commitment. I attended a conference today with this company called (name) who employ Aboriginal people right through the remote areas into various positions like; cleaning, cooking, security etc. And the lady said when they do their recruiting they shortlist them and bring them in for a 7-weeks training program. When they do the 7-weeks training program they offer them positions out in remote areas, so the Aboriginal supervisor employed with the company come to us and wants those who are job-ready.”

“No, because of all of the false information, broken promises and no outcome of jobs.”

Finally, the interviewees were asked whether they had anything else they would like to say about the ATP. Three did not comment. One had this to say:

“Yeah it’s pretty hard to get a job out there, ‘cos most of the black-fellows are still working on CDEP. I have been trying for different jobs, showing them my resume and still can’t get a job. I don’t want to work for CDEP. I want to get a proper job like work on the mines.”

Satisfaction in employment

Further questions put to the eleven interviewees who had found employment in the mining industry explored the nature of their work experiences in the mining industry. For some this task was fairly straightforward; for others, especially those who had long since left the industry, the task was more difficult.

The interviewees were asked about whether or not they were happy in their present jobs. Three gave “no” answers, and another a slightly expanded answer to the same effect. All but one of the other responses were positive:

“Yes, I am happy with my actual job, just not happy being in Kalgoorlie. For example, if this mine was in Northam I would live there and I think I would be happy.”

“Yes, I have no problems speaking to the managers. They’re fairly open because it’s a small company. They tell me anything they pretty much want to compared to (two

companies named) where was no communication at all, so the communication is much better.”

“Yes, good work mates.”

“Yes I was pleased.”

“Yes, we were doing store person duties, like picking and receiving material that came on site and then we would distribute them out to the contractors. At that time it was construction stage giving out different material that we had in the store and packing and general store duties.”

“Yes, it was easy for me and it suited me it wasn’t very big but it was good”. (Interviewer: Is there any thing you didn’t like about your job?) “Yeah I didn’t like being treated like a trainee all the time, like I didn’t feel like I had a job and I didn’t liked being watched all the time.”

“No I wasn’t happy working as a (cleaner) but with (contractor). I was happy working in the store.”

“Yeah, it was pretty good because it was pretty easy.”

A further question explored the interviewees’ attitudes to shift work and industry travel arrangements. The responses are not examined in detail in this thesis, but a number of interesting aspects can be underlined. I was rather surprised to find, for example, that shiftwork was popular. Ten of the 11 respondents expressed their liking for shift work. The eleventh had this to say:

“No at the moment I am getting a bit sick of shift work and I have never been a huge fan of night–shift. I prefer day-shift. At the moment I am not a fan having to work on week-end. Because I like playing my sport too much, so I wouldn’t mind trying to find something like Monday to Friday 9 to 5”.

I then asked them what shifts they preferred to work. Their responses were mixed. Ten preferred day shifts, five of them citing family reasons as their rationale; one preferred night shifts; one indicated no preference; and two did not respond. A number answered in terms of work cycles, two preferring a ten days on and five days off routine, while another two preferred a two week on, two week off routine.

Information was also obtained on attitudes to the long hours (10 and 12 hour shifts) typically worked in the mining industry. Only two respondents indicated a dislike for those long hours, with two others indicating they had no strong views one way or the

other. Attitudes were more divided with respect to weekend work, with two indicating their like for weekend work, five their dislike, and four others no particular like or dislike. A similar divided picture was evident with respect to like or dislike for the industry's "fly in-fly out" arrangements, with seven liking the system and four disliking it.

Likes and dislikes

Building on the earlier questions, gave the interviewees the opportunity to identify the things about working in the industry that they most liked. They were encouraged to identify three such things.

Of the fifteen four who had found permanent employment in the industry answered as follows:

"The management and communication was getting better between staff and myself with a diversity of good job opportunities."

"I liked being an operator and working in the plant and liked the good work mates and the idea of working all day shift."

"I just liked to be working out there it was good."

"Everything is OK."

All four commented that the pay was good.

The seven worked for a short period of time and left were given the same questions and had this to say about the three most things they liked about their jobs whilst working in the mines. Two did not respond.

"I liked the pay, shift work and meeting lots of people."

"I liked doing the sampling in the mills."

"I liked working with good blokes at (agency), I enjoyed the shift rosters, the location of (mine) and if I had the chance again I would be working back there."

"I like dismantling things and doing maintenance and hands-on stuff; also I like operating the forklift and learning the process side of it all, the plant."

“The people I worked with, and driving the dozers underground, and hands-on work and the general experience of the mining industry.”

The interviewees were then given the opportunity to identify the things that they disliked about the industry. Again, they were encouraged to identify three things. Three said everything was “OK” and they didn’t comment further. Other responses were as follows:

“It’s not local and it’s not residential. I wish the mine was in town, and I didn’t like the campsite because there was no activities out there, like no swimming pool especially in the heat. Out there, it was boring, and I do not drink (alcohol) and I do not like to hang around in the wet mess (the bar).”

“I didn’t like the smelly acid out there; apart from that it was OK.”

“I didn’t like the cold weather during the winter, the locations of the mine site and if it was closer it would be good, and I would like to see equal rights for Aboriginal employees on the minesite out there because we do not get treated right. We want equal rights for Aboriginal people on any minesite.”

“I didn’t like the heat during the hot summer, the dirt floors and the dust out there.”

“I didn’t like the heat, dust and the noise out there.”

“I didn’t like the feeling of non-Aboriginal people watching you all the time out there. I started feeling like a prisoner at work. And Aboriginal employees were given the poorest jobs out there, you know the Jacky Jacky jobs. Nothing has changed. Why is that?”

“I didn’t like the gasworks, non-Aboriginal employees because the way they looked at us and made us feel, and certain jobs the supervisors gave us made me feel like we were nothing.”

“My supervisor; he didn’t understand me or like me; and I didn’t like the dust out there.”

The interviewees were then given a further opportunity to reflect upon any disappointment they might have had about the ATP. Specifically, they were asked whether they had been disappointed about the job opportunities opened up for them by the ATP. Some of them did not comment. Three said simply that they were happy with the opportunities the ATP had given them. Others had this to say:

“To start with no, I actually enjoyed it because I have never worked on a mine before and I was always interested to see how gold bars were made. I needed a change and

I was looking for other challenges and yes I am getting a bit sick of working in the mining industry and I will be looking for other options.”

“Yes, I thought I would get good jobs like the non-Aboriginal employees do but I didn’t.”

“Yeah, one way we didn’t get a lot of options, like I said, in different areas on the mine-site. We were all just put into one area. Most of us were just put into one area, and that was just the warehouse, not a lot of options.”

“I was disappointed because most of us were given Jacky Jacky jobs like picking up paper, and we didn’t do that training in the ATP, so why do they give us those jobs why not give them to the white-fellas and see what they’d say.”

Extending the line of questioning, the interviewees were then asked whether they believe their current jobs give them sufficient opportunity to build careers in the industry. My interest here was in discovering whether or not they had gained or could see the possibility of a career path in the industry, with their current jobs leading on to better paid and more senior positions, such as a supervisor or leading hand. Four said there were opportunities for advancement, all adding something to the effect that they could go on to something better if they were given a chance and had further training opportunities. Others had this to say:

“As a process technician, the highest you can go is to a shift boss. I don’t know if any cases where shift bosses have actually gone higher, unless they have had university experience. I mean they’re actually at our site, their different crews. Few of the process technicians are actually qualified metallurgists so, but not really, I don’t know.”

“To go further in the mill they must deem your competence. That is, to leave you unsupervised. So you can climb the ladder to further your career with in the mining industry.”

“I don’t think so.”

