

School of Education

**Backboards to blackboards - rebounding from the margins;
A critical auto/ethnographic study of the struggle for culturally-
sensitive educational pathways for Aboriginal girls**

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Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

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.

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

Signature:

Helen Christine Dominica McCarthy

Date: 15th November 2010

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Abstract

This PhD research journey describes my personal and professional involvement with the Yolngu, Nyoongar and Wongi peoples, where I consistently observed Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal teachers express dissatisfaction with the way mainstream Anglo-Celtic education was delivered in their schools and communities. This disparity never sat well with me and I had always wanted to write about the unacceptable inequity.

As a consequence this doctoral research deploys a critical auto/ethnographic research design within an interpretive paradigm where “the writing process and the writing product are deeply intertwined”. The research became the site of exploration about the struggle for culturally-sensitive educational pathways for Aboriginal adolescent girls.

The investigation took place at a metropolitan Aboriginal secondary school, where staff developed an emergent curriculum framework known as the Yorgas Program to re-engage Aboriginal learners in their schooling, through a sporting program known as the “Girls’ Academy”. As a consequence of the Yorgas Program there were observable improvements in the girls behaviour leading to regular attendance, improved personal hygiene, greater commitment to study, self-regulation and willingness to defer risk-taking social behaviours resulting in a significantly larger number of Year 12 graduates completing their studies with the majority of students going on to traineeships or further studies.

Disclaimer

An examination of the history of British colonialism and slavery throughout the world reveals that one of the first acts in the process of oppression has been the de-identification of the intended victims and a replacement of their names with labels such as “indian”, “aborigine”, “native”, “black” or “nigger”. Less concern is likely to be expressed for the oppressed or murdered if they are unknown (Fesl, 1993, p. xiv).

In this research thesis I use the term Indigenous reluctantly, my preference is to use the term of the local “Aboriginal” peoples’ in their geographic homeland. For example in this PhD dissertation Wongi/Wonggai refers to local Aboriginal people where I live in Esperance, Western Australia, Australia. As well there are variations in the spelling of clan names and languages across the regions. I was guided by a Wongi Elder who told me that the songlines or dreaming tracks of the Wongi, “span from the west to Ravensthorpe and east to Eucla, which includes Esperance, north east of Cosmo Newberry and south of Wiluna” (J. Dimer personal communications, 1999). Non-Aboriginal people are referred to as Wadjula or Wadjella or White Fella.

When I refer to the Nyungar/Noongar I am talking of the people in the territory of the Nyungar which extends from “...the Geraldton district south along the coast to Cape Leeuwin, continuing south-east almost to Esperance and then in line north-west to rejoin the coast at Geraldton. It is an area of almost 3,000,000 hectares” (Green, 1984, p. 1). In this context I also refer to the non-Aboriginal people as Wadjula or Wadjella’s or White Fella.

I refer to the peoples in the north east region of Arnhem Land in northern Australia as Yolngu and the non-Aboriginal people as Balanda. The people of The Island are known as Warnumamalya and the non-Aboriginal people are called Dumangkadirra.

When doing this research, most of the metropolitan based students were Wongi and Noongar, however the regional and remote students came from various communities in the Murchison, Pilbara and Kimberly regions of Western Australia, to my limited knowledge, belonging to Banyjima, Nyiyaparli, Innawonga, Karajarri, Jabirr Jabirr, Warrwa, Bunuba, Bardi Jawi, Nyangumarta and Mangala people. Instead of referring to their country I have used the term Aboriginal interchangeably

with Indigenous. As such, within this dissertation the term Aboriginal refers to mainland Aboriginal peoples, and the term Indigenous is articulated to mean both mainland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Nomenclature

I acknowledge the colonial legacy in the naming conventions and recognise Aboriginal people's ambivalence towards the proper nouns; Indigenous and Aboriginal.

Further throughout the dissertation I have intentionally chosen not to use the term Western when referring to dominant mainstream white Australian society, but rather call this social order Anglo-Celtic interchangeably with colonist. I am cognisant of and acknowledge that contemporary Australian society is constructed on a foundation of ethnicities far broader to those who first invaded. As such, I begin this paper in the spirit of reconciliation of past differences, helped by contemporary black African writer Malidoma Some who argues, "there is an indigenous person within each of us" (as cited in Tacey, 1995, p. 137).

Throughout this PhD dissertation pseudonyms have been used, however I wish to advise Aboriginal readers that there are images and stories relating to deceased people.

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Preamble

A long time ago nestled between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean on the tropical island of the Dominican Republic, a mulatto girl named Salomé Ureña was born. Remarkably in 1878, in a time when women were not taught to read or write, she became the inaugural winner of the Dominican Republic National Medal for Poetry. At the peak of her fame she gave up her notoriety to start the first school for women since she felt it was completely shameless or “una decencia” (Alvarez, 2003, p. 211) to be creating poems that only half the population were privileged to read and as legend has it, set herself the task to build a nation of literate women, “girl by girl”.

She in turn gave birth to a daughter named Camila, who lived a life very different from her mother. Camila’s world was conservative, affluent and comfortable. When she turned 64 years old she travelled to Cuba to be a part of Castro’s revolution, to establish Literacy Brigades whose radical goal was to recruit thousands of volunteers to teach peasants to read and write, and as a country achieve widespread literacy. When asked by her students why she gave up her security and status she said simply without fanfare, “I came to help” (Alvarez, 2003, p. 211). Alvarez believed this humble respect for human life resonated louder than any resistance, any reformation, or any revolution. In her historical novel about Ureña, she said her story reminded her that often things can be changed through simple quiet actions such as, “a group of women wearing kerchiefs and black dresses and practical tie shoes circle a plaza in Argentina. A handful of women in a Greek village refuse to sleep with their husbands until they end a war” (Alvarez, 2003, p. 212). She claimed that, “I want to posit the small, sometimes invisible but utterly powerful way that we can be a force for change” (Alvarez, 2003, p. 211).

Her claim for a “force for change” is also my intent. I wish to posit my small unremarkable story. I want to take the reader on a journey along a meandering pathway that reveals in time, a sequence of events that has led me to undertake a similar, though less dangerous, pilgrimage to that of Camila, since like her, I too “came to help”. In another time, to another tropical island in far northern Australia, referred to as “The Island” throughout the dissertation from now on, I travelled. I

came to help but found others had come before me. They were the colonists and the missionaries: the first, invaders who brought with them their incivilities, while the other had brought with them their dogma. I had to be mindful not to be as zealous. For me it started with my meeting of a like-minded young woman named Jara Amarda who wanted to achieve widespread literacy in her community. Our friendship was born from the shared force of wanting to craft ways of learning, that were a little different to those espoused by some mainstream government Departments of Education for the teaching of young Aboriginal learners.

I acknowledge that in addition to data generated through an in-depth ethnographic study my personal memory, the auto/ethnographic aspect of this thesis, serves as a primary source of information. My story is structured around a collection of my pedagogical journals and diary entries drawing on artefacts and experiences written. This type of research according to Chang is, “a rigorous ethnographic, broadly qualitative research method that attempts to achieve in-depth cultural understanding of self and others” (Chang, 2008, p. 57). I derived this ultimately from living, working and playing basketball with Jara Amarda – a young Aboriginal woman. I spent about ten years in her community and school, being a part of her daily life and she of mine which included the sacred rites of ceremony. Thus I witnessed her mature from a young girl into an experienced educator and leader.

Since much of my life has been intricately interwoven around teaching in exhaustively absorbing Aboriginal communities trying to separate my professional life from my personal life has been problematic. Geertz’s (1983) concept of the blurred genre becomes the most pragmatic model of how best to document the undertaking of autobiography within auto/ethnography. Instead of merely describing what happened in my life, I try and explain how fragments of my memories are strung together to clarify what Chang (2008) referred to as understanding or justifying cultural tenets and relational connection with others in society.

A story to start the story

Yukurrirridangwa (The Sawfish)

On one of the islands, known as The Island, in Arnhem Land, northern Australia, is a long meandering river that was made by the sawfish or Yukurrirridangwa, using its serrated, elongated nose to diligently carve an opening through the jungle and rock escarpment, towards the centre of the island. As it laboriously journeyed through the earth, other sea creatures like the turtle and the stingray and the barramundi, swam behind in its wake and kept telling it whenever it tired, to keep going because they needed a pathway to get to the centre of the island to the source of important mythological knowledge.

However, the sawfish story is not my clan's story to tell, it belongs to the Larra, one of the other several clans who inhabit The Island. To me, the story of how the sawfish made the river's path is reminiscent of Jewish American poet Marge Piercy's poem titled *For Strong Women*, who writes of a woman who takes on a similar responsibility to that of the sawfish. A strong woman she says, is a woman determined to do something others are determined not be done. The poem describes an image of a woman relentless because, "she is trying to raise a manhole cover with her head; she is trying to butt her way through a steel wall. Her head hurts. People waiting for the hole to be made say, hurry, you're so strong" (Piercy, 1982). Her strength does not come from sheer brute force but rather, "...she enacts it, as the wind fills a sail" (Piercy, 1982). I start this research journey like the barramundi and the stingray, waiting for the sawfish to undertake its notable obligation. Likewise, I am the one who wants to encourage others to push through and up so the grinding hard work of creating a pathway is achieved. I feel like I am the one now saying, "I need to get through. If I can, I have come to help".

Chapter 1 – Introduction

For strong women “I came to help: resistance writ small” (Alvarez, 2003)

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide an overview to my story, weaving together my experiences of the historic past and my investigation of a metropolitan Aboriginal secondary school, where staff developed an emergent curriculum framework to re-engage Aboriginal learners in their schooling, through a sporting program known as the “Girls’ Academy”. It presents an outline of the attendant critical auto/ethnographic methodology and illustrates how the research was structured and conducted over time. Further, (1) it gives a historic account of the program’s life, (2) foreshadows briefly the results of the research and (3) outlines and contextualises the thesis structure and chapters. Furthermore I invoke auto/ethnographic writing as the method of my inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

I alert the reader to the various voices embedded in the story by the use of a variety of fonts: Aboriginal yarns that have been traditionally told orally and have been passed on in writing are set in Lucinda Fax font, Size 10 in a text box with 5% grey shading, while entries from my teaching journal appear in Trebuchet MS font Size 11. Student Commentaries are presented in Century Gothic font Size 10, Staff Commentaries are set in Arial Narrow font Size 12 and my own - the Researcher Commentary - appears in Californian FB font Size 12. I have used text boxes to indicate data sources which include journal entries, oral stories, participants’ testimonies and photographic representations. Poems I have penned are set in 12.5% grey shading in a text box surrounded by an intermittent line border. A glossary in the Appendix is provided to explain the meaning of particular words especially those written in the vernacular. The definitions given are my understanding of the meaning of these words rather than scholarly linguistic interpretations.

Background of the study

Like many serendipitous things, my story started when I was presented with the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal peoples, which very quickly grew into a commanding fascination about the uniqueness of Indigenous socio-cultural and

linguistic practices. Often overwhelmed but always engaged, I have been personally and professionally involved for over thirty years, physically and spiritually embedded within these practices. I lived and taught in remote and isolated Aboriginal communities both in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and in rural communities in Western Australia. Over the natural course of these years and in spite of my many shortcomings, without condition, I was accepted into the extraordinarily complex and fascinating Aboriginal kinship systems. A white woman from Esperance in the south east of Western Australia, I was befriended and cared for, and with these friendships firmly forged, enabled to share unforgettable and awesome Aboriginal experiences. Similarly, I was meticulously taught incredible things and bestowed the privilege to participate in certain ceremonies as a member of one of the clans. I think back to when I was first learning, the sheer importance of what I was involved in, often caused me to completely forget what I was supposed to do or where I was supposed to go. Instead of chastising me, the ladies would laugh and affectionately tease me about my clumsy novice ways. Always through humour, they would encourage me and patiently re-show me the procedures and eventually through repetition or mimicking, I remembered the complex ceremonial sequence.

I didn't notice at the start of my teaching internship - it only occurred to me later as I travelled to the different schools as an advisor working with neophyte teachers - that the art of teaching Aboriginal students seldom appeared to engender these same qualities of engagement. I considered the ways that I was being taught by Aboriginal people and then re-considered the ways I was teaching Aboriginal children. I realised that their strategies for engagement and the ones I had been taught at university, were diametrically opposed. Consciously, I began to mimic the Aboriginal teacher's style of teaching and to my surprise; subtle changes began to occur in my classroom. Aspects such as anticipating or interpreting the sly sign language that deviously erupts into teasing, allowing me to defuse a situation often with humour, well before it became a full blown chair throwing debacle, or ameliorating the teacher/student hierarchy by relating to the students on the basis of their distinct special relational connection to me. I began to observe that I was more likely to get the students to school on a daily or at least regular basis, if they themselves could see the value of attending. Attending school is not necessarily a

priority in many communities, although students will turn up if they relate to the teacher, even when they are not entirely convinced that the knowledge the teacher is imparting, is at all relevant to them. As the years passed, I found myself documenting and emulating more and more Aboriginal ways of teaching suggested to me by the Aboriginal teachers and members of the wider Aboriginal communities. It seemed I could differentiate between the classroom behaviour of students whose teachers used Aboriginal ways of learning and those who did not. It appeared a discord existed between the two cultures and the structure and modus operandi of many of the schools which were not necessarily engaging Aboriginal students as well as they could have done.

Two Way Learning Model

Over several years I listened to, and heard the requests of scores of Aboriginal parents and community elders about how they wanted their children taught, and how they were gravely concerned that the mainstream ways of schooling were prejudiced to their Aboriginal ways of knowing, unfairly eroding their cultural uniqueness by undermining their Aboriginal identity. They felt that the responsibility of government public servant workers coming into their communities was to assist them, in a bipartisan undertaking to achieve Indigenous self determination, self sufficiency and cultural sustainability.

In the eighties I felt that there had been a growing undercurrent amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators indicating a distinct preference towards the Two-Way Learning Model where the, “students’ learning experiences count as much as the teachers’ knowledge. This “Two Way” learning is also reflected in sharing authority in which learners assist in formulating the curriculum” (Burns, 1995, p. 233). By incorporating negotiated course content in both, Standard Australian English and the vernacular, enabled students to operate as effectively as they possibly could in both worlds. I believed this Two Way Learning Model – or as many Aboriginal people called it, “Both Ways” was seen as a breakthrough because there had been an increasing mood of disenchantment about the role education was taking. Throughout the dissertation for purposes of consistency I refer to this model of learning as Two Way. I was heartened by a spate of national and international research and dissent that was beginning to percolate up against the dominant

conservative neo liberal view of what constituted education. Under siege by shifting government policies, one dissenting voice in particular got my full attention. According to Giroux (2001) knowledge and scholarship had been watered down to a “market driven ‘consumer juggernaut’ reducing education to training for conglomerate gain” (2001: xxviii). Giroux advocated that pedagogy was not just something that went on in schools, but rather it had to be posited at the very centre of what should be about the discourse of freedom and social responsibility. He, along with others, claimed that students from subordinate and marginalised groups continued to be silenced by exclusion and ideological distortions ensuing that another “... whole generation of poor, young people of colour is being lost to the excruciating devastation of bad schooling, poverty, hopelessness and joblessness” (Giroux, 1992, p. 4).

Unequivocally Giroux called for educators to become engaged and to create alternate public spheres. Describing these educators as “border crossers” he warned they had to take up the dual task of not only creating new objects of knowledge, but to also address how inequities, power and human suffering were rooted in basic institutional structures. He referred to the seminal works of Dewey (1916) who had also argued that a liberal education afforded people the opportunity to involve themselves in the deepest problems of society, to acquire the knowledge, skills and ethical responsibility necessary for “reasoned participation in democratically organised public” (Giroux, 1992, p. 97):

What is at stake here is not simply the issue of bad teaching, but the broader refusal to take seriously the categories of meaning, experiences, and voice that students use to make sense of themselves and the world around them. It is this refusal to enable speech for those who have been silenced, to acknowledge the voices of the other, and to legitimate and reclaim student experience as a fundamental category in the production of knowledge. That the character of the current dominant discourse on the canon reveals it totalitarian and undemocratic ideology (Giroux, 1992, p. 95).

Quintessentially Giroux, (1981) argued if pedagogy was inattentive to the histories, dreams and experiences that students bring with them to their learning place, regardless of what other quasi supportive structures may be place, it will not promote trust and respect. This viewpoint drew an assenting accord with me, it resonated deeply and reflected the way I was feeling and thinking based on my own

personal lived experience. I knew Giroux was accurate to assert that these historical socio-cultural characteristics must be inclusive in the learning milieu, substantiating the reason for why a student would choose to engage and retain what they learn in an attempt to improve the quality of their life. Likewise, Principal Mandawuy Yunipungu (1989) from Yirrkala Community School in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory concurred:

What we want is BOTH WAYS education – Balanda and Yolŋu ways – but we want the Yolŋu to have control over both sides of the curriculum. We want our children to learn Yolŋu culture and history from the Yolŋu point of view. We do not want to keep the Balanda content out of the school, but we want control over the Balanda content. We want to decide for ourselves what our children learn about the Balanda world. We all, Balanda and Yolŋu are trapped by our past experiences of school the Balanda way (as cited in Marginson, 2002, p. 197).

This belief was widely held in Arnhem Land when I first started teaching in the early eighties. I can readily recall how community members would sit under the bough shelters in the soft river or beach sand close to where the classes were taking place, and observe what was happening. Likewise if a student was not behaving in a way deemed appropriate, a custodian would casually walk over, sit down and work with the child until the child settled into the task. The bilingual learning program was intricately linked with the seasons and the ceremonial cycles, so the children's education was seldom interrupted by their schooling. Bilingual education was abolished in the Northern Territory on 1 December 1998. According to Nicholls (2005) the axing of the bilingual programs, "ran counter to the oft-articulated wishes of the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal community members" (Nicholls, 2005, p. 161). Nicholls argued that no hard evidence was ever provided to prove that bilingual education was failing students, "the government's lack of endorsement of Indigenous languages programmes ultimately discredits the status of Indigenous languages by undermining their legitimacy in Australian classrooms, and by extension, in other social settings as well" (Nicholls, 2005, p. 165). Nothing replaced the profound void that existed after the Minister for Education directed the Northern Territory Department of Education to close down all bilingual programs. The dynamic element of greater involvement and ownership of community members teaching the vernacular and sharing Two Ways in the school never returned. This vital integral element of what went on inside schools was now largely unseen and

unheard by parents and community members, as they were no longer a central part of their children's learning.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry

It seemed that as Aboriginal students disengaged and became truant, their irregular attendance often resulted in them leaving school prematurely with underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills, thereby diminishing many future opportunities. This inequality never sat well with me and as a witness I have always wanted to write about this unjustifiable paradox, but it seemed the pathway to achieve this had been blocked by my life circumstances. Through writing this doctoral thesis now, an opportunity appears. This research journey describes my long term personal involvement and professional career, as I consistently observed Aboriginal parents' and Aboriginal teachers' dissatisfaction and dis-ease with the way education was delivered in their schools. Like the possibility of the pathway carved out by the sawfish to traverse its way to the source of knowledge, or the breaking through of the steel wall, head butted until finally holed, I am able now to push through. I feel that I have eventually found a means to write the story of my experiences of what was/is occurring in some parts of Australia in Aboriginal education. Doing this research has placed me in a position to investigate what can possibly happen when a school applies an alternative method to re-engage its Aboriginal students in an attempt to "hook" them onto learning, which is meaningful and consequential. However, as a white Australian woman I feel I must preface my thesis and couch my involvement with some caution:

Non-Aborigines have always thought they know the solutions to Aboriginal problems and with the best intentions and, sometimes at great personal cost, devastatingly implemented them.