“No way, given a dead-end job, getting nowhere. You don’t need skills to learn how to use a shovel and rake up and to pick up paper.”

“No way.”

“I get more experience out there in the mining industry. They helped me out in more ways than one than what goes on out there.”

The question about career advancement was then turned specifically to their own particular opportunities for advancement. They had this to say:

“As I said before the highest you can go is a shift boss unless you have had university experience and higher qualifications like yours.” (meaning me the researcher)

“Yes there is a chance to become a supervisor with the more experience I gain along the way. I need two years experience.”

“The mining industry needs to offer further training to achieving more certificates to advance our careers within the mining industry.”

“Yes, no information and no progress report. If you want to climb the ladder further, no-one lets you know how you’re doing. For example, no-one takes a progress report on you and if you wanted to become a supervisor.”

“None at all. Like I said, I felt like a trainee all through the job in the time I was out there.”

“None.”

“Yes, I suppose when training came up you could advance your skills but you need more training.”

“Yes and no; if I finish my studies at university, maybe yes.”

Obstacles to career advancement

The interviewees were then asked about any particular obstacles they had faced to advancing their careers in the mining industry. I wanted to find out from this question if they had actually experienced difficulties in pursuing their ambitions for advancement. Three did not comment. Others had this to say:

“No, not personally all the people out there have been good to me, to tell the truth.”

“Experience is the only obstacle that’s preventing me from furthering my career in the mining industry.”

“I keep asking supervisors for any other work out there and they keep telling me, no. It kind of upsets you when you see other people getting jobs there. And you feel like you’re getting nowhere, when you see non-Aboriginal people getting jobs over you, when you know that you should have got that job because you’ve got the certificate. Yes, we do face an obstacle and it is the non-Aboriginal people getting the jobs over us, that we are trained for, so it would take us 10 times longer to advance our career in the mining industry than a non-Aboriginal people would.”

“Not yet, I suppose I wasn’t out there long enough to face any obstacles”

“Yes the racism and the colour of my skin and I got the impression that we weren’t supposed to be out there. Like all Aboriginal people should be on the dole and not working on the mines. Their attitude is only we white-fellas should be allowed to work on the mines.”

“Yes, there is always an obstacle, one is probably the colour of my skin and because I am Aboriginal, you will always get some racist ones that won’t let you advance your career in the mining industry.”

“Yes, no motor driver license at the moment is an obstacle and I am using my Extraordinary License and I need my ‘B’ class license and I am just waiting on that now.”

Attention was then turned to perceptions of the ATP by would-be employers in the mining industry. Specifically, the interviewees were asked whether they consider employers in the industry recognise the certificate awarded to ATP graduates. Two respondents did not answer. Two said “yes”, three said “no”, another said “no, I don’t think so”, and another again said “No, I don’t know if they did know at the time.” Other responses were a little more expansive:

“They read it on the resume and they should recognise it.”

“Yes, I think it’s because of all the phones calls we made and we kept reminding them like we have got tickets and we are trained for the sort of work out there. And with the consistency of keep ringing and ringing and after 4 months they gave up and we rang HR and a few other supervisors and we even got on the Internet and sent the CEO e-mail. Prior to this, the CEO gave us a lecture and saying that we will get jobs when we finish the ATP. And we made all staff on site aware that we wanted work, because you trained us and then you sent us home.”

A follow-up question asked the interviewees whether they had actually come across any employers or supervisors who didn’t know about the ATP or didn’t seem to value it. Five simply responded “no”. Other responses were:

“Yes, they know about it but they don’t value it because it’s only a ATP certificate in the class. It’s not actually a complete 6 months on the job working. It’s all just a piece of paper to them. It means nothing unless you actually got the experience and the supervisor can leave you on the job unsupervised. They don’t acknowledge quite a few certificates unless you actually got experience.”

“No, what the ATP is doing now is they’re going through HR. Before they used to have (a named employment agency) give all the non-Aboriginal people work and

that's when we slipped out of the mainstream and got our window seats on the plane and sent home. And no-one actually caught on what was going on, like they were giving all the jobs to non-Aboriginal people. And we had 8 people in our class and you trained 8 people and let them go home."

"No, not yet."

"Yeah, I think they were all-aware of it, but didn't value it."

The interviewees were then asked whether they had faced difficulties in holding on to their present job. Five said they had not. Three mentioned racism. Others commented:

"No, just the travelling to and from work."

"Yes short time work."

"Yes, I feel that they didn't want me working out there and this made me feel uncomfortable."

The interviewees were next asked whether they considered they had experienced difficulties working in the mining industry that "white-fellas" might not have experienced. They had this to say:

"No, like I said the people out (named minesite) have been great to me."

"Actually furthering my career, like you would get someone who has run a shift and the same amount of days and amount of months as I have worked and they (the white-fellas) would get a better chance than I would because of the colour of my skin."

"Yes, verbal racism from non-Aboriginal employees."

"Yes, not enough equal opportunities for our Aboriginal people. It's all for the white-fellas, across the board, because Aboriginal people are only about 2 % of the working population. (Named company) used to employ a person to go out and find Aboriginal people who wanted work on the mines, but now they done away with that person now."

"Yes, we Aboriginal people lack in education."

"Yes, the people that I worked with they were good but there was a lot of sarcasm. I think it was because, it had to do with I got a job, like the easy way, on merits, compared to them. You know what I mean; there was a lot of sarcasm like that."

Because I got the job the way I did, because I knew how to do my job properly, I did have good ideas.”

“Yes, general racism and the way the white- people look at you. They would never have to experience this what we have to put up with.”

“Yes, racism; you can sense the barriers.”

“Yes the white-fellas would get more respect than I ever would get. Because I am Aboriginal and I don’t think it’s because I am young at the time it’s because I am black. Some of the time I know I have worked longer than the white-fellas and I am still treated differently.”

“Yeah, see the white-fellas they got a big mob of white-fellas around where I work, and as I walk into the room, I feel shame and that’s why I don’t want to go and talk to them ‘cos I am different colour, see, you know.”

Working with Aboriginal co-workers

The interviewees were also asked about the experience of working with Aboriginal co-workers. To begin with, they were asked whether or not other Aboriginal people were working with them in their particular place of employment. Their responses were:

“No, I think I am the only Aboriginal employee above ground at the moment. I am not too sure about underground.”

“Yes, at (named place) there was only four Aboriginals working there the four years I was there, and in the last two years it was only me and at this present mine, pretty much none besides me.”

“Yes, two males and one female.”

“There was Aboriginal people working out there but not with me.”

“Yes, about 30 at (named minesite).”

“Yes, about seven working at (Aboriginal agency).”

“No.”

“Yes, about 20.”

“Yes, a couple.”

“Yes, two.”

The next question probed their attitudes to working alongside other Aboriginal people. Their responses were:

"It doesn't bother me."

"Confident."

"Yes, I like it."

"Makes you feel good like having a brother with you (and he laughs)."

"Good. I would feel very comfortable."

"Yes, it feels good. We should be like the white-fellas; they all work together, why can't we?"

"How would I feel, I would have preferred at least one."

"Very good and comfortable."

"Yes I feel good and I prefer that should be more."

"It's good."

"Yeah, I felt good that there were Aboriginal people out there who I could relate to and have a yarn to."

The following question was pitched along similar lines. It asked whether the interviewees would prefer to work amongst Aboriginal people. They had this to say:

"Doesn't really phase me, to tell you the truth. I mean I get along with both people."

"Yes, because the more Aboriginal people out there gives you more confidence."

"Not really."

"Yes, it makes you feel good working alongside a brother or sister (and he laughs)."

"Yes definitely."

"Yes, I prefer to work amongst my own people just like the white-fellas do."

"Yes."

“Yes, I felt very relaxed to work amongst other Aboriginal people, just like non-Aboriginal people would feel relaxed to work amongst their people. Imagine just four or five of them white-fellows working among 4 to 5 hundred Aboriginal people. I am sure they would feel uncomfortable and would like to see more of their own people working alongside of them.”

“It doesn’t really bother me.”

“Yes, definitely.”

The interviewees were then asked whether, to their knowledge, if there were any Aboriginal supervisors in the mining industry. The question elicited one bald “no” and other more positive responses. A number of respondents took the opportunity to say that they would prefer to work under an Aboriginal supervisor.

“I have never really thought about that to tell you the truth. Yeah I guess that doesn’t really phase me at all. Well I get along with both; I don’t have any dramas.”

“No, yes it would feel good. The communication would be better.”

“No, yes, they have a better understanding of the Aboriginal culture then a non-Aboriginal supervisor ever would.”

“Yes, better understanding of Aboriginal culture and people, plus you got someone to talk to.”

“Yes, BYAC has Aboriginal supervisors, because they know more about our culture than a non- Aboriginal person would ever know.”

“Not where I was working, but yes, it would be good to see an Aboriginal supervisor working on the mines. I would be very proud of them.”

“That could be yes and no, but generally speaking yes, I would prefer to work under the supervision of an Aboriginal person. An Aboriginal supervisor would be much easier to talk to and to get along with each other, and you don’t feel that discrimination which is really good.”

“Yes, like they can talk for us and back us up because they know how we feel. Being an employer and he can employ us, he’ll know what we’re going through and understand us and that, yes and it would be good to have an Aboriginal supervisor.”

“Yes, I suppose as a support blanket and network.”

“Yes, because they understand more about Aboriginal people, whereas non-Aboriginal supervisors don’t.”

Work relationships with non-Aboriginal persons

Work relationships with non-Aboriginal persons were then explored. I asked the interviewees whether they had experienced difficulties in their relationships with non-Aboriginal workers that had been difficult to resolve. I was interested in this respect in learning whether attitudes had changed over time, and particularly whether there had been any discernible changes as a result of the various cultural awareness programs that had been around for some time. From the answers received, the conclusion seems to be that, for some, things have changed for the better, while for others nothing much seems to have altered. Three simply said “no”. All of the others had experienced or witnessed such difficulties. This is what they had to say:

“Yes, I experienced verbal racism from a few of them white-fellas.”

“No very good.”

“No, but I knew when someone was racist. There was this guy out there that never said anything but you can just tell. It’s blackfellow instinct.”

“Yes, I have experienced both verbal and mental racism.”

“It depends. People were different. Some were OK, and some just didn’t want to talk at all, so you just avoid them and some would avoid you.”

“No, I could sense it was there, but it wasn’t directed at me.”

“Yeah, always like being classed second to them, you know, the white-fellas. They think that we know nothing and they give us the shitty jobs, so it holds us back from trying to apply for other jobs there. Like in the (named mine) dining room, you got all the white-fellow on one side and the black-fellow on the other side. Some white blokes would come up and have a yarn. When you’re sitting in the bar you will have a couple of white-fellas that thinks they’re pretty smart and start to make trouble. Some of them will get let off and they just want to make trouble looking for a fight. They end up getting two blokes the sack from there, when we told the security guards and went to the supervisor the next day and they was flown off site.”

The next question was directed at discovering whether the interviewees knew of any other Aboriginal person in the industry who had experienced discrimination that had been difficult to overcome. One said “no”. The others could all readily bring to mind incidents that had disturbed them:

“Yes in the ATP.”

“Yes, verbal racism.”

“Yes, one male he copped it verbally from this white-fella.”

“Yes, a few of my friends have.”

“No, yes, an Aboriginal male he was doing the course with me as well. He told me when he was in the workshop, he said that the same guy I thought was racist and he got that same feeling; that fellow was a bit rude to him, like snobby.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, they’re always saying that they think they’re better than us, and treat us like as if we’re nothing.”

“Yes, when I was doing the ATP there was this white lady and this traditional fella from (place) to (another place). When we were in the computer class, the white lady who was there told this other black lady, she goes on, can you go over and get me this chair because I am going to help this guy. But we were already helping him (he started laughing) and she said you get up and get the chair yourself.”

Following up on the questions about discrimination, the interviewees were asked whether they had received help in resolving the particular problems they had faced. In asking this question, I was interested in hearing the extent to which some of the established advocates in the industrial and public sphere (Aboriginal liaison officers, counsellors, union representatives, security guards, or managers) had been called upon. The answers received suggested that little recourse was had to such persons:

“Yes definitely, the first person I would speak to is my shift boss. Then after that he would speak to his boss who is the metallurgist; after that is the General Manager of the mine-site.”

“No support.”

“No, only the coordinator of the course, the ATP.”

“No, there was no one to talk to about the issue; you just had to grin and bear it.”

“No-one to talk to about the issue.”

“No, we had to deal with the abuse ourselves.”

“No.”

“No, I just had the rest of the group of us Aboriginal workers.”

“No, they expected us to talk to the supervisors about the issues. Like I knew somebody who I don’t know if he was the mine manager or something like that but I went and spoke to him because he knew my family. And he knew my dad. And I think my boss or supervisor’s boss got pissed off with me because instead of going and talking to them, I went above them and spoke to the big boss. So yeah, we have to deal with it ourselves and turn a blind eye to it.”

“Yeah, there was an Aboriginal male officer, I think he was; he said if anything happened just come and see him, but we really didn’t need him ‘cos we got security guards.”

Doing things better

The interviewees were then asked whether anything could have been done differently to make it easier for Aboriginal people to get jobs and get ahead in the mining industry.

“I must admit it, it would help if there were Aboriginal supervisors out there because there are a lot of Aboriginal people that would want to work for Aboriginal supervisors but I think it’s up to the individual, to tell you the truth. Let’s be honest there are a lot of Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie who don’t want to find a job. They don’t really want to do anything so it’s up to the individual. Like as I was saying before, I have never had any problems with people at they’re being racial. So I guess Aboriginal people who want to try and get a job at (named mine), well they can’t really use that as an excuse. Because I haven’t had any dramas with any people at all, if you ask me it’s definitely up to the individual.”

“Give them more of a chance.”

“Yes, more Aboriginal supervisors for a better understanding.”

“Yes, more Aboriginals support officers and professional people out there so you can go and speak to someone in confidential circumstances.”

“Yes, Aboriginal people prefer hands-on training rather than coursework.”

“Yes I think at the beginning I didn’t know anything about the mining industry and I didn’t know where I wanted to work. And I think if they gave us a bit more exposure to more job opportunities, first to the minesite and then if we could choose to go in the Lab, give us a bit more training in that direction instead of wasting their time with us. There was a lot of wasted time with things.”

“Yes, the culturally awareness training maybe to touch up on a few points was good.”

“Yes, a support network team like a Aboriginal liaison officer, or someone you can talk to like or some Aboriginal person in HR, yes just a lot more support network like

a psychology support team. Just an Aboriginal person to talk to who could understand us better.”

“I think we need Aboriginal liaison officers and counselling and the support team of professional Aboriginals.”

“Yes, employ more Aboriginal people and supervisors just like the white-fellas. They have all that, why can't we, and that would make it better for Aboriginal people.”

The interviewees were then questioned about family influences on their employment in the mining industry, beginning with a question as to whether any other members of their family were working in the mining industry. I was rather surprised to discover that all either had or have family members working in the industry. Two said their fathers used to work in the mines. Four said they have brothers working, and another said a son. The others were not specific.

The interviewees were then asked about the support they receive from family members for their work in the mining industry. All indicated that their families were supportive, without volunteering further information. Two were a little more forthcoming.