Whether or not they were 'good' or right solutions, they were always wrong. This is not a moral judgment. Change in society is brought about by decisions taken by individuals who judge, to themselves, whether or not to commit themselves to action.

The people whom the change will effect (sic) are best placed to judge, implement and later accept the consequences of their decisions. Any decision taken by outsiders for others penetrate, if at all, only the surface of the problems they seek to alleviate (Coombs, Brandl, & Snowdon, 1983, p. 19).

Cognisant of this pragmatic advice I remain committed; but I know I will most likely only “scratch the surface”. I have focused the ethnographic component of the research on an innovative sporting program specifically designed for a small group of “at risk” adolescent Aboriginal girls. During my fieldwork I worked with Aboriginal College staff who understood that the prevailing systems of teaching and learning needed something “more engaging” for their Aboriginal adolescent students, and who consequently designed a program that connected their Aboriginal ways of knowing with their preferred ways of learning. These educators set about developing an emergent curriculum framework, where learning was more akin to “wonder” and was highly collaborative - what might look like playing sport and having fun is in fact, a serious time-invested inimitable formation of a young person, who under the watchful eyes of a school and wider community, can evolve into a promising, resilient and principled citizen. As one of the students attested:

“The environment, you know, being around all the girls and stuff...and then we got the Basketball Academy there to keep us on track. Then we had Coach Reed and Aunty Justine on your back about attendance and stuff.

Like rockin' up to classes and then when you were in class, you could see Aunty Justine or Aunty Lore or someone like peepin' in and marking the roll, and when you see that and then you go, “Oh no, they do check up on you (laughs) and that makes you go to every class but it's good”.

It was good to be a part of something other than just school work and that was probably one of the reasons why you went to school. As well you knew that there was a trip at the end or that you would get rewarded” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 13).

Irrespective if I only scratch the surface, this dissertation is positing a small unremarkable story that may possibly in the fullness of time, assist girls make a significant difference in their own lives.

So why me?

Recently while sorting through some archived literature regarding Aboriginal student achievement through sport, I re-discovered a book given to me by Lizard Jaragba for my birthday in 1985, titled *Daughters of the Dreaming* written by Australian anthropologist Dianne Bell. Wedged in between the pages was an envelope. It was a letter written to me by one of my undergraduate university lecturers, whom I had met years later returning to university to complete some postgraduate studies. He was

astounded to see me back, even turning up to classes, since I had seldom attended during my undergraduate years. Then, he had tolerated my naive endeavours to establish some symbolic stance of individuality by writing my essays, like the distinguished African American feminist *bell hooks*, all in lower case letters. I had decided that I would become *helen cd mccarthy* to distinguish me from all the other Helen CD McCarthy's in the world. From then on he referred to me as "cd" and while we had our heated differences of opinions, beneath my adolescent angst I saw him as an authentic educator, one who had lived Indigenous experiences, the very same experience I was so hungry to become immersed in. The letter went like this:

Dear cd,

Your letter was beautiful and I was thrilled to hear from you. As I read your letter I couldn't help but feel that schools and tertiary institutions tend to start with people and by the time they have been through the system they have become sausages - all the same all strung out on the same thin twisted line - all stuffed with the same ingredient - all stuffed! Tell me how did you escape the sausage machine? Where did we go wrong? (N. Green, personal communication, May 31, 1985)

While I may have been successful in surviving the "sausage machine" I fell certain victim to the ideological furphy that Australian parents had an unambiguous right in determining their children's education vis-à-vis their specific styles of learning or ways of knowing.

This critical auto/ethnographic study represents the dis-ease I experienced when this furphy became evident to me, both professionally and personally due to my close involvement with Indigenous peoples for over a quarter of a century. I have spent this time observing the ways Aboriginal teachers impart knowledge to their students, which differs from how the mainstream system whose educational curricula and policies seldom acknowledge, or venerate students' Indigenous ways of learning. Herein presents the unjustifiable paradox that I referred to previously, Aboriginal epistemologies from my observations appeared complex as well as accomplished and yet were not permitted to exist. The contemporary mode of teaching Indigenous learners attempted to assimilate emic knowledge into a curriculum constructed on only dominant mainstream ideologies. In Arnhem Land the Gumatj speaking Yolngu School, Dhupuma College, established at Nhulunbuy

incubated an entire cohort of both Yolngu and Balanda educators and students in Two Way education. The success of Dhupuma College was unprecedented and in 1978 the Northern Territory Government closed it down and instead opened a rural college in Katherine. By the time I arrived in Arnhem Land in 1981, communities were still lamenting its loss. Batchelor College attempted to harvest the ground swell of Two Way education proposing ways of increasing Aboriginal cultural content in to the school program, ethos and message systems and generated pedagogical principles for Aboriginal Teacher Education. However regardless of the stellar achievement of Dhupuma College, over the course of my career a plethora of reports, royal commissions and studies appeared to provide substantiated evidence that many Indigenous learners have been disadvantaged in their schooling. With validated authentic research corroborating this claim, not much seems to have changed: schools continue to be constructed in the Australian context, on colonialist or Anglo-Celtic paradigms of non-Aboriginal knowledge and many Aboriginal students seem metaphorically “stuffed like sausages” to fit into them.

Similarly schools are more than likely to be staffed with non-Indigenous teachers, whose teaching techniques often involve didactic and direct questioning styles, maintaining constant emphasis on writing, within linear time frames, with lots of eye contact concentrating on individual achievement whilst engaged in empirical thinking, engrossed with future orientations and an apparent fixation on affluence indicators, inside a structured autocratic classroom. Whilst this teaching style seems appropriate for some mainstream non-Indigenous Australian learners, it appears to lack cultural sensitivity within an Indigenous context.

What the experts are suggesting

Longitudinal studies conducted by researchers Gray and Partington (2003) suggest that cultural difference plays a large part in the school attendance patterns of Indigenous students compared to those non-Aboriginal Australians. Kickett-Tucker describes Aboriginal children’s preferred ways of learning as, “...working in groups, cooperation, sharing common group goals and learning by observation, an understanding of the real life significance of school based learning, and jovial social interactions in the learning environment” (as cited in Gray & Partington, 2003, p. 147). Kickett-Tucker believed that these values and behaviours are rarely

encouraged in the mainstream academic context. In my experience working directly across culturally and linguistically diverse settings I knew this to be the situation and endorsed Kickett-Tucker's declaration. Frequently witnessed wider mainstream teaching styles seldom applied attributes of learning by observation, applying real life significance to school based learning, within appropriate communicative styles. This is hardly a recent phenomenon, in 1975 the Australian Education Union reported that an Aboriginal consultative group whose views were presented in the *Report to Schools Commission Inquiry* (Egan, 1986) requested inclusion of their particular cultural needs within the contextual framework:

We see education as the most important strategy for achieving self determination for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We do not see education as a method of producing anglicised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', but rather an instrument for creating an informed community with intellectual and technological skills, in harmony with our own cultural ideas and identity. We wish to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens in changing Australia (Australian Education Union, 2002, p. 1).

To prevent a homogenised version of Anglicised Indigenous peoples of Australia, the 1997 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) set out very clear goals stipulating what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and parents required for their children:

1. to provide guidelines for schools that encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education,
2. to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in educational decision making,
3. to provide equity of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to education services,
4. to achieve equitable and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students especially in literacy and numeracy,
5. to increase understanding of and respect for Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the wider community, including implementation of measures to address prejudice and racism,
6. to extend the teaching of Aboriginal education and Torres Strait Education across the curriculum,
7. to address the issue of maintenance and development of Indigenous languages (Australian Education Union, 2002, p. 1).

Research participants suggested that these goals have seldom been enacted much less implemented on a national scale and go so far as to say in their experience, many members of the wider teaching community do not seem aware of the existence of this policy.

Curriculum in Western Australia

Even with legislative policies of self determination and equal opportunity in place, the issue of implementing and applying Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing inclusively in Australian schools and in the Australian education curriculum, has not yet been achieved. For instance, the Commonwealth Government initiated moves to establish a seamless curriculum established around a national, skeletal framework. The objective was to cater for the different levels of student abilities in which teachers would then embellish with relevant content developed over eight learning areas. This concept evolved into the present day Western Australian Curriculum Framework.

According to Forrest (2000), a lengthy and protracted community consultation period of the fifty eight organisations were consulted during the review stage, though few represented Indigenous Australians. Once the draft Curriculum Framework had been prepared, it was re-presented for another period of consultation to community and educational representatives. Following this review phase in 1998 the Western Australian government introduced the Curriculum Framework document to all government and non-government schools for all students from kindergarten to Year 12. Forrest stated that the Curriculum Framework's goal was to ensure that all Australian students have the knowledge, skills and values to participate and prosper in a changing world within the new millennium (Forrest, 2000). A conscious and important component written into the ethos of the Curriculum Framework document was the principle of "inclusivity" yet Forrest claimed it still failed to include a number of Indigenous peoples. Of all the individuals who were listed as members of the committees, reference groups and writers which made up two hundred and thirty four names, only four members were Indigenous. Forrest confirmed (S. Forrest personal communication, September 15, 2010) that it seemed rather paradoxical that, "the committees formed included: the Inclusivity Working Party, the Values Consultative Committee, the Languages Other than English Community

Reference Group, and the Society and Environment Community Reference Group. None of the eight learning area committees had Aboriginal membership” (Forrest, 2000). This was not the only disparagement vented. A study from the mid 1990’s into the outcomes-based reform, the curriculum policy processes and the possible impact of this reform on all stakeholders conducted by Griffiths, Vidovich and Chapman (2009) titled *Policy ‘partnerships’? Power dynamics in curriculum reform* claimed that:

The prevailing view expressed by meso- and micro-level participants was that collaboration between the different interest groups did not occur because of their different agendas and philosophies. There was ample evidence to suggest that the government sector was particularly resistant to collaboration because it meant relinquishing its dominance over curriculum policy processes (Griffiths, Vidovich, & Chapman, 2009, p. 198).

It seems not much has changed from the previous decades that deeply entrenched power differentials continue to impact on opportunities to develop collaborative processes. This inevitably results in a lack of trust on behalf of the interest groups.

Alleged lack of culturally sensitive and appropriate content

In addition to the alleged lack of Indigenous consultation and contribution to the framework document, further concern existed in the 2005 Commonwealth of Australia *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report* when Indigenous people stressed the absence of culturally appropriate curriculum content relevant to the Indigenous people in given areas. This apparently “...was one of the reasons why their children were not motivated to attend or remain at school. This was particularly the case in the early and middle years of high school” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005, p. 2). The report stated that data was limited in this area and it was desirable that in time more information was to be collected. Many claimed these findings were ambiguous, believing that significant data already existed and indeed should have been acted upon much sooner by the incumbent government.

To me the idea of waiting for more data to be collected to prove the system was failing an entire cohort of learners, in particular Indigenous students was simply untenable. Disappointed by the lack of direction by leaders as crucial

recommendations in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report* went unheeded, I believed if improvement was not going to come from the top then more needed to be done at the bottom – at the gold face. I had barely escaped from an ill-fated secondary educational system which had let me down and left me to tread water in a sea of bewilderment; I did not want others to have the same experience. I knew that sport had played a lifesaving role in my school life and had taught me about the significance of teamwork, the consequence of goal setting and the implications of becoming self sustaining and resilient. I recognised that attitudes did change and opportunities did present themselves when individuals gathered in places like schools that promoted encouraging and constructive environments. I wanted to find a place that demonstrated once and for all, students learnt best when teaching occurred in the manner that was authentic and culturally-sensitive.

Choice of research context and my role as a researcher

I had played basketball since I was nine years old spurred on by my first coach, an Aboriginal woman named Aunty Norma-Jean, whose daughter Dari played in my team. As it happened the first time I ever picked up a basketball I immediately fell in love with the game and all its fascinating aspects; the art of shooting a ball through a hoop, the nuances of executing tactical game plans, the reliance on only four other players and the physical demands of running for an hour, defending and attacking the ball. Basketball had taken me places; it was my passport out of my small country town to the city and beyond. It provided me with an open invitation to meeting new people in new places. Whenever I arrived at a new place I would find the basketball court and ask if I could join in. As soon as I stepped onto the court and started playing basketball I immediately became a partner, a mate, then after the game I would be invited to stay back for a drink which inevitably led to being invited to join the team. I had used basketball in my own teaching to engage Aboriginal students and was constantly amazed at how playing basketball outside the classroom always promoted camaraderie and cohesion inside the classroom. Over time I noticed truant students began attending and behavioural issues slowly dissipated as many lessons were designed around playing basketball. I realised I could teach complex numeracy concepts and develop extensive experiential language/texts that frequently fed into an array of multimedia products often successfully resulting in language acquisition and competency.

Consequently when I heard of a school that was using sport to motivate reluctant adolescent Aboriginal girls I wanted to know more and to be a part of it. I wanted to investigate what was happening since it seemed extremely aligned with what I had already discovered in my own teaching experience in Arnhem Land. I hoped to find that students did learn best when teaching occurred in the manner that was akin to the lives of the learners. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report* stated data was limited and they needed more information, so I was going to get it.

Context of study

This ethnographic component of the inquiry took place in a Western Australian metropolitan Aboriginal secondary college. The College established within its program specific sporting academies which utilised sport as a tool to attract students to attend school regularly. The academies used football for boys and basketball for girls as a motivating factor to develop healthy lifestyle habits, learning skills, and workplace readiness skills, life preparatory skills, sporting proficiency and leadership skills. The students who attended the college came from a range of locations including the Perth metropolitan area, the Kimberley - the Pilbara - and the Goldfields regions of Western Australia, with rural and remote students accommodated in several hostels in various parts of the city.

Research problem

Many Aboriginal students' compulsory education ends in Year 9 or Year 10 leaving school with underdeveloped literacy, numeracy and life skills greatly limiting their options for the world of work or participating as a valuable member within their own community. Systemic truancy "...all too often leads into boredom, despair, substance abuse and criminal activity. The retention of Aboriginal students at this stage in their education seems one of the milestones in breaking the cycle of disadvantage" (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005, p. 7). The introduction of the sporting program at the Girls' Academy was a direct response to this reality: leading to the formation of my primary research question; how could young Aboriginal girls be re-engaged in learning in an endeavour to establish regular attendance and long term retention? As

a participant-observer immersed in the research site, my intent was to explore the following secondary research questions:

1. How has my upbringing, my experiences of living in Aboriginal communities shaped my professional, pedagogical and research practice?
2. What is an effective learning context for Aboriginal secondary girls, how then does this context impact on their ability to learn?
3. In what ways does the Aboriginal College accommodate Aboriginal learning through its learning environment and pedagogical practices?
4. How does the Aboriginal College promote Aboriginal learning specifically through the Girls' Academy sports program?
5. How do teachers at the Aboriginal College experience their teaching milieu in conjunction with the Girls' Academy program?
6. How do students at the Aboriginal College experience their learning environments and how they see themselves in the future?

Historical overview

For 83 years, the College building which was constructed in 1901 by the Catholic order of the Christian Brothers, served as an orphanage for boys. In 1986 it was converted into the Aboriginal secondary College for boys and girls from Year 10 to Year 12. Prior to this period the Aboriginal College did not attract a large student population, with even a smaller cohort from remote and/or regional communities. In 2000, the Aboriginal College with the support of an ex-Australian Football Coach, who was working as a relief teacher at the school at the time, set up a specialist football program. This decision was based on observations that included how much more motivated the boys became when working on aspects of their school program that interested them. This sporting program became known as the Football Academy and of the 20 boys who completed the academic year in 2000, 17 returned in 2001. By the end of the first term 2001, enrolments had grown to 165 boys.

The Girls' Basketball Academy

In 2003 following the success of the Football Academy, it was proposed that girls should also have access to a similar sporting program. Several meetings were convened resulting in a decision to go ahead with a trial. The Girls' Basketball Academy was established under the leadership of an ex-Australian Olympic

basketball player who agreed to coach the girls for a three year pilot program, funded by the Catholic Education Office. The Girls' Basketball Academy had the support of one full time Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer who assisted the coach with any salient cultural and gender issues that arose. In its infancy the Girls' Basketball Academy was about setting up a healthy and positive environment, where the girls could come to school and play basketball on the proviso that they attended at least 80% of their classes. The objective was to use their love of basketball in an attempt to improve attendance, based on the premise that regular daily attendance could lead to a measurable improvement of academic achievement and retention in the classroom. The girls participated principally in various Catholic secondary school competitions and within a wider metropolitan basketball association, and earned additional court time if they had been attending and working successfully in class. For the duration of the trial from 2003 onwards, girls' attendance improved, as did their personal hygiene, general behaviour and submission of assignments. Also noted was an increase in mutual empathy amongst regional and remote students with the local Nyungar students. In the past several Nyungar students had mentioned that at times they had felt overwhelmed by the large number of regional and remote students attending the college, who then made areas of the college their own and spoke in languages that the Nyungar students did not understand. Now with the establishment of the Girls' Basketball Academy a greater sense of camaraderie prevailed between the cohorts, as they spent more time training and playing basketball in competitions against other schools.

In 2007 a federal funding application by the Girls' Basketball Academy staff to the *Sporting Chance* project was approved. The significant funding endorsement ensured the continuation of the Girls' Basketball Academy until 2010. The Girls' Basketball Academy was renamed in an endeavour to become more inclusive and was now known as the "Girls' Academy". The injection of funds allowed for the employment of three development officers, a program manager and a significant capital works program generating a physical space within the school furnished with appropriate resources. For the first time since the co-educational conception of the Aboriginal College, the physical presence of girls in the school seemed evident, and as a cohort they emerged making the Girls' Academy an auspicious and positive

addition to the school. The girls were now a part of the prestigious “Academy” brand generated by the renowned accomplishments of the Boys’ Football Academy.