“All the way, my parents do support me.”

“Yes, obviously 'cos dad used to work in the mine and I guess mum and dad are just happy as long I've got a job and not bumming around, and staying out of trouble and just sort of paying my own way.”

I then asked whether the interviewees were aware of Aboriginal people walking away from jobs in the industry. This is a question that had been in my mind for some time, as explained in Chapter One. Two simply answered “yes” and another three “no”. Other answers were:

“Yes, I have heard of one Aboriginal person being sacked.”

“Yes, this Aboriginal female was constantly being harassed by this security guard. Another female and me was working for the same company at the time witnessed it. And finally she couldn't take any more of it and just got up and left, because of being harassed by this security guard. I drove her to the gate because she had no-one to talk to and she was very emotionally upset. When we sit outside of our rooms having a beer after work and the security guard was on duty and out of the crowd he would pick her out and start harassing her for no reason. He has now left the site. She had no support, no-one to talk to, and that's why she left.”

“Yes, I have seen plenty Aboriginal people walk off the job for lots of reasons.”

“Yes, it all comes back to racism and I suppose training has a lot to do with it to”

“Couple of blokes they couldn’t put up with the crap from the tradesmen and the white-fella supervisors and just had enough of the place and just walked off. (Researcher: And if they had had a support team of Aboriginal people out there, would they still be working out there now?) Most definitely.”

“Yes I have, when I was doing the ATP at (named minesite) this guy had finished the ATP before me and he got a job driving the trucks. And some of the guys were giving him shit. He came back and spoke to the coordinator about it. The coordinator had a yarn with his supervisor because I think he felt he couldn’t speak to his supervisor about it; and when he went back, his coordinator went to his supervisor and I think they came to an agreement.”

5.4 LEAVING THE INDUSTRY

The questions in this part of the questionnaire were directed toward the seven ATP graduates who had worked in the mining industry for a time after completing the ATP but had since left. Later, it was ascertained that two of the seven had been sacked and five had voluntarily left the industry. Two of those who had left “voluntarily” had little choice: one was pregnant, and the other left after failing a drug test. One of those sacked said that his dismissal had been “*self-inflicted*”, while another said that he was still unsure “*why I was sacked.*” This is what the seven had to say about their work experience and why they left the mining industry prematurely.

“I was sick and tired of doing the same things for 18 months and needed a change but there was no other option but to leave.”

“I was casual and after my time was up they didn’t need me any more and they told me I was finished and made me redundant.”

“I was pregnant, that’s why I left the mines.”

“Generally, I left because of the feeling I had about being there and the people just got sick of me I guess, plus I failed a drug test.”

“There was a cutback with positions with everybody and I was one of the unfortunate ones.”

“I got sacked. I still don’t know why. They didn’t give me a valid reason, and they said they didn’t think I was ready to work on the mines. I asked the guy for the

reason why he fired me and I didn't get the reason I expected, that I wanted, like. I still didn't get a reason."

"Too far away from home and being away from home and plus just the workers there they white-fellas are up themselves. (Interviewer: Is that why you left the mines?) Yeah them white-fella, they like to tell you to go and ask for a job and that, but it's like you will hear another story. They tell someone else to go and ask for a job, so like they don't care. They try and show you that they care about you but really they don't; they just make it good for themselves."

The interviewees were then asked whether they would ever go back to the industry. They were encouraged in answering this question to identify anything that could be changed to make a return to the industry easier for themselves and others. Interestingly, all said they might one day go back to the industry, and all readily identified changes that would make it easier for them to do so.

"Yes, on-the-job training for Aboriginal people and trained by an experienced Aboriginal person."

"Yes, to have more help and support when you need it. And I would go back to the mining industry on a heart beat."

"Yes, I would like to see more Aboriginal employees and supervisors and leaders in higher position like you. (Researcher: Meaning me?) Yeah. So we can talk to them, and have a support team to help us through our difficult times. If they had had all this support team out there when I was working there, I would still be working out there and so would a lot of other Aboriginal people."

"If they gave me a job that I wanted to do, yes. (Researcher: And what would you like to see changed to make it easier for you?) I would like to see some Aboriginal supervisor in the mainstream of the plant and then the support officer and that would be really good. And a bit more siding done about racial discrimination out there and a policy should be put into place to stop this stupid behaviour by these certain white-fellas. They should be moved offsite and educated a bit more."

"Yes, I would like to see more Aboriginals employed there because of the agreements that they made. And they suppose to employ 20% of Aboriginal people out there. And when I was working there, I was the only Aboriginal person there, and I felt a bit uncomfortable, thinking why aren't I working with Aboriginal people?"

"Give the white-fella more knowledge about the Aboriginal culture, like you see one bloke walked off the job (Researcher: An Aboriginal employee?) Yeah and they think we're all like that, and that we are all going to walk of site and we are all the same."

A follow-up question explored whether the interviewees considered they would have still been working in the industry if things had been different at the time.

“Not really, I like it here in Perth. One day I might go back to the mines if things change.”

“Yes, definitely.”

“Yes, as I said before, if they had all this support team out there when I was working there I would still be working out there and so would other Aboriginal people.”

“Yes, if I were appreciated more and had more opportunities to better my skills, yeah.”

“Yes for sure, but they have to make changes to suit us too.”

Concluding the questions in this section, the interviewees were asked whether there was anything else about their experiences as an Aboriginal person working in the mining industry that they had not previously mentioned. All but one felt that they had already had the opportunity to say what they wanted to. One interviewee had this to say:

“Yes, I think there are some important issues out there that need to be dealt with and something needs to be done about certain issues out there. There are a lot of issues but at this time of day I can’t think of anything. But I feel I wasn’t given a fair chance. Sure enough, I had family issues and problems of my own and I had to be dedicated to my work, whereas I might have let them down with my work once or twice. The supervisors don’t care about if you have family problems. They think you signed a contract and you’re here to work regardless of personal problems. Their attitude is ‘that’s your problem to deal with not mine.’ Something should be done about these issues to prevent things like this happening again.”

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have laid out my interviewees’ responses to questions about their experience working in the mining industry. In this connection, I have explored why they were (and, in some respects, continue to be) drawn towards employment in the mining industry, what sorts of employment they ultimately found, what their employment experience has been, and why more than half are no longer in the industry.

My data reveal considerable differences within my survey population with respect to what we might call their mining industry experience. The biggest contrast is between those who have remained in the industry, those who have left, and those who never

made a start. In general, those who have remained in the industry are the most positive about the industry and the work experience, those who never joined are the most negative about the industry, and those who started but have since left are somewhere in between.

What is chicken and what is egg in this regard is rather difficult to define. It seems that the positive expectations of some interviewees have been a significant factor in encouraging their search for work in the industry, as well as in keeping them there when the going has been difficult. Conversely, the negative expectations of others have limited their search for employment, and made them particularly sensitive to the failings of the industry. It seems clear that the employment experience itself has disappointed many, including those still hanging on to jobs, causing a hardening of ATP graduates' attitudes to particular companies, to non-Aboriginal co-workers and supervisory staff, and to the mining industry generally.

Against that background, a number of themes in the interviewees' responses are especially worthy of attention. One strong theme is that the ATP has been a worthwhile though overdue venture, delivering expanded opportunities to many of its participants. In that connection, the efforts of existing mining companies to promote Aboriginal employment are also regarded as worthwhile, by some but not all. A related theme is that better outcomes could have been achieved had there been more consistent industry commitment to achieving the desired employment outcomes. Three aspects feature strongly in interviewee responses in this regard—the frequent failure of existing mechanisms for helping ATP graduates make the transition from training program to paid employment, the presence in the workplace of attitudes and practices offensive to Aboriginal workers, and the limited opportunities for “real” jobs and career advancement. Their disappointments and frustrations aside, the interviewees seem to have been saying that some good progress has been made, but a lot more needs to be done.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES REVISITED

At the beginning of the present thesis, I outlined my growing interest in Aboriginal participation in the mining industry, particularly in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia, my own traditional country, and the region where I was born and raised. I explained that my research was directed toward learning more about how Aboriginal people could participate more effectively in the mining industry, now and in the future. In this regard, I have focused specifically on the Aboriginal Training Program (ATP) devised to assist prospective Aboriginal entrants to the mining industry, a program that has now been in existence since 1997. The broad question I have explored is how effective the ATP has been in increasing Aboriginal participation in the mining industry workforce. In seeking to answer this question, I have sought to foreground the voices of the ATP's Aboriginal participants.

As detailed in Chapter One, my broad interest in the effectiveness of the ATP gave rise to five more specific research objectives, as follows:

- To identify and examine the background and characteristics of the persons who have enrolled in the ATP over the past decade.
- To document the experiences of Aboriginal participants in that program, both within the program itself and subsequent to it.
- To examine the impact of the program in encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.
- To identify potential obstacles to Aboriginal employment and career advancement in the mining industry.
- To identify ways in which the program could be changed in order to enhance its effectiveness in promoting greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

Each of these is addressed in the following pages of this chapter.

In pursuing my research objectives, and in keeping with my commitment to foregrounding Aboriginal voices, I have worked with a sample of (15) ATP graduates, conducting in-depth interviews exploring both their ATP experience itself and their experiences in the mining industry after graduating from it. As previously stated, the interviews were wide-ranging in the coverage, allowing the interviewees to speak in their own terms about themselves, the reasons they were initially drawn to the ATP, what they now recall about it, how they see it as having prepared them for mining industry employment, and how they might like to see it changed to better serve its intended purposes. The interviewees were also given substantial opportunity to speak to their experiences and perceptions of the mining industry. My main interest in this respect was in identifying any obstacles they had encountered to getting jobs and advancing their careers.

My sample of interviewees was, in so far as I have been able to determine, broadly reflective of the ATP enrolment population as a whole. Nevertheless, it is not possible to claim that it is a fully representative sample. To make that claim, I would have required more information on past participants in the ATP than is available. To cover the many differing variables in the ATP enrolment population, I would also have required a substantially greater survey population than my research circumstances allowed. To some extent, in this regard, I have traded off sample size against the length and depth of the interviews conducted. The advantages of doing so, I trust, are apparent. The disadvantage of the small sample size is that it has been possible only to a limited extent to make meaningful quantitative sense of the interviewees' responses to the various questions posed. In presenting the results, therefore, I have tried as far as possible to let the interviewees' answers speak for themselves.

6.2 THE RESULTS OBTAINED

Background and characteristics of ATP participants

In Chapter Four, I have described in detail the background and characteristics of my interview population. In this respect, I have presented information relating to age,

gender, place of birth, place of origin, family and household circumstances, prior education and training, and prior experience in the mining industry. Because no comparable data exist for the ATP enrolment population as a whole, it is impossible to say that my interview population was fully representative of the broader ATP enrolment population in any or all of these respects. Recognising this limitation, I have chosen to speak of my interview population as being “broadly reflective” rather than “representative” of the ATP enrolment population as whole. Evidence in support of this contention comes both from my own knowledge of the industry and the ATP and from the detailed information presented in Chapter Four and Appendices One and Two.

A striking feature of my interview population, small as it is, is its diversity. Thus, for example, the ATP graduates interviewed ranged in age from older adolescents and young adults through to those in their late 40s. They included people from various parts of Western Australia and beyond, with a roughly equal split between those associated by birth or family association with the Eastern Goldfields and those whose primary associations and affiliations are with other parts of Australia. My interview population also included people of differing prior levels of educational attainment. The principal differences in this respect were a function of age, those who had completed their schooling more recently generally having stayed at school longer than those whose schooling was completed in the more distant past. My interview population also contained significant differences with respect to family and household circumstances. Of special interest, my interview population also included persons of both genders, with fully a third of those interviewed being women.

Perhaps even more important than the contrasts within my interview population were the things in common. Without exception, all of the interviewees were at the bottom end of the Australian socio-economic scale. All had had limited formal education and training, and continued to be handicapped by that fact. All had had limited prior success in the employment market, and were conscious of their marginality in this respect. In other ways too—in terms of health, family situations, housing, and general self-esteem—all had been disadvantaged by past government policies and community practices. Sadly, as became increasingly clear as I progressed through my interview schedule, those disadvantages are not all things of the past: the

interviewees are all living with their continuing consequences; and the prejudiced attitudes continue to operate in various spheres of their lives. In each of these respects, all of the fifteen individuals who together formed my interview population continue to be disadvantaged in the employment market and workplace, and in the community generally. The degree and consequences of this disadvantage is, in my view, all too easy to underestimate, especially by non-Aboriginal people who are not confronted by it on a day-to-day basis.

While my interview population may not be a fully representative sample of the ATP enrolment population as a whole, or to the segment of the Aboriginal population targeted by programs such as the ATP, I believe it provides some guidance to those responsible for planning, delivering and evaluating such programs. In this regard, I have pointed both to the diversity within my interview population and to shared disadvantage and marginality. Clearly, the ATP has been pitched at a broad catchment population, and it has been successful in drawing Aboriginal people from a variety of circumstances and backgrounds. Responding both to that diversity and to the shared disadvantage and marginality is at the heart of the challenge faced by compensatory or facilitating programs such as the ATP.

Experiences within the ATP

The ATP is designed to promote Aboriginal employment in the mining industry by providing its participants with the skills and knowledge needed to obtain long-term and satisfying jobs with genuine prospects for career advancement. The program delivers a wide range of skills and background information, together with opportunities for on-the-job training. While the program is specifically targeted at the mining industry, it also makes a broader contribution to promoting Aboriginal employment by imparting generic work and life skills.

Most of my interviewees indicated that that they came out of the ATP with enhanced skills and knowledge which they expected would increase their chances of employment success in the mining industry. Perhaps of equal significance, most graduates reported emerging from the ATP with enhanced confidence about their ability to get and hold down jobs, and about the opportunities likely to be available to them. The fact that a majority of graduates (11 of my sample of 15) actually

succeeded in gaining mining employment suggests that the ATP has made an important contribution in enhancing Aboriginal employment prospects.

Varied views were expressed about how well the ATP has actually worked, and where it could be improved. In broad terms, the different responses correlated with the post-ATP employment experience. Those who had obtained and remained in mining industry employment were the most positive about the ATP's benefits. Those who had not found mining industry employment were the most negative, and those who had found and left mining industry employment were somewhere in between. It is hard to know in this respect what is cause and effect—whether the negativity toward the ATP reflects post-ATP frustrations and disappointments or whether the real or imagined failings of the ATP were a significant factor in the somewhat patchy post-ATP employment experience.

My interpretation of the results obtained is that there is a bit of both chicken and egg involved. The ATP seems to prepare some graduates for mining industry employment better than others, and one significant dimension of this is the degree of confidence and self-reliance it imbues in its graduates. Those who have little confidence in their own ability to find meaningful work for themselves are inclined to expect failure and to experience failure, and to think negatively about what the ATP did for them. Those with more confidence are more self-reliant and less discouraged by setbacks, and ultimately are more successful in employment.