The Academy is synonymous with success, achievement and excellence, while the College still evokes negative imagery from a bygone era in spite of any achievement in partnership with the Academy. While some people may believe the focus of the College has become too orientated towards sport, and in particular football, the reality is that this is part of the statement of excellence that is now identified with the branding... (Edgar, Idle, & Wade Architects, 2007, p. 24).

The notion of branding the Academies as synonymous with success and excellence is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 8, where I present how the modus operandi of the College impacts on the students’ lives.

The here and now for the Girls’ Academy

At this place in time the Girls’ Academy is established in its own right and the number of 2010 enrolments continues to grow. The development officers work with the girls on their negotiated curriculum within the *Sporting Chance* program, which has been renamed the “Yorgas Program” an acronym for “Young Outspoken Responsible Girls at School” – Yorgas also means “women” in Nyungar. The Yorgas curriculum is emergent and strengthened as the development officers assessed the needs and interests of the girls. An Academy Student Committee was formed to assist the Academy staff in considering the interests and views of all girls enrolled. The Girls’ Academy attempts to complement formal academic curriculum delivered by the Aboriginal College teaching staff. Where possible Academy activities are integrated within the school curriculum or are allocated specific times within the College timetable. Previously, the general teaching staff worked specifically on Academy students’ academic requirements. Currently the Academy is strongly orientated towards developing an emergent integrated curriculum framework in collaboration with all Aboriginal College staff, with the belief that “[this] Aboriginal College is in a unique situation that given the right approach could enhance its future as a place of excellence for Indigenous education” (Edgar et al., 2007, p. 24). The 2007 draft document *Aboriginal College Introspection and Investigation Report* states that the Girls’ Academy “...has been structured around a similar philosophy to the Football Academy with the notable exception of integrating

education with training and employment in a holistic approach” (Dowie, 2004, p. 1). The Girls’ Academy goals were to develop its faculty to advance the sporting and learning program, to integrate workplace readiness, to operate in a culturally appropriate way, to attract and sustain significant interest and enrolments, and to respond to the changing needs of young Aboriginal women so to equip them to live sustainable worthy lives in the twenty first century.

As a participant-observer in the role of a relief teacher I was able to track the integration of the negotiated curriculum framework and to document how the program at the College impacted on the lives of those girls who took part in it.

Research design

This doctoral research deploys a critical auto/ethnographic research design using critical constructivism as a referent within an interpretive paradigm, discussed further in Chapter 2. Within a postmodern context, this auto/ethnography aims to document not just the product of the inquiry but the process itself. Richardson and St Pierre (2007) refer to this style as a creative analytical process or CAP where “the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962). This research approach is truly concerned with how people make sense of daily events in terms of ordering and living their varied and multiple social realities. The design is about framing random eclectic communities of human experiences therein allowing the auto/ethnographer - me, the white girl who played basketball in the black girls team, to write “tiny moral tales, tales that do more than celebrate cultural difference or bring another culture alive. The researcher’s story is written as a prop, a pillar that will help men and women endure and prevail” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. xvi). For me, writing the story of the study becomes the site of the exploration and/or struggle of the research process whilst documenting my own personal involvement. As a corollary of my long time involvement with Yolngu, Nyungar and Wongi students and communities and my love of playing basketball, this auto/ethnographic inquiry “feels right to write”.

Deep immersion in Yolngu, Nyungar and Wongi worlds became the catalyst to substantiate my role as an auto/ethnographer, to document the lives of those individuals who were not always in the position to initiate investigation, but

recognised they needed to activate change, so to improve aspects of their lives. To Cohen and Manion (1994) interpretive researchers begin with individuals who set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them, "...theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations; it should be "grounded" on data generated by the research act. Theory should not precede research but follow it" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 37). Constructivist "grounded theorists" take a reflective stance, "that means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them - *and* locating oneself in these realities. It does not assume that data simply await discovery in an external world or that methodological procedures will correct limited views" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). According to Alexander (2005) this capacity as an auto/ethnographer to locate oneself as an "insider" into the research site, allows interpretive ethnographers a voice to do so much more:

...the staging of reflective ethnographic performances that turn ethnographic and theoretical texts back onto each other, a form of both scholarly production and textual critique committed to the critical social processes of meaning making and illuminating cultural experiences. This is done through descriptive language and embodied engagement (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 419).

I felt the urgency to conjure up descriptive language and the embodied engagement of poetry, photography, prose, and reflective journal writings as I assembled this study as an auto/ethnographic montage, blending and bleeding the conscious borders to express my personal and professional lived experiences. As Alexander (2005) suggests, "the evidenced act of "showing" in autoethnography is less about reflecting on the self in a public space than about using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other*" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 423). In writing this thesis I have learned the art of the act of "seeing the self see the self", to reflect these lived experiences carefully so as to convert to (scribal alphabetic) writing, the very action necessary to write, to go over and over, to revisit and rewrite in an effort to make sense of the data, like the re-scribbled text on a palimpsest, forging spliced narratives of participants' experiences and struggles. As I alluded to before, although my interpretation is based on my "White Fella" view of the "Black Fella" story, the focus negotiated from the start has been to create a co-constructed, collaborative

interpretation, posited in collective terms of reference of what the participants have done and how they have shaped the outcomes in the Girls' Academy pilot program.

Ethical considerations

Since this inquiry has involved the opportunity to work with Indigenous people I needed to establish strict ethical protocols compliant with Curtin University's Ethical Approval of Research Involving Humans requirements. This included ensuring I had an Aboriginal member of staff from the Centre for Aboriginal Studies as my associate supervisor, the establishment of an Aboriginal Reference Group to guide and inform me on Indigenous protocols. In conjunction with establishing these two Indigenous protocols, I had ongoing influence from my mentor, Jara Amarda, whose focus for nearly two decades has been to urge me to tell the story about the importance of having Two Ways learning in schools to best meet the needs of Aboriginal students.

Apart from establishing human resources, I also needed to organise research protocols, for example, ensuring that participants' narratives were numerically coded, pseudonyms were used, and information was not released in any identifiable form. Information Sheets explaining the investigation and permission notes were posted to all parents of the student group with agreements that respondents could withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to all of this I needed to gain permission from the Aboriginal College Principal and Girls' Academy Coach to undertake the study which I was granted.

Doing the research

As part of the investigation I tracked the introduction of an innovative sporting program, the so called Girls' Academy and the program's potential to reform and re-engage secondary female adolescent Indigenous learners. The sporting program was presented in a style and setting very much unlike what had previously be established in the time-honoured Catholic secondary paradigm of teaching and learning. Ethical requirements I needed to observe to participate in this study are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

After an exceedingly protracted waiting period to find out if I was permitted to use the College as my research site, which finally came from both the Principal and the Head Coach, my first point of contact was the Aboriginal liaison officer who invited me into the Girls' Academy room to meet with the girls during morning recess and lunch time. In the tradition of an ethnographic participant observer, I joined the girls in an assortment of activities ranging from attending training sessions in the local municipal gym to official games at Perry Lake Stadium. My role as a relief teacher gave me ample opportunity for this. When I wasn't employed as a relief teacher, I sought permission from other teachers to begin my observation sessions in their classrooms, making observational notes which later led to participating in field trips, out of school excursions and the end of year retreat. I immersed myself in the sporting program and helped out where possible, umpiring, and scoring or lugging bags of basketballs. Often just being there worked too. Sitting behind the coach at games I would "take delivery" when he would turn to offload earrings or mobile phones that the girls would shed seconds before being substituted onto the court. I aimed at being present as often as possible at morning tea or lunch time, in an attempt to catch up with the academic staff or to glean information about the girls' program or their performance. Having had no previous experience with the College, establishing rapport was significantly problematic. I had to spend a substantial period of time trying to create a practical transparency of my genuineness, with both the girls and staff.

After months of daily observations and extensive field notes, interviews were conducted firstly with the Aboriginal liaison officer and Girls' Academy Coach, followed by twelve members of staff and nine students from the Girls' Academy. Having heard I had lived in other Aboriginal communities the students wanted to see the places and the schools where I had worked previously. Drawing on Indigenous cultural protocol, I discussed what the girls wanted with Aboriginal liaison officer Justine Hope to check if this was acceptable to do. With her approval, we informed students that some of the photographs were dated and could contain images of deceased people. This practice is based on Aboriginal people's customary belief of not looking at images of those who have passed away or referring to the name of the deceased. We personally notified one student in particular who came from one of the communities. Before the student interviews, I shared with the students my

photographic collection which also included some photographs of my family and various Aboriginal basketball teams I had played in. This offered participants an opportunity to relax and have the centre of attention shift from them to the screen of my laptop. It also provided the girls a chance to engage in an informal exchange with me, as they asked questions about the places I lived at or what my relationship was with the people in the photographs. Likewise, in an effort to make the participants feel more comfortable they were interviewed at a place of their choice. This occurred once the Aboriginal liaison officer had received the parental approval and permission notes. Transcripts of the interviews were returned to the respondents for clarification and changes were made. Member checking took place for all interviews, with respondents receiving a copy of the final, agreed upon transcript. Using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis QSR NVivo the interviews were examined and coded and I was able to identify recurring themes.

Significance of the research

The findings of this auto/ethnographic inquiry could contribute to the existing body of Indigenous Education research. In writing my personal account, reflecting on my own subjectivity to write about my long term engagement and immersion in various Indigenous settings could possibly assist other educators. Documenting and learning how Indigenous educators and students at a particular Aboriginal College achieved a culturally-sensitive educational program could provide a sense of motivation for others. The findings of the study could support the development of similar curriculum models for schools that could better meet the needs of Indigenous learners, to the point where they complete their studies, graduate and go on to enjoy meaningful and productive lives.

At both a national and local level, the study has the potential to provide non-Indigenous educators in a variety of contexts, non-Indigenous policymakers and non-Indigenous curriculum designers, an opportunity for greater understanding and recognition of the socio-cultural diversity found in successful Indigenous educational contexts. Further this knowledge might be beneficial in many scenarios where cross-cultural contacts are prevalent.

The writing of this dissertation has been deeply personal. It is directly related to my own exploration to seek answers to make sense of the previous pathways that I followed and the decisions I made. It is deeply personal for two reasons. Firstly, I cannot remain deferential and watch another generation of young Indigenous female students be deprived by an education system that neglected to include many of them. Secondly, I turned and walked away not once, twice but thrice before, after witnessing inequity and injustice because I did not have the courage to confront it. This time I have refused to be browbeaten. Now the writing of this research has allowed me to witness the advent of how new possibilities for a group of highly marginalised at-risk female students came about when they were given positive and relevant educational opportunities. These new possibilities created in each girl the capacity to competently step up and take order of their own lives as young, outspoken, responsible, women.

Summary of the findings

Now in its sixth year the Girls' Academy is still learning and growing in terms of future design and direction. The Girls' Academy has attracted a group of educational and sporting professionals who share a common vision and a common plan. Their unconditional stratagem is to improve the lives of young at-risk Indigenous women, and they plan to do this incrementally and carefully, by:

- 1 Securing funding to provide a program of learning that “hooked” the girls onto learning and further engagement at school.
- 2 Setting up real life workplace readiness programs and traineeships so students could see the direct link between the knowledge needed to complete a task and the skills necessary to undertake the task.
- 3 Recognising that the traditional method of delivery was disengaging students so they used sport to link learning outcomes with Curriculum Council Assessment tasks.
- 4 Integrating wherever possible all learning areas so that the experience was meaningful.

In the process of accomplishing the previous actions, this group of educators realised that the synergy between what they were doing, and what other Aboriginal College staff were doing, did not actually co-exist as well as it possibly could. As

the Girls' Academy staff and leadership negotiate its relationship with the broader Aboriginal College, establishing synergy in terms of goals and strategies will be necessary. These relational elements need to be robust if the longevity of the Girls' Academy is going to be enduring and successful. Findings indicate also that the girls attend school more regularly, and that they seem to succeed with their schooling as the number of graduates has increased each year since the creation of the Girls' Academy. Observable differences have been reported due to the girls' change in attitude, team work, cooperation, discipline and the meeting of their personal responsibilities. Furthermore both a reduction in teenage pregnancies and an increase in the number of girls gaining full-time employment on completion of Year 12 have been documented.

Thesis structure

Chapter 1 of this dissertation presented a general overview of the disadvantage and exclusion some Indigenous students have experienced in the past. Furthermore Chapter 1 provided a brief historical overview of the Aboriginal College that formed the context for this study. This was followed by an explanation of the qualitative methodology used in this inquiry specifically of auto/ethnography. Ethical considerations were discussed requiring an Indigenous Reference Group be established to oversee that appropriate Aboriginal procedures and etiquette and customary codes of behaviour were adhered to. These also included specifically having valid ethics clearance, permission and approval from parents for their daughter to participate in the study and a police clearance to work with children.

Chapter 2 is presented in two parts offering an explanation of the methodology of auto/ethnography. Part I is presented in three sections and Part II is presented further into the dissertation in Chapter 7. Part I section 1 discusses the methodology of autoethnography and autobiography, defining these approaches as narratives that attempt to establish uniqueness about the everyday, generating "thick description" to embellish the story. Section 2 relates to me: it is an autobiographic collection about what has occurred in my life and how these events shaped what I did, and what motivated me to try to engender the discussion about establishing educational relevance for some Aboriginal students. Section 3 is about using my experiences to make sense of my teaching practice, by documenting the lived experience; I could

ruminate and reflect in the act of provocation, to justify the basis of my own convictions. Likewise, it also revealed flaws in my teaching style, so that I could consciously adapt my specific cultural and personal behaviours, to best complement and harmonize with those behaviours and traditions of the students I worked with. Applying an auto/ethnographic approach provided the means to privately expose flaws to self and publicly reveal one's professional performance, and as an educator it became a powerful process to self discovery, self recovery and reconciliation.

Chapter 3 is “my yarn”, where I tell of the early years of helen cd mccarthy and my connection to land and the experiences, beliefs and values that formed my way of thinking. It is the chapter where I substantiated my claim to justify my right to write, to document in the annals what happened and why a group of teachers and parents continued to fight for better, more appropriate ways for their children to learn.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of helen cd mccarthy aka Makarda Amagula and the enculturation of becoming Makarda Amagula. It tells of the fights, the term for “Awiyemba” on The Island, the challenges and choices that were made in the process of instigating a “force for change” and The Island Affair that followed.

Chapter 5 focussed on “Awiyemba” - the continuing the fight for culturally-sensitive and relevant education for girls situating the research and providing a socio-historical perspective of where Aboriginal education was placed in terms of the provision and relevance to learners. It discussed the perceived problems of the mainstream educational paradigm and its apparent irrelevance to some Indigenous peoples' ways of living and learning. The chapter set out to authenticate these claims by incorporating the words and actions of others who have tried to enlighten Australian policy writers by way of reports, submissions, commissioned inquiries, and personal testimonies about what needs to be done, if Aboriginal people are going to live and participate sustainably in Australian society.

Chapter 6 is presented in two parts. Part I provides an overview of the socio-political involvement of the Catholic Church in the creation of the Catholic Aboriginal College. It provided an explanation of the emergent curriculum framework that evolved in the creation of the Yorgas Program, which engaged

learners through providing the girls something that actually meant something to them. As well it offered by way of explanation, how emergent curriculums evolved and the underpinning reasons why they continue to shape the course of contemporary learning. Part II is written in two sections. The first was about getting in to the research site and the establishment of the inquiry, so to begin gathering sources for the generation of data. The second section was about sorting the data to seek verisimilitude, by way of applying qualitative measures that reflected the multiple realities of what occurred during the study, based on the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Chapter 7 refers to Part II following up from Part I presented in Chapter 2 and provides a general overview to the auto/ethnographic study and briefly explained the College practices, processes and procedures, data collected from both staff and students. The second section presented the findings that represented the environment in which the Girls' Academy was embedded and how this contextual matrix generated the inquiry's thirteen themes, built up from the participant's viewpoint or frame of reference.

Chapter 8 investigates what occurred after the emergent curriculum framework known as the Yorgas Program was created and how it impacted on the lives of the students.

Chapter 9 discusses how change has occurred and provides an overview of a case study in the *Sporting Chance* program. It recommended strategies such as Cultural Competency units in all university undergraduate degrees, now legislated, to ensure the past does not repeat itself. The chapter is titled *From small things big things grow*, which also serves as the Aboriginal College song.

Chapter summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the historical context in which this inquiry took place. It portrayed the complex milieu in which mainstream education and Indigenous education are placed, perhaps even diametrically opposed, in their delivery styles and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, it described the introduction of an innovative strategy to re-engage learners through sport describing the

establishment of the Girls' Academy and the impact of this intervention on social, spiritual, physical and academic outcomes of the research participants.

Chapter 2 provides the first part of a two part outline explaining the research methodology. The chapter is presented in 3 sections. Section 1 explains the methodology of the auto/ethnographic focus that shaped this inquiry, section 2 considers my autobiographic experiences that helped me to understand the consequences of my behaviours and section 3 addresses the processes that provided me with a deeper understanding of what was happening within the current educational paradigm and eventually directed me to consider possible alternatives and pedagogical reform.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the methodology to this auto/ethnographic study. The chapter is set out in two parts. Part I provides (1) a brief background to the research method of ethnography and the theory of critical constructivism and (2) emerging interpretive practices of self study narratives. These self study narratives are represented by the genres of autobiography auto/ethnography as the method that specifically shaped this inquiry.

This chapter also focuses on how writing one's practise brings a profound meaning to what is not always obvious at first or at the time of its occurrence. Sometime later when I applied these auto/ethnographic processes in my professional practice as a teacher/learner, (re)searcher I gained a deeper understanding and in turn became more receptive to the praxis of pedagogical reform. How this is achieved is through the methodological, theoretical and ethical aspects stated through the process of writing, employing the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity to reveal multiple realities in a multivocal setting.

Ethnography as a methodology

I decided to write this dissertation using the methodology of ethnography because I believed this method has long been enshrined as an authentic tool to document the raising of consciousness about cultures and cultural practices. Bearing in mind at the start of this PhD journey when I was a novice researcher I was heartened to read about the problematic nature of ethnography field work and felt especially comforted when I read:

Ethnographers transverse both territorial and semantic boundaries, fashioning cultures and cultural understandings through the intertwining of voices, they appear heroic to some and ludicrous to others. They are cross dressers, outsiders wearing insiders clothing while gradually acquiring the language and behaviours that go along with them (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455).

My attraction to this methodology became strengthened by its organic and ostensibly ubiquitous features. Ethnographers encapsulate life as it is unfolding, and then hold it up to venerate the uniqueness of both site and circumstances. Regardless of how seemingly uninteresting this may appear to others, for the researcher the focussed

attention begets a sense of wonder adding to the sites value, and the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Ethnographical research therefore is keenly attuned to naturally occurring talk and plenteous social interaction, and is significantly dependant on the everyday lived experience.

Such endeavours are entered into with deep conviction, that the result of the investigation could go some way to improve the worthiness of the lives of those being studied. The distinguishing feature of ethnography is when the lens intimately focuses on, then encapsulates people in their worlds and documents the very heart of their everyday ordinary life. “Much of what we seek to find out in ethnography is knowledge that others already have. Our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human being must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms and patterns of a way of life” (Hymes, 1996, p. 13).

The objective of the ethnographer is to embellish the collective energy of those with a passionate desire to envision change, who are willing to make a difference, to summon an alternate improved reality, who are prepared to challenge what Giroux (1992) refers to as the status quo for linguistic, national, racial, religious, and/or personal rights in the pursuit of social justice. The ethnographer is there to document peoples’ cultural activism and resistance against the oppressive effects of colonisation, imperialism and corporate globalisation and to be the lens through which the new reality of a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable world is achieved. And while the ethnographers’ job isn’t always as noble as being the catalyst to accomplishing world peace, equally as important, it is their anthropological responsibility to document contemporary monographs and artefacts of the everyday.

The ethnographer tells the story, not in respite from but the way things appear to her/him, though perhaps should not be, and is never alone in the undertaking. Living in a society marked by class, racial, gender and sexual conflict, Foley and Valenzuela (2005) believe no architects of knowledge are innocent or politically neutral. As a consequence this forces the ethnographer to recognise that they are not deity, but indeed come to the site with their own culturally situated ideas and need to abandon any thought of establishing an omnipotent standpoint. In the past

ethnographers traditionally appeared to have been privileged white bourgeois males with unmitigated ethnocentric biases. Anzaldua (2003) suggests the evolving nature of ethnography has seen this reign challenged with a growing number of contemporary ethnographers in the field now being women. In terms of gender and ethnicity, ironically many originate from the place of the native or the minority. As a result, these stories once left untold are now powerfully influencing the art of ethnography:

Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty (as cited in Browdy de Hernandez, 2003, p. 80).

The opportunity to genuinely engage and tell the story that traditionally had been couched in serious scientific and anthropological language, inaccessible to the lay person, has evolved over the last decades emerging dialogically in the form of the self-narrative. As Hymes ardently states, “narrative is perhaps as old as language. It is at the heart of everyday life” (Hymes, 1996, p. 685), and it comes in many guises making definition and application problematic. Likewise Geertz (1973) embraced the enterprise of scripting the rich experience that evolved from connecting the personal to the cultural, insisting that this imaginative genre needed to display substantial and multiple levels of consciousness, “what defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Thick description entailed documenting the inimitable personal, cultural, ritual and customary events which Geertz (1973) espoused needed to be more interpretive, open ended, blurred, provoking finer micro-macro descriptions which in turn makes for possible thick interpretations since “writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a “native” makes first order ones: it's *his* culture.)” (1973, p. 15). This cathartic release onto paper best exemplified the veracity of the experience, the human interest bit of the story, yet traditionally never included in the published anthropological works.

Critical Ethnography:

The overarching interpretive practice of Constructivism applies grounded theory methodologies, which includes understanding human consciousness and the study of meanings within the uniqueness of everyday realities and closely observing social interaction as the basis to understanding. This occurs at the insistence that the researcher immerses herself within the culture in order to become conscious of the subjective worlds of others and the beliefs they hold. In doing so the researcher develops an, "...integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesise and interpret them but also show processual relationships" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508). In the spirit of the Chicago School tradition this approach advances social justice inquiry, "...assumes human agency, attends to language and interpretation, views social processes as open ended and emergent..." and, "...emphasises the significance of language for selfhood and social life..." (Charmaz, 2005, p. 521) serves to stimulate new ways of exposing concealed social injustices in an effort to achieve or affirm possible improvement.

Crafting the genre to authenticate my practise

Throughout the thesis I use the tools of the research method auto/ethnography to illustrate how writing one's practice helped me to try and make sense of what I have been doing as an educator and learner. Documenting my prior ventures helped give me a rich resource to re-visit, to begin deeper professional reflection in an attempt to improve or enhance or appreciate aspects of my pedagogy. As Chang (2008) asserted this was the process where the researcher, "transforms bits of auto-biographical data into a culturally meaningful and sensible text" (p. 126). It was the ordinariness of existing and surviving the everyday that strongly attracted me initially to this methodology and continues to intrigue me. I sought to know that:

Homes were filled with the grounding details of getting the rent money together, getting or keeping jobs, getting sick, getting well, looking for love, trying to get out of things we had gotten ourselves into, eating in, working out, raising kids, walking dogs, remodelling homes and shopping. There were distractions, denials, shape-shifting forms of violence, practical solutions and real despair. For some one wrong move was all it took. People bottomed out watching day time television. Credit cards were maxed out. There was downsizing and unemployment (Stewart, 2005, p. 1029).

While both autobiography and autoethnography depend on the lived experience and had a strong sense of chronological composition, the genre that seemed to go further and encompasses a wider range of literary and performative devices to engender cultural crossing between the self and others, has become known as auto/ethnography.

Auto/ethnography

An explanation of this research method was not always straight forward and remained somewhat blurred with an abundance of definitions. For me, the idea of believing words matter was profound, so to initiate a simple quiet action such as writing my story in the event it could possibly in some small way, change a perception or perhaps transform or reform was both appealing and cathartic.

Autoethnography is...Setting a scene, telling a story, intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation...and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives. Believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point to creating autoethnographic texts *is* to change the world (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765).

I chose auto/ethnography because for me it best expressed when reading other peoples' auto/ethnographic writings, that I was not alone and that many before me had felt what I had experienced, within the wombs of cultural immersion. I wanted to indicate that this was *my* story within the research paradigm of ethnographic inquiry. I wanted to assert my voice in all of this and by placing a slash between the word auto and ethnography I felt I had finally established a place. As soon as I blurred the two, the story started to flow. On returning "home", feeling and seeing the discernible repercussions of my long-term cultural conversion was often perplexing. As a paradigm, auto/ethnography gave me the relief and the form to "come out", to confess that I did feel comfortable walking in the shoes, or in my case, bare foot with "the Other". I was happiest when empathetic and bicultural, to use the lexis, when I was a cultural "border crosser" (Giroux, 1992). As well, I had become to use Tedlock's term, a "cross dresser" in my bright zipped mission dress, and I have to say - it felt good. Further, I wanted to write using this style because it afforded itself to no easily definable genre.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggested that defining this genre of writing is difficult and they list over 40 different titles that describe it, ranging from first person narratives, to journals, to fragmented and layered writing that come in the device of photographic essays, to short stories and poetry. Tedlock (2000) supported this view by saying that autoethnography evolved organically, when two previously separate genres overlapped - as ethnographers tried to portray accurately the subjects of biographies, but found themselves including their own personal and professional experiences. Although labelled by anthropologist Karl Heider some 20 years ago as what people do or “autoethnography”, the term tended to be credited to David Hayano’s (1979) according to (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Chang took this interpretation further and suggested that Hayano (1979), “refers to autoethnography as a study of the researcher’s own people” (Chang, 2008, p. 56) and believed Hayano saw what people did as autoethnography was to carry out an action akin to becoming native. Chang’s explanation of Hayano’s definition was that he claimed transformation occurred when one immersed oneself by becoming an insider, achieving the status of full membership so to experience with profundity, the intimate connection between the personal and the cultural, and then documenting it as a chance to raise greater cross cultural understanding.

From this description I appreciated auto/ethnography as utilising local ritual, allowing dance to tell its story, using the craft of art, re-defining local knowledge, capturing words of songs, corroborating local parable, multiple in layers, representational, all embracing - everything becoming usable in the venture of making sense. Finley argued that, “it is an act of political emancipation from the dominant paradigm of science for new paradigm researchers to say, “I am doing art” and to mean, “I am doing research” - or vice versa” (Finley, 2005, p. 685). Similarly Chang (2008) believed that, “in conventional ethnography, insiders and outsiders are different people; therefore, it takes outsiders a considerable number of border-crossing experiences to decipher the cultural meaning of data collected from insiders. In autoethnography the insider and the outsider converge” (Chang, 2008, p. 127).

The framing paradigms of Interpretivism and Constructivism

Indigenous Education teacher and ethnographer Malin (1989) clarifies that the goal of interpretive practise is to illuminate the significance of what certain culturally

specific actions have for the participants from a perspective, which is, as close as possible to that of the participants themselves. The research becomes a rich unfolding of a diverse array of interpretations which freely materialize into an interpretive bricolage as it pieces together sets of representations that are, “fitted into the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4) with the intent to develop an emergent construction that allows for new forms of representations and interpretations to be revealed. It is important to remember that the application of this paradigm leads to the orientation towards the production of reconstructed understandings, enhanced by the search for trustworthiness and authenticity as opposed to the positivist approach of seeking internal and external validity to justify the purpose of the research. This approach denies a mechanistic view of social life and disparages the notion that it might explain any human behaviour in terms of cause and effect or stimulus and response as deterministic motions. As a consequence this paradigm adopts a relativistic view of the social world and according to Bordow and More, “reality-meaning-is not considered, as independent from human consciousness but is the negotiated result of individual’s interpretations of the world” (Bordow & More, 1992, p. 52). They claim that the social reality is not seen as an external reality, but as an interpretation of that world.

Similarly the interpretive approach vigilantly observes community interactions and as such is concerned with qualitative methods and employs strategies of observation and interview to document the data. Connole summarises the qualitative approach as:

In general, qualitative research methods focus on identifying, documenting and knowing (by interpretation) the world views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts and general characteristics of life events, ceremonies and specific phenomena under investigation (with its goal being) to document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in particular contexts from the people’s viewpoint or frame of reference (Connole, 1993, p. 131).

Consequently this research method generally takes place over a significant period of time allowing researchers to develop more intimate and informal relationships with those they are observing. Interpretive ethnographers are participant observers that, “gather further data through interviews and the collection of documents simultaneously referring to both a research process and the written

outcome” (Bryman, 2001, p. 291). Likewise Meek (1990) suggests this ethnographic methodology can be defined as, “a way of systematically learning reality from the point of view of the participant” (Meek, 1990, p. 10) noting life is writ small whilst performing an intimate study that marries the habits and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural. This action eventually evolves into, “a creative analytic practice” (Richardson, 1997, p. 929) connecting action to praxis encouraging experimental multivoiced representational performances, ranging from (scribal alphabetical) writing to lived experience to embodied engagement. “Thus we confront the problem of understanding our experience-the praxis of our living-is coupled to a surrounding world which appears filled with regularities that are at every instant the result of our biological and social histories” (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 241). I suggest that the interpretive approach, like the research site, appears organic and authentic and ingeniously able to accommodate within a continuous state of flux, the multiplicity of unpredictable episodes that tend to predictably occur. Constructivism as a referent can be described as:

It is an unconventional approach to the problems of knowledge and knowing. It starts from the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it be defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 1).

This unconventional approach differed greatly from, and cannot be assimilated into any of the traditional philosophies specifically those preferred by the positivists. That the matter of truth and fact are indeed merely interpretations and the reality of the perceived truth rests entirely within the beholder. How we perceive our experience is based on a gradient reality that is re-constructed from multiple interpretations, constructed from a schema of previous consciousness, or not, and influenced by the present state of being. The key process of interpretation or languaging, according to Maturana and Varela (1987), is the creation of the notion of autopoiesis, which is the emotional connection that becomes established with the union of two psychological elements. Therefore the action of languaging becomes the instrument to process knowing which initiates behavioural coordination and as such we exist since, “we experience language in use, we “word the world” into existence” (Richardson, 1997, p. 923). Our meaning is made up on the basis of our

discourse and it is created by the mechanisms within our environments, our realities and our identities. When the fables or mechanisms of our various worlds are repeated over and over again by the preceding generations, the poetic imagination is blurred and a new tradition is created which the human mind assimilates as actual experience and accepts as social and cultural knowledge.

Lev Vygotsky - tools, practice and signs - motivation for development

Russian Lev Vygotsky seldom if ever used the term ‘sociocultural’ instead according to Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez, “he and his followers usually spoke of a “sociohistorical” (e.g., Luria, 1981) or “cultural-historical” (e.g., Smirnor, 1975) approach” (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995, p. 6) however in this dissertation I will use the contemporary term socio-cultural.

Therefore I establish a working definition of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory within the context of my study in concurrence that the key feature of his interpretation being that, while participating in social events members interrelate with each other, or with objects, developing cognitive and communicative functions, which are unique expressions of meaning or authentication within the specific domains of their own cultural matrix. According to Vygotsky, cognition is to a great extent a social phenomenon, socially constructed and shared, determining language as the critical link between the social and psychological planes of human functioning. Consequently socio-cultural theory places strong emphasis on the wide variation in cognitive capacities among human beings and Berk and Winsler (1995) believe that Vygotsky underscored this theme in his, “general genetic law of cultural development” where the development or history of behaviour was archetypical to understanding custom and cultural patterns. They consider that, “to understand the development of the individual it is necessary to understand the social relationships of which the individual is a part” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 12).

Wertsch, del Rio, and Alvarez (1995) emphasize a year before his death he wrote that, “the central fact about our psychology is the fact of mediation” affirming that mediation is the vital active process that can only be activated when individuals trigger or carry out the action connecting the potential cultural tools to shape action. “In particular, they provide the link or bridge between the concrete actions carried

out by the individuals and groups, on one hand, and cultural, institutional, and historical settings, on the other” (Wertsch et al., 1995, p. 21). These tools then become the critical connection between the social and psychological planes of functioning, of which language in particular leads to higher mental processes. Lower versus higher mental functions involving the use of language or other cultural tools, mediate cognitive activity by forming self-regulating thought processes. Formal education and other cultural forms of socialisation leading to development, also enhance these functions. In terms of the context of my study, this is in effect the way many Indigenous families instigate the socialisation of their children into their complex moieties ensuring their children are primed to exhibit future codes of acceptable behaviour.

The seminal component of Vygotsky’s theory is that of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the dynamic region in which learning and development take place. It is the distance between what a learner can accomplish during independent problem solving and what they can accomplish with the help of an adult or a more competent member of a culture. Specifically in terms of my study the ZPD appears to complement how Indigenous people generally relate to each other and share their ways of knowing knowledge. The role of the family to teach their children specialised knowledge or “story” is vital as are the various strategies to transfer this specialised knowledge ensuring it is passed on only to those qualified to possess it. I suggest that with many Indigenous students, knowledge transfer or internalisation transforms the process as learning and teaching by the community of members is shared, especially where group membership is made up across a range of generations who apply the same social interactional processes. Vygotsky advocates elements such as the development of thought processes that result from small group collaboration highly compatible with social interaction, the internalisation of cultural symbol system through artistic and technological provide means as a channel to higher mental functions, the co-construction of knowledge based on the concept of scaffolding. This transfer of ability from the shared environment to the individual occurs as the valued role community/culture plays within the scope of the learner has far-reaching implications for educators.

According to Vygotsky, instruction in the zone of proximal development “calls to life in the child, awakens and puts in motion an entire series of internal processes of development. These processes are at the time possible only in the sphere of interaction with those surrounding the child and in collaboration with companions, but in the internal course of development they eventually become internal property of the child (Wertsch, 1985, p. 71).

The internal property especially when referring to specific forms of instruction allows the interpsychological functioning to be structured in such a way that it maximises the growth in the intrapsychological plane and on other planes of development as well. Vygotsky stressed that instruction had to proceed ahead of development and that instruction and development did not meet for the first time at school age but rather, “they are in fact connected with each other from the very first day of a child’s life” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 71). He claimed that properly organised instruction of the child pulled mental development behind it which became the catalyst for a series of developmental processes and higher psychological functions to emerge from the cultural development of the child whose origins were embedded in a cultural matrix of collaboration and instruction.

Critical Constructivism

Like Radical Constructivism the definition of Critical Constructivism is somewhat blurred and evolving as the disciplines’ genre borders become indeterminate. As historical and socio-cultural theory became more widespread and as international boundaries dissipated, and as ideas influenced and instigated revolutionary notions became reinterpreted and recreated through emerging praxis – a consciousness driven by reflection and action upon the world of the subjugated to take back their power and reclaim their lives – and at reaching this juncture, became transformed. Up until this point in time radical and social constructivism have been taken to be fundamentally different however Reagan (2005) suggests, “...the tension between the personal and social construction of knowledge, is to a significant extent more apparent than real” (Reagan, 2005, p. 9). Consequently the viewpoints have emerged that a way to articulate them as, “...socially mitigated but personally constructed” (Reagan, 2005, p. 10) though powerfully influenced by:

...four different “emergent” schools of social inquiry : the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory associate most closely with the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse; the genealogical writings of Michel Foucault; the practices of poststructuralist deconstruction associated with Derrida; and post modernist currents associated with Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Ebert, and others (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305).

Theoretical considerations

For this thesis I have specifically chosen the work of Paulo Freire which is critical in its search for a pedagogy of the oppressed and Henry Giroux’s work on Critical Pedagogy to provide me with theoretical support, since I am trying to achieve similar outcomes with my research.

Reform and resistance theory of Freire and Giroux and how it impacts on Indigenous Education

The keystone of Paulo Freire’s work is based on developing pedagogy for the oppressed. In this study I discuss the antialogics and dialogics as matrices of opposing theories of cultural action. “In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities: they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression” (Freire, 2000, p. 133). As such and central to my investigation is the observation that many Indigenous students represent a similar community of people, whose rich traditions of oral story telling are seldom respected by mainstream Anglo-Celtic perception of literacy, who become silenced and invisible; and are regarded as being “less than” and even “less than human”. Underprivileged, suppressed by deep seated racism and widely disrespected, many of these learners are seen as being excluded by the invaders from mainstream society. Recognising the tyrannical impact of the invaders on the Indigenous population, Freire critically examined the inequitable social situation of the workers and in rigorous collaboration instigated initiatives with the peasants to transform the society that had kept them “submerged” and silent. Freire advocated that the solution could not be achieved in simplistic idealistic terms, “in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire, 2000, p. 31).