While their views of the ATP were interwoven with their employment experiences, it is noteworthy that all interviewees were willing and able to put their own particular experiences aside to some degree in commenting on the ATP's value. They expressed strong “in principle” support for the ATP as a program addressing specific Aboriginal training and education needs. The ATP is seen as serving an important and valuable service in offering expanded employment and career opportunities to its graduates. The criticisms of the ATP, such as they are, are not that the ATP is unnecessary or that it is poorly conceived and delivered. Rather, they are about things that could be done better. In this respect, the main message from the interviewees is that more care needs to be taken in explaining what the ATP can and can't provide by way of guaranteed employment prospects, that there needs to be

more meaningful integration of the ATP's coursework and on-the-job training components, and that there needs to be more follow-through with respect both to the initial transition from the program into employment and to longer-term work and career issues.

In response to various questions, the interviewees had other important things to say about the ATP and the mining industry. Two strong themes were evident in their expressed viewpoints. One is that Aboriginal people want and need "a chance", a real opportunity to improve their situation. This requires in turn good information, meaningful opportunities for "decent" jobs (not the "Jacky Jacky" jobs that some now feel they are being restricted to) and good continuing support from those involved in running the ATP and from the industry itself, along with genuine opportunities for career advancement. The second theme is that Aboriginal people continue to be disadvantaged by their Aboriginality, in terms of lack of prior training and education opportunities, continuing racist attitudes and practices, and their own lack of self-confidence and self-belief. Those themes speak powerfully in favour of programs such as the ATP, but also that they have to be equal to the challenge.

ATP effectiveness in promoting job and career outcomes

In examining programs such as the ATP, it is important that we reflect upon the programs themselves and participants' experiences within them. That's often what is done when "exit surveys" are conducted, usually in the immediate aftermath of a program being completed. But what happens after the programs are completed is also very important, perhaps even more so. Do the graduates make that transition from training program to work? Do some manage and others not, and if so why?

At the point of emerging from the ATP, it seems, all graduates were confident about their future employment prospects in the mining industry, though past setbacks and rebuffs were also weighing on their mind to some degree. The latter seems to have led to something of a "wait and see" attitude, particularly on the part of those with the least prior positive experiences in employment and non-Indigenous society generally. Eleven of my 15 interviewees made the transition from the ATP to settled employment in the industry; four did not. Of the eleven, four now remain in mining

industry employment. The others are either now unemployed or have moved on to other employment fields. For the reasons previously discussed, my interview population cannot be taken as fully representative of the ATP enrolment population as a whole, and therefore it would be inappropriate to extrapolate general trends and patterns from my interview population's employment statistics. Nevertheless, the patchy post-ATP employment record of my interviewees cannot easily be dismissed as unreflective of Aboriginal experiences in the mining industry generally. As my review of the available literature demonstrates, the order of the day in the mining industry are low rates of Aboriginal participation, high rates of attrition, and continuing issues of workplace conflict and adjustment. My study speaks to these issues, whether or not different numbers and percentages might apply in other instances.

On the face of it, the ATP has prepared graduates for employment. That is acknowledged by those who found jobs, and to an extent it is conceded by those who failed to do so. Some had not worked on the mines before, and have enjoyed the opportunities and challenges it has brought in their jobs as mill and plant operators, haulpack truckdrivers, four-wheel driving, and store duties. They have also liked meeting new people, forming relationships with work mates, and simply “having a yarn” with the people they have met in the course of their work. In this context, they have accepted and adjusted fairly well, it seems, to the industry's demands and opportunities. All indicated that “the money” (wages) is good. Working shift work and long working hours have also been taken in their stride by most, though for some—and for the women in particular—these aspects of mining industry employment created conflicts with family demands and responsibilities. There was a broad though not unanimous view that communications between Aboriginal workers and their supervisors and other non-Indigenous workers were improving, though most agreed there was still much room for improvement. There was also the view that getting ahead in the industry was possible, but difficult, and that more opportunities would have to be provided for there to be genuine prospects of career advancement.

The ATP seems also to have made a small but significant contribution to encouraging Aboriginal women into the mining workforce, some into traditional

female positions such as receptionists and “girl Fridays” (general office duties), and others into what have been until recent times male preserves (such as driving haulage trucks). These successes aside, there is clearly much still to be done if substantial numbers of Aboriginal women are to be drawn into the mining industry and given opportunities to build long-term careers within it. Retaining Aboriginal women in the workforce may prove to be even more significant in the long-run than attracting them to it in the first instance. That will require a thoughtfulness that is, arguably, not there at the moment. An illustration might make this clearer. One of my interviewees had got a job in the industry, with which she was reasonably happy and in which she intended staying. She fell pregnant and left her job to have her baby. She indicated to me at the time I interviewed her that, now her child is no longer so dependent on her, she would love to have her old job, and this work would be helpful to her in providing for herself and child. At the time she had tendered her resignation, she had not been aware—and had not been made aware—that she could apply for unpaid maternity leave. Had she been so advised, she says, she would be back at her old job at the first opportunity.

This particular woman’s disappointment that she had not been properly advised about her rights and entitlements (in her case, in relation to eligibility for unpaid maternity leave) points to some more broadly-based concerns about post-ATP employment. These concerns were most evident among the interviewees who’d gained work in the industry but since left. Most had serious complaints about their employment experience. A common theme in their complaints is that they’d been given the “Jacky Jacky” jobs, that is, poorly paid and unskilled positions such as picking up paper and emptying rubbish bins. They wondered in this context why they’d bothered with the training. Had it all just been a sham? They wanted the jobs for which they thought they’d been trained: jobs that would allow them either to work as or to start on a career path that would allow them to work as mill operators, plant operators, truck drivers, mechanics, and cooks. They wanted and expected jobs, “real jobs” and real job guarantees.

Deepening their disappointment, a number of my interviewees had also experienced difficulties in their relationships with their supervisors and fellow workers, in some instances compounding the emotional stress of personal and family problems.

Interestingly in this context, a number suggested that they might have remained in the industry had there been appropriate professional support, especially professional Aboriginal support, to assist them through their difficulties.

The level of disappointment and frustration experienced by ATP graduates entering the mining industry needs to be acknowledged. Their disenchantment with the industry goes a long way toward explaining why the greater number of those who had found work in the industry (7 of 11) had either voluntarily left or had put themselves in a situation to be sacked.

In sum, it seems evident that the ATP has made a significant contribution to promoting Aboriginal employment in the mining industry, but much of its good work seems to have been undone because the realities of the work made available to ATP graduates have not matched their hopes and expectations. Indeed, it seems that those hopes and expectations have been trampled upon in some instances, rather than having been simply brought down to earth a little. As a result, some of the potential positive outcomes of the ATP have been lost, and a degree of disillusionment generated.

Obstacles to Aboriginal employment and careers

In some respects, the present topic (obstacles to Aboriginal employment and careers) has been covered under the previous heading. In this section, I expand the discussion of difficulties faced by ATP graduates in getting mining industry jobs, holding them, and developing careers.

As discussed in Chapter Five, three points cropped up repeatedly in my interviewees' responses to questions about their post-ATP employment experience. They are: the inadequacy of existing mechanisms to help ATP graduates make the transition from training program to work; the presence in the workplace of attitudes and practices offensive or discouraging to Aboriginal workers; and the industry's apparently limited commitment to providing ATP graduates with "real" jobs and career paths. I want to dwell just a little more on these before going on to my interviewees'

suggestions about how the ATP could be redeveloped to make it work to better effect.