In Freire's view the mechanism to humankind emerging from their subjugation and acquiring the capacity to intervene was education. He claimed that an authentic education investigates thinking. Because he was once one of the poor he was cognizant of the condition they were in and reasoned that, "when people are already dehumanised, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ methods of dehumanization" (Freire, 2000, p. 49). The conviction of the oppressed to stand and defend their human rights to live and learn and become "conscientious" was made possible only with dialogue and reflection. While many past and present Indigenous leaders and educators have advocated for the right to human rights, many Indigenous children have remained underprivileged and educationally deprived.

Giroux expresses a similar view believing that schools should be about ways of life and not merely a boot camp for the economy, "the 1990's has made visible the colonialism at work in the U.S. and other advanced industrial countries" (1992, p. 4). This backlash from reducing learning to discrete observable outcomes, which Freire believes, "only someone with a mechanical mentality, which Marx would call grossly materialistic, could reduce literacy learning to a purely technical action" (as cited in Giroux 1992, p. 28) justifies the emergence of an entreaty to transform the education system towards one that reflects greater community values and aspirations free from intrusive bureaucracies. Giroux claims significant and widespread evidence confirms that education is no longer considered a public asset but rather a private investment and it has become apparent that the need to confirm the ideology that knowledge and social responsibilities remain strongly linked. Dewey (1916) for example argued that a liberal education afforded people the opportunity to involve themselves in the deepest problems of society, to acquire the knowledge, skills and ethical responsibility necessary for, "reasoned participation in democratically organised public" (as cited in Giroux 1992, p. 97).

Giroux maintains that critical pedagogy will finally exist when the hegemonic discourses that make up the official curriculum of the school has been examined from the perspective of the silenced and marginalised, "...and the self-representations of subordinate groups as they might appear in "forgotten" histories, texts, memories, experiences, and community narratives" (Giroux, 1989, p. 143). It

becomes clear that the most important element in the construction of the forgotten narratives of experience is the appropriacy of expressions, including mother language and the appropriate gestures and postures, and all the paralinguistic factors such as pace, pitch, pause, emphasis and volume. Language is intimately related with knowledge, and knowledge is power, but in this sense it is not reduce to its strict hegemonic function. Rather language becomes a powerful, genuine discourse that reclaims identity and place and brings into being ones' existence confirming their way of life.

This position represents one of the most important pedagogical tenets of a cultural politics: the necessity for teachers to work with the knowledge that students actually use to give meaning to the truth of their often difficult lives, to construct meaning out of their own narratives: in other words, knowledge that is often derived within the context of the intersection of mass and popular cultures, neighbourhood life, family experiences, and the historical memories and contradictory narratives that define one's sense of identity and place (Giroux, 1989, p. 144).

The seemingly obvious statement beams like a light in the darkness...that teachers actually work with knowledge that students can use to give meaning to their often difficult lives. When teachers neglect to draw on students' fundamental socio-cultural conceptions often underpins the very crisis that exists in many of our schools. It appears there is a critical necessity for the many students of colour and/or marginalised groups suffering from colonial oppression and patriarchal domination, to dynamically reclaim and reconstruct meaning out of their own narratives which authenticates their existence and verifies their worth. Critical pedagogy provides:

...students with the opportunity to develop the critical capacity to challenge and transform existing social and political forms, rather than simply adapt to them. It also means providing students with the skills they will need to locate themselves in history, find their own voices, and provide convictions and compassion necessary for exercising civic courage, taking risks... (Giroux, 1992, p. 74).

This suggests the need to exercise civic courage and the challenge to find a voice that connects the struggles against injustice is not about representing the subaltern, but by empowering her as Partnoy (2003) claims and, "that in educating our students so the subaltern is no longer subalternized, deprived of human dignity, no longer massacred with impunity" (Partnoy, 2003, p. 181).

Quality Criteria of the research

The epistemology underpinning the interpretive methodology insists the researcher must view and interpret the events through the perspective and multiple realities of the people being studied. Doing the research this way helped me to examine the quality of the research by employing criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity. These criteria used in evaluating this study established what Bryman (2001) drawing on the work of Guba & Lincoln (1989), Smith, (1993) and Schwandt, (1996), referred to as alternatives to the quantitative measures of reliability and validity, to those that reflect the multiple realities of the events as the respondents saw or lived them. Trustworthiness includes the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability while authenticity is represented by the criteria of fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity.

To ascertain the criterion of credibility I established through sustained immersion and observation the multiple cultural contexts followed up by cross referencing, applying crystallisation or multidimensional angles of approach as well as member checking or member validation. Member checking gave me the opportunity, “to judge overall adequacy of the interview itself in addition to providing the opportunity to confirm individual data items” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239).

To satisfy the criterion of transferability I used rich descriptions of the time, site, cultural artefacts and events that shaped the inquiry by the use of, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973a) (as cited in Bryman, 2000, p. 272). This engendered the reality of the research site to be revealed and represented as a diverse and dynamic multivocal setting as opposed to a place that espoused one immutable truth.

To achieve the criterion of dependability I documented and reported all phases of the process corroborating data generation as it was audited by the Indigenous reference group/reviewers of the study and tracked throughout the exploration so that the outcomes were consistent with the data.

To ensure the criteria of confirmability I established audit tracking to generate assurances of integrity that the findings were embedded in the data itself, “this means

that data (constructions, assertions, facts, and so on) can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally and coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit in the narrative of a case study” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). The dependability of audit tracking can be illustrated the evolution of my methodology by the use of a series of conceptual framework maps (see Appendix C).

The authenticity criterion includes fairness and educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to, “...the extent to which different constructions and their underlying values are solicited and honoured within the evaluation process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 246). In my study the identification of stakeholders was achieved by seeking guidance from the longest serving member of staff who was able to clearly identify who best could be a potential participant in the study based on their position within the College and their first-hand involvement within the Girls’ Academy. Secondly open negotiation was achieved through the establishment of an accord where all staff and student members were in possession of the same level of information in a balanced equitable manner. “...fairness requires the constant use of the member-check process, not only for the purpose of commenting on whether the constructions have been received “as sent” but for the purpose of commenting on the fairness process” (as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 247), as illustrated by the following excerpt taken from my researchers journal:

Bridget read the Interview transcript very carefully and made several notes to make sure that I got to write specifically what she wanted me to get from the interview. She checked to see if I had deleted the comment she made from the transcript regarding Sex Education. As she was making the changes to the document she kept talking. This time it was about issues she had not mentioned in her interview and the implications of what she was saying were profound, instead of member checking suddenly I was inundated with critical new information.

Bridget said that perhaps the College should go up to Year 13 and Year 14 because many of the students were not work-place ready or ready to start participating as young adults in the wider community.

This year Easter was tacked onto the holidays and then Anzac Day so some students had not been at school for almost a month. She was concerned that during such long school breaks some of the student’s lives tended to reflect some of the adult family member’s possibly dysfunctional lives made

up of activities that included excessive drinking of alcohol and taking of drugs on a daily basis.

Some students were still hung over or coming down from bingeing in the first weeks back at school and their behaviour was often volatile and aggressive.

Bridget says that she emails staff to be on a look out for this behaviour, especially depression and suicide. One student told her; “I would be an addict if I didn’t come to the College” (May, 2007).

It was important for me and those who have entrusted me with their stories to do this study as authentically as I humanly could. As such, I invited a peer who had no contractual interest to facilitate extensive discussion, so in the process of peer debriefing, assisted me to better articulate and consciously own my exploration. As I have experienced in previous post graduate research, this strategy also provided a means of catharsis, substantiating hunches and observations sometimes blurred in the isolation of fieldwork. To establish progressive subjectivity, I used large spiral bound notebooks documenting my thoughts and speculations of what I expect to find as my study evolved. “Prior to engaging in any activity at the site or in the context in which the investigation is to proceed the inquirer records his or her a priori construction-what he or she expects to find once the study is underway” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 238).

The criteria of authenticity in particular ontological authenticity according to Bryman, (2001) includes the researchers rationale for conducting the research and where the research was designed to assist the respondents to work towards generating evidence they could use to improve their social milieu/school curriculum. The degree and extent of the data generated from the investigation reflected in the evaluation process, was achieved by member checking and rechecking that the stakeholders felt that they were truly representative and that they felt that they had a significant role to play in the study. In terms of tactical authenticity the researcher tracks the respondents to instigate or engage in or encourage the participants to alter specific behaviours. If the participants stated that they felt this, it may be evident in their future actions such as in the girls’ situation of improved attendance, greater participation in the school program and a willingness to defer the thought of quitting, as Tierney suggests, “the challenge becomes the desire to change the more

oppressive aspects of life that silence and marginalise some and privilege others” (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 549).

Establishing a site

The saga of how I won and lost at Little Bird

I described in Chapter 1, how I had heard about an Aboriginal College who were using a sporting program in an attempt to retain at-risk adolescent girls at school. Shamefully I neglected to mention that I only got to know about the Aboriginal College serendipitously by default. Prior to this I had been deeply involved working with my Reference Group preparing myself to establish my research site at Little Bird, an Aboriginal school in the south-west of Western Australia. For twelve months I had worked developing my Literature Review and Candidacy with the intention to investigate Aboriginal educational practices occurring at the school. Unfortunately at the eleventh hour the school board withdrew their support for having me in their school due to other researchers needing to stay on longer to complete their investigation. After a full year focussed on this school it was very disappointing and extremely difficult to now find that I had no site and no idea of what I was going to do or where I was going to go. Notes from my journal read like this:

Monday March 10 2006 Ya! my daughter is 15 today. I rang Robyn (Reference Group member) she is really keen to drive down south to Little Bird Aboriginal School with me to meet up with the Principal who is her ex-colleague and dear friend. It was Robyn's older sister who was instrumental in getting the place built and her connection to the school, country and kids is very strong. I am really looking forward to this and to finally getting in to the school and getting to work. I quickly rang the Principal to confirm what we had previously arranged. She tells me to hold on, the Little Bird school board have met and they have decided not to have me in the school as they feel with the researchers from Edith Cowan University still there, they are beginning to feel like fish in a bowl. I rang Robyn back immediately; she recommends that we still go down to get a feel of the situation; she is as stunned as I am. I call the Principal to tell her this but there is a funeral on and no one will be at school for the next week and, she feels strongly that no means it's non-negotiable.

It took four long angst-driven months to find a replacement school. On the 28th July, 2006 I was given approval to use the Aboriginal College as my research site.

The following section is drawn from my extensive field notes detailing in chronological order how the inquiry eventually came about, how I managed to get past the gatekeepers and into the heart of the research site.

How Field Notes became Prison Notes then back to Field Notes again

8 June 2006

I rang the Aboriginal College today and asked to speak with the Principal Mr Ted Cooder, the receptionist said that he was busy with students and that he would call me back. He did. After I had introduced myself I asked if the College would consider having a PhD research student. He started to answer then the phone went dead. Had he hung up on me? When he rang back I said without hesitation, “Do I take that as a no?” he laughed and said I think we can meet and see. He asked me about Esperance, how much rain we’ve had and to make an appointment with his personal assistant to discuss the proposition of having me conduct the study in his school. I sigh deeply and contentedly.

10 June 2006

Scheduled to meet with the Aboriginal College Principal Mr Ted Cooder but the meeting was rescheduled.

12 June 2006

The re-scheduled meeting to meet with the Principal Mr Ted Cooder was re-re-scheduled. To say I am having a little difficulty in securing a contact or an interview with the Principal of the College would be a principle understatement.

me sits and waits

wind wails at the window as I sit and watch the dawn.

clouds cut out the winter sunrise and scowl at me forlorn.

I've waited for days, haven't sleep for nights,

hungry for news to confirm I have the research site.

13 June 2006

This morning the meeting with the Principal Mr Ted Cooder was delayed as he had double appointments. I didn't mind the wait at all; I was in the building with my proverbial foot keenly in the door. It was lovely to get my breath, sip my tea and have a chance to sit in the magnificent old building, wondering about the hundreds of feet that would have trampled up and down the wooden staircase with hand-carved balustrades. Buildings like this seem to drink in the life-energy of the people who move like corpuscles up and down the capillary-like corridors. Schools like this can give life to wonder-filled new possibilities, the place that has the power to make you a better person, if you agree to let it transform you. Sort of like the Mandela quote about it's not the darkness but rather the lightness of possibilities to allow ourselves to be brave, brilliant and successful that is most frightening.

Finally I got to meet the Principal Mr Ted Cooder. I was conscious that he had been double-booked and I didn't have a lot of time to put my case. He said my proposal sounded interesting and requested a copy of my Candidacy Proposal and my Ethics Clearance saying he would get back to me with his decision. I felt that he was genuinely supportive of the proposal but I was not out of the woods yet. After the fuck up with the Principal from the first school who had verbally agreed for me to use her school for my inquiry, and who after working on the proposal in conjunction with my Reference Group for twelve months, told me just prior to me relocating across the state, kids in tow to start my field work, that "the school board have changed their mind and said no", meant this time I wasn't going to take

anything for granted. Once, if this Principal agrees, I will get him to sign a contraction agreement stating the board supports my internship. I must say changing the document from the first school to the Aboriginal College actually felt really good. A genuine peaceful easy feeling settled right over me and it finally felt “right”. To be this far into my studies and still scratching around for a research site is soul destroying. This bloody PhD study business is fraught with angst and unpredictability. I have never been down, so low, for so long before. Is this the stuff of epiphanies? Please Mr Ted Cooder...just say yes.

15 June 2006

I delivered my Candidacy Proposal and Ethics Clearance to the Principals’ Personal Assistant. I also added the Informational Sheet and the Consent Form but most importantly a draft sample of a letter from the Principal formally approving me to conduct the study at the college.

25 June 2006

I lament about the time consuming delay. Why haven’t they returned my calls? Having worked all my life in places similar to the College I know the answer to my question.

30 June 2006

Two weeks have lapsed during which time I rang the College many times and left messages with the receptionist asking the PA to call me. I am desperate to know Ted Cooder’s decision. The passing of these days are perilous. The PA said that he was very busy due to the end of term being so hectic, but he would get back to me.

I start to become despondent again and write ‘Plath-esque’ poetry in my journal, ramblings titled “Here we go again” and “PhD Blues”. English rock band “Coldplay” lyrics titles pepper my writing, “How long do I have to climb up on the side of this mountain of mine?” And “When you try so hard but you don’t succeed...when you get what you want but not what you need. When you feel so

tired but you can't sleep, stuck in reverse" (Berryman, Buckland, Champion, & Martin, 2005).

I'm reeling from frustration, guilt, resentment. The days are seeping out like water in cupped hands. I'm reading everything I can such as: Semali and Kincheloe, Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper, Giroux, but I never have a sense of completion. Everyday I stop with fuzzy vision and aching shoulders yet it never seems enough.

Days pass still no response from Ted Cooder to let me know if I can do my study at the College. In the mean time I have moved on from Reed-Danahay to Gramsci and Geertz.

I did four days of exam supervision at the College to get "a foot in the door" and to be seen around the place. During recess I could hear the girls down stairs in their common room, laughing, teasing and singing along to music. I was getting so desperate for permission to start my study that my thoughts turned Machiavellian, wondering if I could subtly start my field work documentation. I could become the ghost researcher, turning up in the guise of other roles; exam supervisor, cleaner, listening to corridor conversations and documenting the real story of the place. I quickly chastised myself for having such underhand thoughts. However if Ted says I cannot do my internship here at the College, I just don't know what I will do. I feel miserable and agitated.

Last week to comfort myself I attended a forum discussion, how sad is that. The session was titled Action Research in Postgraduate Studies with Dr Ernie Stringer at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. It was soothingly restorative for me to sit in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies and feel the energy of the group talk about their Indigenous experiences. One thing is for sure about all this business, this waiting to write business...it's in my heart I just can't give up on it all now.

4 July 2006

5 to 5

I'm waiting by the telephone - I'm anxious. She said she would call me any day.

I want to phone-but hold back, press the numbers in my head, the Aboriginal way?

will this Principal tell me it's all off, come to think of it, was it ever on?

I drift along...

I'm on the path to nowhere, at the mercy of others—once again.

I read all day but the words and concepts just seem to unravel,

I want you to know I am not lying when I tell you... I am truly trying.

this student life, this economic rationalist, neo fascist farce

is nothing more than a miserable post modern pain in the arse.

I drove home to Esperance for the inter-semester break. During the eight hour drive I thought about what I had read and written. At home I felt so comforted by my familiar world of sounds and smells. When friends asked me questions about my study I was often surprised at my responses. They sounded like reasonable explanations as opposed to the soup of thoughts I had in my head.

It was so good to be home, in my bed, in our house, listening to the waves break, being woken by the sounds drifting up from the beach of dogs barking at seagulls. Sitting on our balcony drinking wine, watching the sun set onto the granite headland and islands, remanent light coating them in shrouds of mauves and pinks, having family and friends over sharing meals and laughing again was, temporarily, uplifting.

Yet night after night lying awake in the darkness while the rest of the house slept, an overwhelming sense of dread prevailed. I still did not know what I was going to do and if I didn't know soon, I wasn't sure if I would have the momentum I knew I was going to need, to be able to do it. I needed to break out of the uncertainty and get out into the real world, I was sick of just reading about it. Huge issues were impacting on the lives of others while I sat slumped in my pathetic PhD bubble. Megan's (an

old school friend) mother died yesterday and a neighbour from my childhood was washed off the rocks while fishing and drowned. These real lives, deep and sore realities were happening around me and in the meantime I was immersed in some esoteric auto ethnographic study that nobody was going to give a toss about in the end anyway. I sensed so much angst in the air and urgency of time.

After the break the kids and I drove back to Perth. Leaving Mum, my siblings and friends was just bearable but leaving Daniel was really an unbearably hard thing to do. I want to wake up next to him every morning, share the cooking, the kid-raising and arguments over the dishes, the Saturday papers, and the real life everyday stuff. But right now we don't, and this is the bit that makes me feel utterly valueless.

PhD blues

I have taken on a challenge well beyond my capabilities. I don't understand most of the words that I am reading and to pronounce them would be an appalling embarrassment.

I don't feel as though I am learning or developing any part of my head...I guess burgeoning jowls and bulging eyes don't count.

I feel bewildered and inadequate and disconnected from my worlds of work and life.

My children seem to sense my loss of direction; they suddenly become demanding, self centred, insensitive to my fears. They fight and pick and gang up.

Their energies expended on their own narcissism, none left over to take out the rubbish or cook dinner just one night.

Perish the thought to think to close the door, much less sweep the floor.

20 July 2006

The Aboriginal College Assistant Principal Dean Whitley rang today about me doing some relief teaching. I explained that I would be very happy to do it, but what I desperately needed to know was to find out from the Principal if I was going to be given permission to do my study at the College.

He was surprised that I had not been notified and said that he would speak to the Principal since it would be him that would be doing the supervision.

This waiting has effectively flat-lined my spirit.

27 July 2006

I have stopped exercising and drinking water and started writing *prison notes*-the cutting sort to get me out of my imposed entombment.

28 July 2006

I cannot stand this anymore. At 12:27 pm I got in my car and drove to the College. I felt like I was storming the Bastille.

The Principal was standing in the reception area when I walked in and saw me coming. He smiled, reached out to shake my hand and we both laughed when he realised that I had not released my firm grasp. He said, “You are not going to let me out of your sights are you? Yes, you have my approval to do your research here. We are having some difficulty in getting students back to school after the holidays, so hopefully your research may assist us”.

Yakki! I’m in. The sun came out to match my beaming smile as I drove down the rose-bush lined driveway.

Why I chose the Aboriginal College

Traditionally attendance and retention levels of female students at the Aboriginal College were problematic. Something needed to be done in an attempt to generate a

more sustainable school program. This excerpt from Aboriginal liaison officer Justine Hope tells how an opportunity was taken up.

It started in Term 4 2004. It was sort of like a pilot program because we didn't have anything that was concrete for the girls. At the time we had a relieving Principal at the school for a semester and one day he had a visit by a lady from Christian Brothers College who came in with an Olympian basketball player. He said I've retired from basketball and I've always wanted to work with Indigenous kids but basketball is my specialty can I offer anything to the school? At that time the girls had nothing, the boys had the Football Academy and our Principal said do you think you could offer a group of girls a basketball program? He said OK and it came from that and it came from a lot of hard work getting a place set up for us here (T1, FI, 2006, p. 11).

How I conducted the field work

The investigation began with meeting the two key informants Justine Hope and Coach Graceland. From this immersion within the girls' program began, albeit being in the main unnoticed by the majority of the girls and College community. I commenced observation sessions akin to a sleuth, documenting any and all salient details trying to establish the pulse of the place through its procedures and practices. My mini and grand musings filled three large spiral-bound Field Observations notebooks. I recognised immediately that I wanted to freeze frame these first impressions in text to best take advantage of fresh eyes. I had found in previous research that first impressions tended to present accurate indicators of things to come. My other role in the College that provided access to the site was that of a relief teacher. I describe the long drawn out process of gaining access to the research site in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Like other auto/ethnographers before me, I began the research process by systematically collecting data in field notebooks, large spiral bound books of blank white sheets of firm thick paper, not unlike a tabula rasa, awaiting streams of grand higher order thoughts and epiphanies to helix up and be drawn out and documented upon. Instead they became like pages of palimpsests, words and concepts crossed out or erased, erratic and confused rambled writings as the research undertaking intensified. I became beleaguered with documenting in the field note books with what appeared to be an endless list of misdemeanours, misunderstandings and mistakes. It seemed that I was always in the wrong place at the wrong time asking the wrong questions to the wrong person. Van Maanen (1988) called these

confessional tales, “the mini-melodrama of hardships’ endured and (overcome)” (p. 73). I would walk for hours along the beach trying to make sense of it all, how I could possibly be so gullible or inappropriate and reflect deeply on ways I might be able to restore some credibility after the humbug I seemed to invite. Ellis and Bochner (2000) noted that self narratives greatly enrich the research process as, “authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self–other interaction” (p. 740). This process evoked self reflection and self analysis which engendered self learning and consequently autoethnographers, “attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation. As such autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self” (Chang, 2008, p. 49). She believed that autoethnographers used their personal experiences as primary data, ensuring that, “the richness of autobiographical narratives and autobiographical insights is valued and intentionally integrated in the research process and product unlike conventional ethnography” (Chang, 2008, p. 49).

Data and data generation

This section examines what I collected as data from the research participants and how this collection was selected, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by my prior experiences and frames of knowledge, my biography and my relationship with the research participants, discrete or otherwise. Once informed written consent from the principal, teachers, students and focus groups, as stipulated per Ethics Protocol Approval was achieved I began to interview individual teachers, students and school community members. The interview schedule, which was piloted by the reference group prior to application, was structured in an attempt to elicit the significant experiences of the multiple and collective realities of the respondents.

The interviews were conducted within the school grounds in places to ensure the respondents were relaxed and able to talk freely. The coded interviews were taped using a small hand held tape recorder and transcribed. Analysis of these transcripts was conducted using a qualitative computer program. The transcripts were checked to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity so that transcription and editing were analogous to the oral account. Other data sources were participant

observations, conversations with the reference groups and Indigenous community members.

Ethical issues

In accordance with the following principles outlined by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) Division of Humanities at Curtin University, responsible for Indigenous education and research the following requirements were needed:

1. Head of the CAS was informed.
2. A CAS associate supervisor was aligned.
3. An Indigenous local Reference Group was established consisting of three experienced educators and community elders who have agreed to meet four times a year as well as on a need-to basis. Essentially their function was to provide various levels of support from guiding me through established Indigenous protocols, recommending relevant contacts and providing background information to authenticate my study. My responsibility to the Reference Group was to report all phases of the process and corroborate with them that the data generated was authentic and trustworthy.

As well I have an Indigenous mentor whose personal prescience about future Indigenous survival and the way education could evolve was the real naissance of this exploration.

4. Curtin University Principles of Ethical Conduct from the NHMRC were followed. Ethics Approval for Research Involving Humans consent forms C and A was submitted together with the application for Candidacy.
5. Participants were informed about the research in writing inviting them to participate in the study. No names and/or addresses were used, each

participant was numerically coded and a pseudonym was used in the text. Respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

6. All information was kept strictly confidential. All participants had access to their own interview transcript. Information from participants was kept in a locked cabinet in my office, permission was sought to audiotape the interview and the participants signed a consent form. Invasive techniques or payment or inducements were not used. The data will be kept for five years then destroyed, not sold or used in a salacious manner.

The field note documents were typed up in chronological order and coded. My next step was to engage in any conversations allowing me a chance to create a collage of College events and characters. I requested timetables to see which staff members predominately worked with or formally taught the girls and refined my time talking informally with these individuals. The outcomes of meetings were converted without delay into field notes to ensure I remembered what they said and as accurately as possible. These notes were dated, coded and archived. By now some months had lapsed and I felt I was in a better position to interview staff and supplementary key informants working in adjunct to the College. Ethical requirements were established to protect the informants by means of ensuring pseudonyms were used and the interviews were numerically coded, information was not released in an identifiable form, respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any time, all information was kept confidential with respondents having access only to their own interview transcript, permission was sought to audiotape the interview and the respondents signed a consent form allowing this to occur.

College staff interviews

The staff interviews were conducted at various places around the College, chosen by the participants where they felt most comfortable without being concerned about being overheard or taken out of context. I used a short power point presentation on my laptop computer showing a series of Aboriginal schools I had worked in as a warm up exercise. My hope was that they would feel more comfortable with me after learning that I did have an authentic history in Aboriginal Education and that my study was about trying to highlight Indigenous ways of learning, rather than

simply completing my PhD as a means to scaling the rungs of academia. All staff set aside their duties other than teaching period and several scheduled the session which then ran into their lunch time providing an extra forty minutes. This uninterrupted period of time to talk provided the opportunity to genuinely think about and explain what it was they really wanted me to hear.

The informal interview schedule drafted, amended and endorsed by the Reference Group was made up from a suggestion of fifteen guide questions. While fifteen questions may appear as a structured interview, the Reference Group all felt these questions were a necessary requirement to ensure that all aspects of the inquiry were considered. The guide questions were set ranging from broad based to specific, that is to say the first questions were open and ranging, casting the net, trying to establish a platform from which to launch from, which I referred to as the macro level. The questions became more specific, referred to as the meso level until refined down to very precise questions at the micro level. As such the first five macro questions were based around personal background information; six meso questions were based around current teaching situations and two micro questions asked for their opinion as to how they would enhance their current teaching program to accommodate Indigenous epistemologies. (see Appendix A)

The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts returned to the interviewees to ensure they were a true and accurate account of what they said. During this member checking session amendments were carried out. I then made the changes and returned the transcript to the interviewee who once agreeing on its authenticity, signed it as the official accurate copy. The transcript was then coded, ready to use as data.

The data was analysed using the computer program QSR NVivo to generate possible connections/nodes between the codes. Based on the outcomes of these connections/nodes the qualitative interpretations were constructed as the findings were categorised into emerging themes. Multi-layers of classification based upon what emerges out of the first and second phase of connections/nodes was analysed. The mixed genres reflected or refracted multiple dimensions revealed by the approach of crystallisation (Richardson, 2000) which include historical community

intelligence authenticated against field notes and departmental archival records to clarify meaning and verify the credibility and transferability of data sources.

Data Analysis using QSR NVivo

The writing up of the research report was constructed within a postmodern interpretivist paradigm. I conducted a reductionist data analysis breaking down large chunks of text into themes and sub-themes. This creative process makes connections where the respondent's language reflected a site of exploration and struggle. By doing the analysis this way allowed me as the researcher rather than the *interview schedule* to become what Burgos-Debray (1984) refers to as the "instrument" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 543). As in autoethnographic narratives, the goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about things that matter and may make a difference. As Lather (1986) claims via practices of engagement brings ethics and epistemology together.

Buoyed by wanting to know how to use the quantitative program so to best extrapolate the data, I enrolled in a workshop at the University of Notre Dame and learned to use the computer data program known as QSR NVivo. It was complex and I had difficulty in using the contrived work shop data to establish relationships. The program used the concept of a tree to diffuse the data with the first level of analysis known as the Free Nodes that branched out to Tree Nodes and then into Cases and Relationships and Matrices. After six gruelling hours I left the old stone church converted into a computer laboratory dazed.

For the next month I invested time reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening and re-listening to the taped interviews, noting vigilantly various paralinguistic indicators as pauses and silences divulged significant cues, and carefully noticed particular viewpoints percolate to surface and present quite distinctively. Now I was more intimate with the data it gave me the propensity to be intrepid, I enrolled again in another QSR NVivo workshop. This time I spent the entire day using my own data to learn the program and while I left a little less dazed, I felt I had a decent understanding of it. For the next four months I converted transcripts to Tree Nodes and Cases and Relationships and Matrices.

Based on the 14 staff transcript responses and their additional information from informal meetings I generated from their data 13 Free Nodes. These included:

- The College,
- College student population,
- Context of college leadership,
- Characteristics of educators teaching at the College,
- Students' impressions of College teachers,
- Teachers' impressions of student attendance and attitudes,
- Establishing expectations between staff and students,
- Teachers' impressions of dominant mainstream educational paradigms of teaching,
- Students' impressions of dominant mainstream paradigms of teaching,
- Staff and students' recognition of alternate ways of thinking and learning,
- Student-preferred ways of learning and teachers who consciously fish-hook students schematic thought processes,
- Anglo-Celtic styles of questioning using Standard Australian English, and
- Complexities encountered by staff at the College.

Fracturing and dissecting the 13 Free Nodes morphed into 25 Tree Nodes which included:

- Historical perspective - How it all began,
- Establishing the Girls' Academy goals,
- Parental level of involvement in the Girls' Academy,
- Role models and mentoring influences,
- Establishing the emergent curriculum framework - The Yorgas Program,
- What it meant to the girls to be a part of the Girls' Academy,
- To quit or to stay: Flight or fight,
- Observable changes in the girls' social, physical and academic behaviours,
- Staff's belief in students - The self fulfilling prophecy,
- Students' belief in the self fulfilling prophecy of shame,
- Empowering young women - where to from here?

and

- The Girls' Academy – where are they now?

With ethnographic data analysed, I embarked on the venture of re-reading, re-listening, re-viewing the interview transcripts, re-visiting the informal corridor conversations, leafing through my Field Observation notebooks and reacquainting

myself with the words the participants had shared with me. Whatever I was doing, like washing dishes at the kitchen sink, I would put my headphones on and listen to an interview. Often things became apparent, that I had not heard at the time of the interview. Re-reading transcripts eventually presented me with themes which came from investing significant amounts of time conducting repeated analysis. I then sorted and labelled and classified the integral and peripheral sources watching them shunt into commonalties and emerging themes. As I was willowing through all the data I was cognisant of ensuring that the voices of all those people I had spent so much time listening to, emerged. To establish ontological authenticity I needed to constantly check to see that I had faithfully documented their thoughts and their professional feelings.

Once I could see the fullness and richness of the references and how much territory they covered in all my data sources, I began printing out key participants' quotes. I cut and pasted them onto large sheets of recycled paper and hung them on the walls around the house. The walls in my home are covered in large Aboriginal bark paintings, images of iconic cross-hatching and dreamtime representations, and I felt that they didn't mind at all to be shrouded with these large sheets of text. This gave me the opportunity to gaze at the data. Whenever I would take a rest from writing I could stand, sip my tea, re-read the words, recall the setting, reflect and often, renderings were revealed. I found that when I stood back and re-read the words of the participants I seemed to gain a far broader acuity that didn't always become apparent from reading off the computer screen.

It was around that time that there was an "unannounced power malfunction" at my home in Esperance and my computer shut down. When I restarted the computer it would not let me open QSR NVivo nor allow me to access my four months work of data analysis. I drove eight hours back to the university in Perth, *broke* down the Humanities IT Service door and whimpered, "help!" Nothing could be done; I was referred to the National QSR NVivo specialists whose technicians worked for two weeks trying to recover the data but eventually gave up, unable to explain what had made the program inoperable. Desperate and without sleep I returned to the Curtin University QSR NVivo team who managed to retrieve the data, although they could

only save it as a read-only document. I analysed the rest of the data manually which serendipitously gave me an even better sense of familiarity with the student data.

Student interviews

The student interviews were conducted under similar conditions as the staff. As each girl returned their signed consent notes acknowledging that they were permitted to be a part of the study, I interviewed them. The student interviews were conducted at various sites around the College and as with the staff I used as a warm up exercise, a short power point presentation showing an assortment of different Aboriginal basketball teams I had played in. My intent was to take their mind of the interview, and this succeeded as they laughed at my team's unorthodox uniforms or particular player's shoeless feet and asked questions about the places I had lived.

The interview schedule drafted, amended and endorsed by the Reference Group was made up from a suggestion of ten guide questions. Like with the staff questions they started broadly with general open ended questions and then funnelled down to specific content based questions. (see Appendix B)

From the outset, establishing the guide questions for the students felt different to when I was interviewing staff. I was suddenly conscious of my ways of questioning and somehow this made me self-conscious. Since, "self is considered a carrier of culture" (Chang, 2008, p. 125), I was cognisant that I was shifting my attention back and forth trying to ascertain how the students were managing my probing. Even though the guide questions were negotiated with the Reference Group, piloted and amended, when it came time to use them I became somewhat wary of them. I was enveloped in doubt, thinking "am I taking too long? Are the questions too nebulous? Am I trying to probe too much personal information about their private lives?"

I kept seeing the enduring words of Harris (1990) who wrote, "it is bad manners to be too inquisitive in a society which has ways other than walls and fences for maintaining privacy" (p. 39). I knew from previous experience that Indigenous students felt no obligation to respond, and similarly I knew that it was culturally acceptable for them to reserve the right to speak, just as they reserved the right to

listen. According to Collard and Rochecouste (1997), “in Aboriginal society, the listener is not obliged to look at the speaker and does not have to nod and make polite noises to say they are listening. Conversation is ongoing and listeners can tune in and out as they please” (p. 9). This was also evident in the writing of Eades who cautioned that, “direct questioning strategies for eliciting information especially on personal matters and significant areas, by people with whom they have no close relationship, is totally inappropriate” (Eades, 1988, p. 107). Interviewing Indigenous students as opposed to non-Indigenous staff, who freely made information available, highlighted the strong social constraints in which the Indigenous students operated. In Aboriginal societies, for example, there is no obligation to answer a question, as pointed out by Harris, “to get an answer is a privilege, not a right” (Harris, 1984, p. 151). Likewise Eichhorn (1990) noted in his research project that, “Aboriginal participants will tend to tell a non-Aboriginal person what they think that person wants to hear rather than their own opinions, if they are prepared to respond at all” (Eichhorn, 1990, p. 15). It was with this counsel I pressed on, just like the sawfish.

Slowly and steadily I transcribed the student interviews in a similar fashion to how I conducted the staff interviews. I then returned the transcripts to the participants so that they could check them to ensure they were a true and accurate account of what they had said. During member checking sessions amendments were carried out. I tended to make the changes together with the student there and then, as this memo denotes:

Julia met me just after noon. This meeting had been a long time coming. The first time we were scheduled to meet I had waited in the Aboriginal Centre when around about the meeting time she texted me from some place between the city and the central wheat belt saying there were family problems, and she was on the road heading home.

The next time she texted me to make a time to catch up I was home in Esperance so this was third time lucky and we both made it.

Julia had her copy of the transcript. She laughed and said she was surprised at how many times she said “like”. We went over the specific pages that needed her to translate for me what she had said or to clarify what she had intended to mean.

We then listened to the last question on the tape and she re-answered it again following on from what she was saying. We went on to the next question that needed clarification.

Julia kept talking and adding to the questions so I just let her go. Every now and then she digressed, telling me how she had gone over to the girls' room to visit when she had a break at University and that there was a noisy girl called Kaysi McSan making a big racket and she thought to herself, "No shame".

As we left she told me proudly that Aunty Justine has asked her to open the girls' room on the 29th May 2007, and to present the opening speech in Nyungar (May 2007).

After checking, the transcripts were coded, and were ready to use for data analysis and interpretation. Chang (2008) believes that analysis tends to dissect data whereas interpretation urges researchers to connect fractured data. She advocates that it is possible to make the transition from data analysis to data interpretation and in, "the reverse direction, without noticing your cognitive-gear shifting. Thus, analysis and interpretation should be seen not in conflict, with each other, but as a balancing act between fracturing and connecting, between zooming in and zooming out, between science and art" (Chang, 2008, p. 128).

Writing up as a learning process

Writing is what brings a profound meaning to what is not always obvious at first, or at the time of its occurrence. Applying auto/ethnographic processes in my professional practice as a teacher/learner, (re)searcher, I gained a deeper understanding and in turn became more receptive to the praxis or idea of actioning the theory of pedagogical reform.