The question of transition from training program (ATP) to work is clearly something that requires continuing attention. Close attention needs to be given to the promises made or implied when the ATP is being advertised, promoted and delivered. It might be that ATP course participants have assumed or hoped for more than the ATP actually promises to deliver, or indeed is in a financial or contractual position to deliver. What is in no doubt is that among ATP graduates, certainly among those I interviewed, there is a great deal of disillusionment and resentment on the part of those who were not successful in finding the jobs they had come to believe would more or less automatically follow successful completion of the ATP. Better and more consistent communication in this respect is required—in relation to the ATP participants' own rights and responsibilities, in relation to what the ATP can and cannot deliver and to its post-graduation responsibilities, and in relation to the industry's obligations and expectations. Better information and communication are obviously crucial, and it would be wise in this respect, given the past track record of misunderstanding and confusion, for all those involved in planning and delivering the ATP to err on the side of “over-communicating” rather than “under-communicating.” It is also crucial that actions match the words, and this in turn seems to suggest the need for better “systems” of administrative support and follow-up. That suggestion might require an expansion of the ATP's current responsibilities and of the resources upon which it draws.

Also requiring attention are workplace attitudes and practices offensive or discouraging to Aboriginal workers and prospective workers. My interviewees spoke in this respect of quite a few things. Several were particularly emphasised. One was the “run around” experienced by a number of my interviewees when they were applying for jobs. They recounted instances where they handed in job applications and resumes to particular companies but received no acknowledgement and no further response, even after repeated telephone calls. Instances were also recounted of mining companies telling job applicants that they needed 12 months work experience before they could be employed. The message given is that the ATP is not, in itself, a bridge into mining industry employment, except to the degree that

particular companies choose to make it. Another message is that particular employers will invoke whatever excuse they like if they want to stand in the way of someone getting a job. Too often, it seems, it is Aboriginal people who suffer from this attitude. The conclusion that quite a number of my interviewees had drawn was that the “colour of their skin” (that is, being an Aboriginal person) was still a powerful obstacle to their gaining decent jobs and decent careers. If that is the message that particular employers are sending, and it seems to be, then the industry as a whole ought to be gravely concerned.

The list of concerns about working in the mining industry does not stop at the “run around” associated with failed job applications. Even those who managed to find work in the industry have concerns about what they experienced, and these concerns have undoubtedly played a part in ATP graduates leaving the industry, often with a deep sense of frustration and disappointment. In this connection, quite a few of my interviewees expressed the view that there were big barriers to advancing their careers in the mining industry, and that these barriers were linked to entrenched negative attitudes toward Aboriginal people. One interviewee, for example, recalled repeatedly being rebuffed when he ask his supervisors if there were any other jobs coming up, only to see non-Aboriginal workers get jobs after “coming in off the street.” In other instances, the job and career disadvantages facing Aboriginal workers, present and prospective, were a product of things over which the industry had little direct influence—the Aboriginal person’s failure to obtain a police clearance because of past difficulties, an inability to pass drug and alcohol tests, and the absence of a motor driver’s licence. But while the industry, and those involved in planning and delivering the ATP, can do little directly about those handicaps, they form part of the package of disadvantage that the industry and its educational partners have an obligation to address. If inroads cannot be made on this front, the ATP will continue to work best for those who need it least and to work poorly for those who need it most. The industry should also be very careful not to devalue by its words and actions one of the few currently available programs (the ATP) that promises some hope of a desperately needed way out of poverty and social exclusion.

Enhancing the program

Many of my interviewees were disappointed with what the ATP had achieved for them personally and disappointed generally in its outcomes for Aboriginal people generally. On the other hand, they recognised the ATP as an important if overdue initiative and they respected the good intentions and efforts of those involved in its planning and delivery. Against that background, they offered various thoughts and suggestions about how the ATP could be made to work to even better effect. These have been discussed in Chapters Four and Five. The underlying themes are worth returning to.

From the viewpoint of looking at the ATP's future, the most important theme in my interviewees' responses is that it has been a worthwhile initiative—and especially from the angle of allowing some Aboriginal people to make a start in the single biggest industry in the Eastern Goldfields region. It has done this, the interviewees have reported, by giving its participants knowledge about the industry's varied opportunities, by imparting to them some of the information and skills they need to work in particular jobs in the industry, and by raising their level of confidence and self-belief.

The obvious implication of the generally favourable responses to the ATP and what it has been trying to achieve is that “more of the same” would be even better. That “more of the same” could be in the form of more fully achieved outcomes (greater knowledge of the industry, specific job-based skills, greater graduate confidence and self-belief) or of greater number of enrollees and graduates. This, however, brings us to a second strong theme in what the interviewees had to say about the ATP. Their appreciation of the ATP is much influenced by their knowledge that the ATP has not delivered for themselves personally or for Aboriginal people generally all that has been hoped for and promised. In this respect, relatively little was said about the real or perceived deficiencies of the ATP as such; on the other hand, a fair bit was said about how the ATP could be made to work better by what I will describe as a more integrated approach to program development and implementation. Some minor suggestions were made in this regard about modifying, perhaps by diversifying, the current classroom content and delivery of the program, but the major suggestions

about improving the ATP were about the steps preceding and following its classroom component.

In terms of the steps preceding the ATP's classroom component, the emphasis in the interviewees' responses was upon better information and clearer expectations. Promises should not be made that cannot be kept. It is, of course, necessary to raise the hopes and expectations of ATP participants and prospective participants, and to this extent some level of disappointment might lie in store for those who, for whatever reason, can't capitalise fully on it. However it is also important that the hopes and expectations created are based on a realistic assessment of the opportunities and challenges ahead for ATP graduates, and that they be made aware from the start of the pitfalls and challenges ahead of them. Ideally, the message should be that if they play their part, others will also do so. This brings us to the steps following the ATP.

Two things stand out in the interviewees' reflections on their post-ATP experience. One is that there was insufficient administrative back-up and follow-through, especially in relation to the all-important challenge of finding work and then of assisting the graduates in building viable and productive careers in the industry. This is an issue that must be addressed by all involved in planning, delivering and funding the ATP. The second main point is that the industry's day-to-day practices have to change if the mining industry is to succeed in its expressed hope of enhancing Aboriginal employment and business opportunities. Some companies are clearly doing much better in this respect than others. Some, it has to be said, seem to be quite happy to say and do the right things when it suits, and to go their own way when it is convenient or expedient to do so. A more systematic and thorough commitment by the industry as a whole is needed if further progress is to be made in advancing Aboriginal employment and business prospects.

6.3 LOOKING FORWARD

This thesis has explored the Aboriginal Training Program, an important initiative designed to promote Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. My research has foregrounded Aboriginal voices on the ATP. In my research I have not sought to

establish, other than by listening to what my interviewees were telling me about their experiences with the ATP, the truth or accuracy of what they had to say. Nor have I tried to incorporate the viewpoints of the many different people the ATP brings together in a sense—those involved in its planning and delivery, those responsible for its administration and oversight, its counsellors, the specific companies supporting particular offerings of the ATP, general industry representatives, and the many individual companies and employees “on the ground” who have to respond in some way to the ATP qualification and ATP graduates. It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that some of the matters my interviewees commented on—things like getting or not getting jobs, getting the sack, experiencing on-the-job conflicts, and so on—would be seen or described in very different terms by some or all of the wider ATP constituency. It is even possible, again perhaps even likely, that some or all would dispute the contentions made by my interviewees.

My purpose in undertaking the present research has not been to provide a comprehensive and “balanced” view of the ATP from every angle and perspective. Rather it has been about letting Aboriginal voices be heard, on something that affects them very directly, and with a minimum of preconception and judgment. The commitment to letting Aboriginal voices speak can be seen as both the strength and limitation of my research. My results speak to Aboriginal perspectives on the ATP, and they are important on that account. They do not speak to non-Aboriginal perspectives. Those non-Aboriginal perspectives are also important. Hopefully, they will be examined in other research, perhaps research by other Indigenous scholars.