The generation of information about the College, the College staff, the Girls' Academy, the Yorgas Program, and the students originated from a variety of sources. I employed mixed genres to this variety of data sources in order to establish, "crystallisation as a postmodernist alternative to triangulation" (Richardson as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 934) including a compilation of genres ranging from literary texts, to poesies/poems to photographic documentation to demonstrate what Richardson (2008) suggests; will reflect not the rigid one dimensional triangulation of cross referencing but rather the emergent multidimensional and transgressive

characteristics of crystallisation. These also include; interviews, author's reflective journal, archival records, documentation, memoranda, agendas, minutes of meetings, written reports and administrative documents, testimonies, narratives, field observations, participant observation, personal histories, traditional stories, genealogies, video and audio tapes, and personal records.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented the logistics of establishing a data collection process within a setting that shared no prior relationship with the researcher. It tells of the trials and tribulations that occurred when attempting to establish rapport and trust in an endeavour to create the collection. It tells how the management of data became the intermediary link between collection and analysis and how it needed to be well organised, refined and consistently revisited.

The chapter attempted to justify and question if the voices of the participants had been truly represented and that their recorded words reflected what they intended to express. This quality of polyvocality was checked against the criteria of trustworthiness which included the criteria's of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To ensure the study intersected these criteria they were further matched against the quality of authenticity ensuring that the inquiry will be represented by the criteria of ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity.

Chapter 3 will provide an introduction to the early years of helen cd mccarthy and how my connection with the land shaped my life experiences that became the underpinning elements that buoyed me on a journey that would see me become a border crosser.

The following section of the thesis titled Part I My place and country, introduces the reader to my life story and highlights why (1) I have become who I am now and (2) where my passion for establishing a culturally-sensitive girls' education stems from.

Section 1

Introduction to Section 1

Section 1 presents an overview of and focus on *my* place within this dissertation. It is a sketch of how I use autobiography and my evolving dialectical relationship of auto/ethnography to describe how, through a journey of self analysis and personal discovery, I become acculturated in the world of the “Other”.

Chapter 3 provides glimpses of my family history and upbringing and tells the story of my “connection to country” where I was raised. It introduces the reader to the “other I” aka Makarda Amagula and the shifting complexities and problematic experiences that begin to shape my transition into this new world. The seminal works of Homi Bhabha and the notion of the Third Space are applied to draw parallels to Makarda’s acculturation authentication as I entered this space.

Chapter 4 introduces the story of the fight “awiyemba” against the Old Boys’ Network and for Women’s Rights in The Island Defamation Case. Further it continues to tell of Makarda Amagula and the acculturation of a teacher introducing concepts of Enculturation, Acculturation and Cultural Border-crossing.

Chapter 5 describes how my personal awiyemba continues as a fight for culturally-sensitive and relevant education for girls. This theme is examined against the Australian and International contexts in which young Indigenous girls rights and responsibilities are considered.

Chapter 3 – Early Years of helen cd mccarthy – My Connection to the Land

Part I: My place and country

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to my early experiences that shaped the pathway I ventured along as a child which as a consequence impacted on the choices I made as an adult. It begins in a small coastal community in the south east of Western Australia, my home town Esperance, where I had the freedom to surf the beaches and roam the open spaces of my childhood. The narrative then moves into northern Australia as I commence my adult life and career as a teacher. Using autobiography as the methodology to establish the basis for this narrative, I draw on my experiences and establish how these influences impacted my actions.

Relational connection is pivotal to this thesis, and this is what I now need to do. As a white woman what right have I to speak for Indigenous peoples' quest for an educational system that is conducive to their ways of knowing? In the foreword of the Mellor and Corrigan (2004) report *The Case for Change: A Review of Contemporary Research on Indigenous Education Outcomes*, Professor Paul Hughes writes:

Politically the Indigenous community has long held the view that we have been extensively researched for little outcomes. We have felt that many people, mostly non-Indigenous, have studied us and in the process produced many publications that have helped them advance their academic qualifications, professional standing and careers. These activities have not necessarily helped us advance as Indigenous communities and peoples. We would add that it is essential that such research be done in conjunction with, and inclusive of, Indigenous people-both for the purpose of capacity building for our people, but more importantly for Indigenous knowledge to be incorporated (as cited in Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

On the basis of Hughes' supposition I am another non-Indigenous researcher wishing to advance her status by the fulfilment of an academic qualification. Whatever I generate as a scholar according to black academic Moreton-Robinson means that I must, "... recognise that Whiteness has shaped knowledge production" and that, "academia would have to accept that the dominant regime of knowledge is culturally and racially biased, socially situated and partial" (Moreton-Robinson, 2005, p. 88).

Therefore I commence my story with the complexity of my *whiteness*. Not being Indigenous how can I tell the stories of the Indigenous people I seek to exemplify?

I suggest that I have *learned the right* to be a collector of these narratives as I have lived and worked as a teacher/learner in the Indigenous communities of Anindilyakwa speaking Angurugu, Umbakumba, Numbulwar, and the Yolngu Matha speaking communities of Ramingining and Milingimbi in Arnhem Land in northern Australia, and with the Nyungar/Noongar and Wongi students in the Wongutha (Esperance/Goldfield) region of Western Australia. I have witnessed that the education systems of both the State of Western Australia and the Northern Territory that I have worked in seldom reflected the significant advice given by many elders and parents in these communities on how they want their children taught. Governments, curriculum and policy writers as well have seldom listened to what Indigenous educators and elders have been saying. In their 2004 *Partners in Learning-Final Report* the authors reveal that their study substantiates, “clearly many informants believe that, while there are exceptions, “deafness” to Indigenous advice remains widespread” (Kemmis, Atkinson, Brennan, & Atkinson, 2004, p. 129). Furthermore, over this period of time I have observed that the education systems have not always afforded Indigenous learners much sensitivity when dealing with salient cultural differences, nor recognised that there is not one Indigenous culture just as there is not one homogenous Indigenous people in Australia.

But before I get too far ahead of myself I want you to know in a capricious sort of quasi-chronological order, what I experienced in my learning and teaching to both authenticate my claims as well as to seek verisimilitude. For unless I establish this recount as believable and that my intentions to effect change as genuine, I have to accept that the reader might doubt my intention. In the next section of the chapter I use self narrative or autobiography as a methodology to expound how my earlier experiences were instrumental in acting as the catalyst towards setting me on a certain trajectory in what would become my future.

Autobiography as a methodology

William Pinar writes that our lives and lived experiences are, “...not mere smudges on the mirror” (Pinar, 1981, p. 184) but are in fact illuminating and the prerequisite

for cultivating our capacity to knowing, explaining and facilitating our capability towards transformation. Likewise William Earle describes when we seek to write autobiographically we write to ask, “what it is for me to exist, and what lies before me...ontological autobiography...is a question of a form of consciousness rather than literature” (as cited in Pinar, 1981, p. 184). I needed to write this autobiographical element within the dissertation to allow my consciousness a form to express what I have lived, to establish some type of dialectical relationship, self to self. This journey became a reflexive awareness of understanding my role as I had participated in life. For the first time I began to reconstruct my experiences as I trawled around in my past, not in order to diminish my existence but to value it. Initially feeling shy to write so much about myself unabridged I was comforted when I read, “understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and a concomitant condition to the understanding of others. The process of education is not situated- and cannot be understood-in the observer, but in we who undergo it” (Pinar, 1981, p. 186). So in the spirit of using ontological autobiographical methodology as a means to dialectical development I began.

My early years

My goal for writing this story was to instigate adapting the way education is provided for Aboriginal learners as the current mainstream system is not as effective as it could be. I know this as both a recipient of the system and as an educator within the system. As it happened I didn't do so well at school myself, since I was seldom there: one year I travelled to Perth fifteen times representing my school in various sporting events. I didn't achieve the tertiary entrance score to do Marine Biology or Occupational Therapy so I repeated Year 12. I knew of quite a few kids who brought glory to the school but it seemed when they got their tertiary entrance score, and it was inadequate, they too were left to make their own way in the world. Looking back I suppose my low score made me even more determined to prove that I could do whatever I set my mind to, but I needed a second chance to do it. So at seventeen, as American folk singer Janis Ian lamented, with my high school girl clear-skin smile, instead of marrying young and then retiring, I left my home, the coastal town of Esperance in the Recherche Archipelago and moved to Perth. I remember looking back on that early morning at my mum and dad as they waited at the gate of our house on the Esplanade to wave me goodbye. They stood there, diminished by the

seven towering Norfolk pines and the huge Tuart trees that lined our yard, seemingly immobilised, as the last of their eleven children left home. I was so naive that it did not occur to me to even think about what this moment in time meant in their lives.

My family

I was born into a large Irish Catholic family. When I arrived, my mother, the original environmentalist, was 42 and had successfully delivered in succession four sons and six daughters. By the time I was born my eldest brother Edward aka Teddy was 22, Maurice aka Maurie 21, William aka Jack 19, Francis aka Sam 18, Hazel aka Danie 16, Glenys aka Gongy 15, Kathleen aka Cassie Carfy 11, Alice aka Fred seven, Peta aka Chick three and Beverly aka Ned aged one. Growing up the youngest child of 11 indelibly shaped my world view and my strong desire for social justice especially for the rights of the smallest and/or the seldom heard. In truth, a day rarely passes in my life without me in some way acknowledging my gratitude and respect for my mother and father. Even though my father was employed as the underground manager at the gold mine in Wiluna and later in Kalgoorlie, raising and feeding such a big family led to great economical adversity. I think back now how difficult it must have been for my parents to experience that continuous state of scarcity of funds, yet our house was always full of people, seemingly happy eating and drinking. A friend of my sisters who came to stay over, told her mother when she went home that, “when the McCarthy’s sit down to dinner, they have a party”.

Our place in Esperance is where all my early childhood memories start; down the back yard were two brick stables shaded by an enormous ancient mulberry tree, a large sandy rolling enclosure, a feed shed converted from a two room cottage and a chook yard near the Dunny. The Thunderbox as it was also known was eventually replaced when we got a modern septic toilet after the great storm of ‘71 which washed tumultuous waves over the road and flooded our backyard, drowning all our ducks. The middle of the yard opened into a grassed area where “Mooloo” the sheep grazed and until sunset each summer the neighbourhood kids played “Red Rover All Over”. Up the front of the yard to the port side was the boat shed that housed the timber dory. Shaded by seven majestic Norfolk pines the main weatherboard house with its corrugated iron roof was divided up into five bedrooms, two sleep-outs and a cabin where Mum’s uncle lived with his wife and their daughter. It never occurred

to me that not all families had five kids to a room or three to a bed. On those long hot summer nights us three little ones would lie in a row in the big double bed, tickling our previously sunburnt now itchy backs, scrupulously alternating the middle person. We would fall asleep as the sound of the waves broke onto the beach and the smell of salty air mixed with drying seaweed, wafted in through the open window. No one locked their doors or closed their windows in those days and since we knew everyone in town, the modern notion of stranger danger was implausibly preposterous. Although I was always met by my sister Kath when I walked home from kindergarten in the Esperance Waterside Workers Federation hall in 1964, I really needn't have, as there was never any recorded crime against children. As well we had a policeman who lived on our block, called Mr Crab and no villain dared cross his path.

On starry hot summer nights my dad would call us outside to watch the large golden orb of the full moon emerge and rise up over Cape Le Grand and shed moonbeams across the heart-shaped bay, forming the impression of a watery stairway to heaven. When the moon had risen too high losing its golden intensity, and it was too hot to sleep, we would stay perched up on the front fence counting the few cars that passed our house. Windless nights were a rare treat and we would sit telling stories waiting for the two "Drive-ins" to finish bringing some challenge to the game. While waiting, we would run across to the dark, silent beach and make sand balls. Then we would carry them back to form sand ball snakes across the road, watching the car wheels thump as they ran over them squashing them flat. It kept us greatly amused, but our mirth and merriment was our undoing and Mum would catch us and send us to bed.

Apart from our immediate family we always had boarders stay with us. Looking back now I can see how another income would have helped alleviate the demands on mum in her effort to stretch the budget to feed and clothe us all. There were times when our school shoes leaked and our clothes were noticeably darned, but somehow we always managed. Having said that, whenever I hear any students say they didn't come to school because they didn't have a clean dress or shoes, I do know a little about how they feel.

The neighbours in our hood

We lived next door to Byron Smales, the Bottle-Lo, who used to collect and recycle bottles. Down the back of his yard near the lane, was a loading bench which was fixed to a long conveyor belt made up of a series of metal rollers. Once he had filled a crate of bottles on the ground he would push the crate on the rollers to the top of the landing stage and stack them awaiting the truck to take them back to Perth. During the long summer holidays we would hang out here for hours. We would climb to the top of the landing stage then arrange ourselves on timber boards huddled together like spoons, tilted, balancing precariously, and then surf down the rollers. Much later I watched the movie “Cool Running” and it reminded me of us, in the bobsled, leaning out in unison to take the treacherous bend half way down. It was so invigorating to fly down the rollers and survive the ride, my first experience of understanding how being a team member worked. Had we fallen we would have bled to death but remarkably none of us ever did. Maybe behind the scenes it was the efforts of an over worked Saint Nicholas that kept us kids safe.

In the corner of his yard closest to our house was a magnificent forest of wildly over grown soft bushes that had emerged up around a series of large Tuart logs laid there years before and left. The logs formed a smooth highway where we could crawl from one section of the forest to another and because the plants were so tall we knew we could not be seen from either house. We kids called this jungle the “Enchanted Forest” and it became our refuge, especially when mum had jobs that needed doing. We loved to hide away there, eating and reading contraband or on sunny summer days lie on the warm logs watching clouds drift by, having competitions to see who could imagine the most whimsical shapes. The fantasticality of the place to play hidey until twilight, secure in the knowledge that we would be unfound, was everything a child could possibly wish for. Eventually mum would stand at the back door and call out our names, one after the other, in a sing-songy holler, telling us to come home because it was time for tea.

My mother

Mum was born in Calingiri in Western Australia on the 19th January 1919 although she was mainly raised up in the warmth of the Murchison Region where she

developed her positive outlook to life and where the act of congenial hospitality is seemingly inherent. “It’s just another spud in the pot” she would say, an axiom she got from her mother Alice. I often wondered what my father’s parents thought about him and the life he had made for himself with mum. His father Edward James (EJ) had been educated at Saint Peter’s, a private Catholic school in Adelaide, and then continued on to Adelaide University where he studied law. EJ McCarthy came to Esperance in the 1890’s in search of commercial ventures. He saw great vision for the Esperance sand plain that up until then had been developed into a sheep station by the Deville family. It was rumoured that whenever McCarthy and Deville met in the street, even their dogs would fight. EJ built significant buildings in the town most notably the Bijou Theatre, currently reputed to be the second oldest operational theatre in Australia. He was also responsible for raising salt on Middle Island off Esperance and exporting it to India in the late 1800’s and was an eminent and entrepreneurial leader being past president of the Roads Board, now known as the Local Government, for 33 years. Mum often tells the story when she went with my dad to meet his parents for the first time, she inadvertently walked into the kitchen and heard his mother telling his sister, “did you see her hands; they look like they have never done a day’s work in their life!” Needless to say mum being the oldest of 13 siblings helped her mother out financially by working in the local Wiluna boarding house washing and cleaning.

While Wiluna may not look like much today, for those who lived there during the great gold boom, it holds precious memories of a vibrant commercial and community centre. It held state tennis championships, sailing regattas on Lake Way and boasted an Olympic size swimming pool. Mum added to the Wiluna population considerably giving birth to my four brothers Teddy, Maurie, Jack, Sam and two sisters Danie and Gongy. A further two sisters Cassie Carfy and Fred were to be born in Meekatharra and the last of us; Chick, Ned and I, were born in Kalgoorlie. Not long after I was born we moved to Esperance so I don’t have any personal memory of the Goldfields or the Murchison or its people.

Small world

My first real life experience of the Murchison region actually came as an undergraduate student at Mount Lawley Teachers College. As part of the course,

Aboriginal Education major students went on annual field trip to places of Indigenous significance. That year we went to Wiluna to visit the eminent Wilga Mia Ochre mine and on our way we stopped at the Cue Pub eager to wash away the desert dust. As we walked through the door, the locals sitting at the bar stopped talking mid sentence, swung around and stared at us “riff-raff” university students as we made our way in, then in one very obvious movement they all swung back around to the bar and with their old bony backs, formed a wall. We literally cranked up the antiquated juke box and set about playing pool. For the next hour none of the locals bothered to interact with us or show any sign of their legendary hospitality.

When it was my turn to buy the drinks I moved up to the bar and carefully squirmed my way in between two old blokes. They weren't happy about being separated but they moved over a little to let me through. I greeted them with a big smile and inquired if they knew Dick aka Richard Joyce McCarthy. They nodded affirmatively. Since they didn't ask, I donated the information that I was his niece and immediately they inquired who my father was. When I replied Peter McCarthy, they both turned front on to me and said what a pleasure it was to meet me. They recounted how my father had never lost a man on his watch and how his safety record in the mining industry was renowned and greatly respected. They told me that my mother was one of the most beautiful women in all the Murchison, tall and striking with midnight black hair. It was truly extraordinary to sit in a pub in the middle of nowhere, amongst strangers, and hear such personal information about two of the most important people in my life. Needless to say my friends waiting on their drinks eventually wandered over and were equally caught up in the conversations. Bar takings were a record high with the place abuzz with yarns of stoic stories, which became a little more exaggerated as we went longer into the night.

My father

It was peculiar to think of my parents as young and passionate since they appeared to be so old to me. Having a dad who was 52 when I was born didn't really bother me, but sometimes I did notice my girlfriends' dads who were so much younger and seemed to do lots more active things with their kids. Older he may have been, hence why as small children we called him “Peter” and then some years later “Pop” but he was the most distinguished man in my life. My favourite job in the entire world was

waiting for him to get home from work each evening, so that I could pass him his towel and have single minutes alone with him before all the other kids turned up, or he was whisked off to do something for Mum, as this vignette about a childhood memory attempts to evoke.

Out of time

The carved hands on the grandfather's clock moved hesitantly around to five o'clock. I didn't quite know how to tell the time, though instinctively I knew what to do when the gnarled old hands positioned themselves cumbersomely on the five and twelve. Opening the fly-wire door I looked up along the semi-lit passage, where the polished floorboards had been rubbed smooth by the friction of the family's feet. I wiped my bare feet on the hessian bag, letting the door slam behind me. I always did that, it was like a warning of my approach so that mum would know to expect me. Mum sat in her favourite chair playing "Patience" slowly moving the cards backward and forwards as she smoked her cigarette. Her small finger and thumb circled each other while the smoke spiralled upwards as if in a slow rumba to mingle with the rays of the afternoon sun that poured in through the kitchen window.