In foregrounding Aboriginal voices in relation to the ATP, I have foregrounded Aboriginal hopes and aspirations, as well as Aboriginal frustrations and disappointments. To me, my interviewees’ message seems to boil down to this: the ATP has offered and achieved a lot, but there is room for substantial improvement. If that substantial improvement is to be achieved, as I hope it will, all who constitute what I have described above as the “wider ATP constituency” have to play their part. I trust that, in giving voice to some ATP graduates, my thesis will contribute a forward-looking review and revamp of the ATP. I will consider my job well done if that proves to be the case.

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APPENDIX ONE

Enrolment Completion Statistics, Aboriginal Training Programs, Minara Resources
1999 – 2003

(Source: Information provided by Minara Resources)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Grand Total*
Course start numbers	12	21	37	25	25	120
“No-show”, day one of program	-	-	7	3	2	12 (10%)
Termination throughout the course	-	5	8	6	6	25 (21%)
Commenced employment prior to completion	-	-	-	4	2	9 (8%)
Graduates	12	16	24	12	15	74 (62%)

*There was one program offered in 1999, two in 2000, three in 2001, two in 2002, and 2 in 2003. The figures below are aggregated for the year. Course numbers for each individual offering varied from 10 to 13, and graduates from 2 to 12.

APPENDIX TWO

Graduates Employment Statistic Aboriginal Training Programs, Minara Resources
1999 – 2003

(Source: Information provided by Minara Resources)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Grand Total
Graduates employment by Minara	9	9	8	5	5	36
Graduates employed elsewhere	3	7	11	8	5	32
Total “employed outcomes”	12	16	19	13	10	68
Not employed “but suitable for employment”	-	-	3	2	3	8
Not employed “not suitable for employment”	-	-	2	1	3	6
Total not employed	-	-				14
Grand Total	12	16	24	12	15	74

The terminology used in this table is that employed by Minara.

The discrepancy between number of graduates and number of “employment outcomes” is explained by the fact that 4 participants in the 2002 offering of the ATP left the program prior to graduating in order to accept employment in the mining industry.

APPENDIX THREE

INFORMATION SHEET

This research is motivated by a wish to better understand Aboriginal participation in the mining industry and to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people who work in the industry.

Title: “Promoting Aboriginal Employment and Training in the Mining Industry of Western Australia: a case study from the Goldfields Region of Western Australia”.

This project seeks to investigate an Aboriginal employment and training program operating in the mining industry in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia. The central question is how can Aboriginal people who wish to participate in the mining industry be effectively supported to enter, remain in and advance within the workforce, thereby increasing the extent of Aboriginal involvement in the future?

The specific objectives are:

- To identify and examine the background and characteristics of the persons who have enrolled in the ATP over the past decade.
- To document the experiences of Aboriginal participants in that program, both within the program itself and subsequent to it.
- To examine the impact of the program in encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.
- To identify potential obstacles to Aboriginal employment and career advancement in the mining industry.
- To identify ways in which the program could be changed in order to enhance its effectiveness in promoting greater Aboriginal participation in the mining industry.

This research project will examine an Aboriginal employment and training program in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia. This inquiry will document the experiences of Aboriginal participation in order to present an Aboriginal perspective on this program. To do this I will undertake semi-structured in-depth interviews with approximately fifteen Aboriginal trainees undertaking on-site-training in the mining industry.

Supervisors of trainees working for companies involved with the Aboriginal Mining Training Program and associated sub-contractors will also be invited to contribute information to identify potential obstacles to Aboriginal participation in the mining industry. A questionnaire will be used to obtain information from non-Aboriginal employers and trainers about their experiences of hiring, training and working with Aboriginal people.

The researcher will ensure that all participants are fully informed prior to their participation in the project. To protect their rights and interests, the following procedures have been put in place:

- Participants in the interviews and questionnaires will be advised that their involvement is completely voluntary.
- All research data collected from participants will be stored in a locked secured cabinet for five years at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, and thereafter destroyed.
- Any information given by participants will not be used for any purpose other than for the research.
- Anonymity of participants will be guaranteed.
- Participants will have the right to amend interview transcripts.
- Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

This project has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any queries or concerns at any stage of this research project, please contact any of the following:

- Supervisor contact: Assoc/Prof Will Christensen. (W) (08) 9266 3769 Faculty of Media Society and Culture, Division of Humanitarian, Curtin University of Technology.
- Researcher contact: Mr Dennis Noel Bonney. (H) (08) 9331 4005 (M) 041 991 6061.
- Secretary: Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology (08) 9266 2784.

APPENDIX FOUR

Consent Agreement Form

I, -----, of -----

-----, Agree to participate in the research project developed by Dennis Bonney entitled, **“Promoting Aboriginal Employment and Training in the Mining Industry of Western Australia: a case study from the Goldfields Region of Western Australia”**.

I understand that this project is a requirement of a Masters Degree in Indigenous Research and Development at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology.

I sign the following consent form on the understanding that:

- All information provided by me will protect my anonymity.
- All information given by me will be kept confidential.
- Information given by me will not be released to any other person without my consent.
- Any information I give will not be used for any purpose other than for this research.
- My comments may be tape recorded with my verbal consent at the interview.
- My comments may be quoted in the thesis but not attributed to me personally.

I have been fully informed of the aims and methods of the research project and I understand that I am able to withdraw my consent at any given time.

(Interviewee)

Signature: -----Date: -----

(Researcher)

Signature: -----Date: -----

APPENDIX FIVE

INTRODUCTION LETTER

Dear

Hello my name is Dennis Bonney.

Re: Interview

I am writing to seek your help in a study of students who have completed the Aboriginal Training Program set up by mining companies or are currently working in the Mining Industry.

I would appreciate it if you would be willing for me to interview you. The main question I hope to investigate is “how do Aboriginal trainees describe their experiences in the mining industry”. The interviews would take about one hour. I would be willing to interview you at your house or any other place of your choice, wherever you feel most comfortable. The interviews will be tape-recorded. I will explain more about the interviews when we meet.

I am currently studying at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology Perth. Where I am enrolled in the (Indigenous Research and Development) program.

My project title is:

“Promoting Aboriginal Employment and Training in the Mining Industry of Western Australia: a case study from the Goldfields Region of Western Australia”.

I intend to investigate the experiences of Aboriginal trainees in the mining industry in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia. I wish to record your experiences of the workplace. I believe this knowledge and understanding will help employers and trainers and will benefit Aboriginal employment in the mining industry in the future.

I will ring you during the week to book a day and time that suits you for the interview.

If you have any concerns or you can't make it to the interview, please phone me on the numbers below to make another arrangement.

Home: (08) 9331 4005
Mobile: 041 991 6061

Regards

Dennis Bonney

Tuesday, 3 February 2004

APPENDIX SIX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADM	Argyle Diamond Mine
AEDP	Aboriginal Employment Development Policy
AEP	Aboriginal Education Policy
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Services
ATR	Aboriginal Terms of Reference
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATP	Aboriginal Training Program
BHP	BHP-Billiton
BYAC	Burnna Yurral Aboriginal Corporation
CAF	Consent Agreement Form
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CDO	Community Development Officer
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
ERMP	Environmental Review and Management Plan
GEMCO	Groote Eylandt Mining Companies Operations
IEC	Indigenous Employment Centre
IPIM	Indigenous People in Mining
KCGM	Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines
MSC	Minesite Security Consultants
PEEDAC	Perth Employment Economic Development Aboriginal Corporation
RCIADC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WA	Western Australia
WAAECG	Western Australia Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
WMC	Western Mining Corporation
WONGGAI	Name for persons and language from the Goldfields

APPENDIX SEVEN

Figure 1
Map of
Eastern Goldfields