"Mum where's Pop's towel?" I asked, knowing it hung on their bedroom door as it had done for years and would continue to do so. Without waiting for a reply I raced up the passage towards mum and pop's bedroom, striding the floorboards like a triple-jumper leaping optimistically to touch the arch that formed in the highest point of the ceiling. Wrenching the towel off the bedroom door hook, I could smell a faint hint of the subtle remains of Old Spice aftershave.

"Your father's home" I heard mum call. Wrapping the towel like a turban around my head, I ran outside to greet him by the rainwater tank. I waited eagerly, towel in hand, as he splashed the cold water onto his face snorting away the grain dust. Without glancing up he held out his hand and I placed the towel into it. "Hello, my girl" he smiled looking down, his blue eyes red. "What did you learn in school today?" "We learnt a poem and I got a mark for my group because I learnt it first". I waited for his full attention then drawing in breath began, "There was movement at the station for the word had passed around that the colt from ..." I paused, screwing up my face as though the intensity of the grimace could somehow return the words. He prompted, "Old Regret had got away and..." off I went, rapt to be keeping up with him. The flywire door suddenly opened, "Don't you start him going" mum interjected, "many a night in the "Star and Garter Hotel" he's made himself ridiculous quoting poetry" and turning to my father declared, "Come on Banjo, these horses need feeding".

When I was seven I was in awe of my father and inspired that he could be so knowledgeable, but by the time I had reached seventeen I couldn't believe how little he actually knew. Coming home from university, clad in overalls, articulate and opinionated, I would react to his slightest provocation. "My God" I would disparage, "how could you possibly support such a fascist

doctrine. It's ideologically unsound that this country can implement such reprehensible policies". In a storm of words I would roar, "Mum did you hear what your husband said?" divorcing all heritable ties. "You want me to make you a cup of tea? Not likely, I refuse to be another subject of male domination, if you want it, you make it". "When am I going to find a husband?" "Why do you always bring that up?" "I have a career and I want to study and travel". "A woman's place?" "Mum, tell him, a woman's place is in the House...and in the Senate too!" "When am I going back?"

Going back, going back...it hasn't come as a complete surprise to me at thirty-seven to discover how much my dad has learnt in these last few years. My babies are asleep in my old bedroom, we're in the lounge room watching the cricket; my hand is clasped by arthritic old gnarled fingers with a splintered thumb nail. Mum's outside in the kitchen playing "Patience", we're inside sipping tea. It's the way I like it, just my Pop and me (May, 1986).

The passing of a gentleman

My dad passed over on the 13th February 2004. I had gone to work early that morning and then around 8.30 am had a sudden desire to call into the nursing home to check on him. It was forecast to be a very hot day and as I walked into his room there was a gentle cool breeze wafting through the open door. The room was light and airy and I thought I heard him say to me "Hello Hell". I went into his bathroom and rinsed a flannel in some cold water and placed the cloth of his forehead. It was then that I realised that he was sort of slipping in and out of consciousness. He called out, "they're over there" and when I turned and asked him, "who's over there?" I became aware that he was not talking to me or to sentient ones. My dad had his eyes open looking up at the ceiling and he was strangely energised in his exhausted state. His body language was responding in a way as if he was being called and he appeared eager to be with those who beckoned. It was obvious by his acquiescent expression and the calmness that came over his tortured breathing that he was willing to go with them. I say them, because I got the distinct impression there were many in the room with us that day.

From my earliest memories I had been plagued with the fearfulness of how I would cope when this prolific man died. I felt that I had spent half my life terrified about this decisive moment, yet now it was strangely comforting that my dad was being embraced by those he really wanted to be with. This peace was so incongruent late the night before, he had held onto the large metal frame above his head and as tired and frail his old arms were, he would not let go of it. It was sort of a defiant

gesture of, “while I can hold on I still have life”. The morning sun was starting to heat the room so I tried to move his bed over towards the door to get extra air flow. I abruptly experienced the strangest sensation that he was looking down on me, watching me as I lugged the heavy bed sideways. The senior nurse came into the room took one look at Pop and said “Go and get your mother”. I kissed Pop and told him what I was doing and then took off to get mum. I told mum that the nurse said she should come as soon as she could and left her with my eldest sister Hazel while I went straight back to work. I figured I could keep Pop alive because while I was at work, life was normal, fathers didn’t die and things have a way of being predictable and uninvolved. There is always a meeting to attend that doesn’t necessitate having to deal with an agenda item that says you will never see your father again. I got the telephone call at 10.30 am and my world quite simply...imploded.

We celebrated our dad’s long and prosperous life by having the wake at the Bijou Theatre. It was an intensely hot day and after we had got back to our house from the Bijou the storm that had been brewing slowly all day suddenly erupted in technicolour glory. All the kids and most of the adults had gone down to the beach for a swim or surf or to wash away their sadness, when next minute a spectacular furore launched itself in the heavens. We stood on the beach looking upwards at the fracas and it seemed that Peter McCarthy was making his way through the pearly gates and Saint Peter was having something to say about it. The commotion was tumultuous and we all clapped our hands and laughed and somehow the pain didn’t hurt as much. Slowly the tempestuous thunder subsided into hushed golden hues, as the sun’s rays burst through behind the rain clouds that appeared remarkably like the scriptures ascension into heaven. It seemed that our dad had once again used his elegant debonair ways and silver tongue to negotiate a win-win for all. My dad was buried in Esperance, the place of his birth in 1907, in the same line as his father EJ and two of his four brothers Edward junior and Bernard. His other siblings were buried elsewhere as was his mother Mary, who was buried in Kalgoorlie. Just a little further up from him in the same section of the Esperance cemetery is Edward James McCarthy, my father’s first born son.

My brother Teddy was 24 years and nine months old when he was killed on the 4th March 1962 in a car accident. He was travelling with my brother Jack and their

friend Doug when the car rolled at Widgiemooltha on route to Salmon Gums near Esperance on the Labour Day long weekend. Teddy and Doug were both killed. When I was small I used to see Teddy before I fell asleep each night. As soon as I had closed my eyes he would be there on the inside of my eye lids. He would smile at me and somehow all the angst of the day and the fights with my sisters dissipated, and I would fall peacefully asleep. He stopped coming to be with me when I got older and I felt miserable and forsaken. Likewise, it took mum years to get out of the habit of setting out his plate when she was dishing up our dinners.

Unlike Aboriginal custom where the name of the deceased is no longer used, our Irish custom continues to feature the deceased significantly in our daily lives. We go out to the cemetery regularly to replace the flowers, clear the fallen leaves and chat to our ethereal ones. We give them updates on what is happening in the world and if there is an occasion like a birthday we sing a song, have a beer and toast their name. Two of my sisters have prearranged and paid for plots next to mine so that we will all be together in the hereafter. The McCarthy Clan take up a fair bit of the estate in the exclusive pioneer section of the cemetery, to be sure.

A letter in red ink

We walk past the Deville family in the same pioneer section. It is looking for want of care these days as it appears few kith and kin come to visit or tend to them. I often wonder if it has anything to do with what I read in Smith's (1993) PhD dissertation *The prehistory of the Recherche A L'Esperance* who reports how the Deville's brothers with self defence as their justification, massacred many Aboriginal people or imprisoned them on islands in their quest to clear land for their sheep station in the 1860's.

The use of the term "massacre" was seldom used in documenting the historical events that occurred during invasion and colonisation. Yet events that happened at Pinjarra and York, or at Flying Foam on the Burrup Peninsula or at Tunnel Creek in the Kimberley or even how Rottnest Island was established and constructed as an Aboriginal prison, never managed to be part of my school history. My dad told me a story about when he was a young fellow growing up in Esperance in the early 1920's; he befriended a young Aboriginal boy. The Aboriginal boy was sent away to

the penal colony on Rottneest Island. My dad assured me that the young boy wrote him a letter telling of the wretched conditions he had to endure. I recall asking my dad why a literate Aboriginal kid was sent to prison. All I can remember was that he said that the boy had written the letter using red ink. I wished I had taken more notice of my dad's stories.

My experiences with Catholic Education

In the same thesis I read how Black Jack Anderson an African American whaler had set up camp with his group of mutineers on Middle Island in the Recherche Archipelago and hunted fur seals. He had brutally captured and stolen Aboriginal women from the mainland and taken them back to the island. There are accounts of Anderson's men massacring the Aboriginal men who came to rescue their women. When I was 16 I sailed to Middle Island with our local Catholic priest Father Kim Grover and the L' Astrolabe Catholic girls' group. Our name originated from the medieval instrument used for measuring celestial bodies later replaced by the sextant. Father wanted our name to represent something that assisted us to find pathways towards seeking new understanding and acuity. In many ways the astrolabe was akin to the sawfish, guiding us towards sources of new knowledge. We originally came together because we all played in the high school netball 'A' grade team and spent hours training with our dedicated physical education teacher/coach Miss Bollinger. Father Grover had the same sort of dedication to youth and was an extraordinary man. He used to drive a red four wheel drive vehicle which was affectionately known as the "Red Baron" and every day you would see a hoard of kids in the back of the open cage.

If we weren't collecting mallee root stumps and clearing farmland to fundraise for the senior parishioners' housing project, we were sending Norfolk pine tree seeds to Korea. Our other pastime was collecting empty beer bottles to raise money to build the new Catholic Church. Father used to chant whenever our energy for collecting King Brown beer bottles started to flag, "every bottle is brick, every bottle is a brick". Needless to say Esperance has a divine place for devotion in its Catholic church as does Margaret River and Augusta, attributed solely to this man's determined passion. Once we worked for months to present a variety concert to raise money for the earth quake victims in Guatemala. None of us even knew where

Guatemala was, but it didn't stop the desire to help those less fortunate than us. I remember cleaning a state commission house after it was bombed with insecticide due to major flea and lice infestation. For days after school, there we were us L' Astrolabe Lasses in our school uniforms, sleeves rolled up singing and joking as we scrubbed faeces off the walls and years of grease from the kitchen. Nothing daunted us because we had fun anyway, but we also knew Father would find ways to give back to us.

St Agnes

We became the Saint Agnes Altar Servers and every Thursday morning we would meet to serve with Father Grover at the seven o'clock mass. We knew Saint Agnes was the patron saint of chastity, girls, virgins, engaged couples and oddly, gardeners. A cursory glance on Google will tell you that Agnes allegedly refused to marry at 13 and was condemned to death. Since Roman law did not permit the execution of virgins she was dragged naked through the streets to a brothel. As she prayed her hair grew and covered her body and it was said that whenever someone attempted to rape her, they were struck blind. Eventually she was lead out to burn at the stake, but the wood would not burn so the Roman officer in charge drew his sword and decapitated her. Even as a young impressionable girl the chronicles and hierarchy of the Catholic Church seemed to me to be extraordinarily misogynistic and in the end to counter this I only learned the prayers and the hymns that celebrated the women in the church. The older I became and the more I learned about the Catholic Church, the more I began to question its ethos. Sitting at the front with the other altar servers looking down especially on the Sunday morning congregation, I knew who were the adulterers, the liars, the thieves and it seemed that when it came to the offering, their envelopes appeared to bulge the most. It gave me the ominous impression that redemption was just another male privilege.

After serving morning mass on Thursday we would walk back to the presbytery behind the church and share breakfast with Father. It was on one of these Thursday mornings we were watching the 1976 Olympic Games on television, a provision newly arrived to Esperance. We were all waiting for the race as Raelene Boyle, the Australian 200 metres runner, came out track side carrying the hopes and dreams of the entire Australian nation. She was expected to bring home the gold

medal when the unspeakable happened...our Raelene broke twice and was disqualified from the race.

Every Thursday after breakfast Father would drive us to school in the back of the Red Baron. We never went straight to school but rather via the long white beach to the Wylie Bay headland about twenty minutes out of town. We would be in the back singing our hearts out to Sister Janet Mead's songs, "Break us the bread, Mary" or "Take my Hand". We would arrive at school totally oxygenated and alive; the only thing amiss was our hair.

The trip to Middle Island was one of those rewards we got for our dedication to the service of others. Father arranged for a tuna boat to take us across to Middle Island and I remember climbing up into the crow's nest for a god's eye view of the ocean and for the entire journey sang myself into nirvana while swaying with the swell. We camped in the hut that Father Grover told me that my grandfather EJ had built and we traced the history of the whalers who hunted fur seals. We camped out on the island for a week climbing Flinders Peak to get our bearing which also gave us a spectacular view of Pink Lake in all its cerise glory. We visited neighbouring Goose Island and climbed over every nook and cranny investigating the area, leaving our names in the jars at the various stone cairns that had been constructed. I remember thinking what a resourceful and abundant sanctuary of land and sea, how self sustaining and pleasant life must have been for the Aboriginal people before the invasion.

Point Culver

Another trip Father took us was to Point Culver and the legendary cliffs at the start the Great Australian Bight. I think there were about nine of us teenagers and Father had brought along Martin who was one of Father's original altar boys, now grown, to help with the driving. So with the Red Baron full of provisions we headed off into Cape Arid National Park and then along the coastal track to Point Culver.

After hours of bumping and bashing through the bush we reached the cliffs and stood in awe looking out at the almightily Southern Ocean. Then we all looked down the face of the cliff that we were about to descend and each of us had a surging

stab of pure unadulterated fear. We could see the huge turquoise green waves crashing onto the bleached white beach but we couldn't hear them as we were up too high. Father explained to us what we were going to find as we climbed down and assured us that we could all manage it, even the bit which involved swinging out on a rope across the sheer cliff face. He said that we had to push off from the ledge and use our body to make forward momentum because if we didn't, we would be stuck in the middle of the face without the impetus to get back to the ledge. He didn't need to tell us that the distance to the ground was about 200 metres, that small detail we could see for ourselves. So in single file we commenced our descent, slowly and carefully as Father had instructed. The trust we needed in each other got us to the bottom, but the strain of the task was more than significant. Asking yourself to do something that you definitely don't want to do and being aware that you are a part of a team of people all experiencing the same dread is a challenging situation. I am not sure if it was because we felt that we had experienced a near death phenomenon and we were just so happy to be alive, but the swim in the surf turned out to be magnificent and the climb back up singularly sensational.

Along the way to our eventual camp we got a puncture and Father decided to play it safe and call into the road house at Caiguna and have the tyre fixed. Once repaired, we headed back out to Point Culver to where we were going to establish base camp. On the way we got another puncture, which wasn't too much of a problem since we had two new repairs done at Caiguna. The Nullarbor Plain country is dry and the trees have gnarly roots exposed from the wind blasted Southern Ocean and even going slowly doesn't prevent punctures. We couldn't believe it when we got yet another puncture a few kilometres from our camp. When Father went to get the spare tyre out it was flat and when he pulled the second spare tyre out, that was flat too. In technical expedition terms we were stuffed. Father decided that us four older girls Bridget the natural leader, Mif the quiet achiever, Tally the lovable comic and I would have to walk back with Martin to Caiguna and he would stay with the younger ones and wait for us to bring help.

We packed some oranges and water and started to retread our tracks on foot as the late afternoon sun showered us with weak light. We knew we had to stay on the track and keep walking until we got to a distinct fork in the road which was marked

with an old steel telegraph pole. We were so excited about being stranded and the thought of an adventure buoyed our steps as we enthusiastically and confidently walked as night descended. We had been walking for about five hours when we finally sat down on the track to rest and eat the oranges. It occurred to us simultaneously that the surface we sat on was reminiscent of a small section road we had driven over previously that morning on our way to cliffs, which for the want of a better word looked like bitumen. Had we walked past the old telegraph pole in the dark and were now unerringly walking towards the cliffs? We all knew that we would not be able to hear the waves crashing a warning and all of a sudden in the half moon light, the grey surroundings became maliciously dubious. The confidence in what we were doing rapidly deteriorated and we started to frantically, non-rationally, think about what we should do. I'm sure it was Martin who suggested we walk in single file about a metre apart therefore if one of us should inadvertently walked over the cliff it would give the others a chance to stop. So tentatively we set off into the dark alternating the leader every hundred metres or so, each of us with an equal chance to plummet to our death. Timidly we shuffled along, pushing one foot forward laboriously after the other, so that they were in constant contact with terra firma. I can clearly remember how we all whooped with glee when the track suddenly split into three and we found the rusted steel telegraph pole. We danced around the old pole and yodelled a rap how we weren't going to fly then die that night and started off with great determination towards Caiguna.

By now seven hours had passed and the focus on surviving the cliffs had shifted to the need for food. As we walked, we talked intimately about the food that we would eat when we finally arrived at the road house and then compared with extraordinary eloquence, the best meals we had ever eaten. It was around this time that Tally turned around to me and asked why I was carrying a surfboard. Had I not been so busy stepping over ant nests and brushing away spiders, I would have asked her why she wasn't giving me a dink on her bike. These hallucinations continued for the next few hours and we thought we were still hallucinating when we saw a small white light in the distance. Tally had slowly fallen down on the ground by the side of the track and had refused to get up, instructing us to leave her for the dingoes. Then she looked over and saw the light, leapt up, screamed and started running towards it. I truly hoped for Tally's psychological wellbeing that it was the Caiguna

Road House and not the evening star low on the horizon. And so it came to pass, 11 hours later, out of the darkness came four straggling teenagers, petrifying the young road house attendant on the graveyard shift. Later after we had convinced him of our epic journey, though he refused to wake the owner, we lolled languorously on the station floor munching into cold apple pie, gulping down hot cans of soft drink “deliriously” happy. Needless to say we went on to rescue Father and the others and ended up being on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) national news hailed as heroes. We got back to school sunburnt and blistered and it was only when our peers stepped back and gave us precedence in the canteen line, that we understood what we had done had been sort of extreme.

For us L’Astrolabe Lasses the final years of secondary school came and we all moved to Perth to continue our studies leaving behind Father, who after 16 years left Esperance to take up the Catholic parish in Margaret River. Several years later I travelled to Margaret River and attended mass with Father but after that I never saw him again. He did pen me a reference when I applied to go to Africa years later as part of the Australian Volunteer Abroad Program in 1985. He wrote that if they didn’t accept me into the program then they were “bungling idiots”. Needless to say I was accepted into the program to go to Africa; paradoxically the same day as I was accepted into the Bachelor of Education program in Perth.

Father’s heart finally succumbed to a life of clemency, challenge and adventure whilst serving mass on Christmas Eve in the Solomon Islands in 1991. He was 79.

Part II: Interpretive processes to gain new insights

Part II of this chapter will take my autobiographic tale, based on the many existing definitions of what biographical writing is, and recount in a quazi-chronological sequence the influences and experiences that shaped my personal choices and professional behaviour as an educator of Aboriginal children.

Leaving home

Leaving home was difficult and I was cognisant that I didn’t have much money. I needed a job to support myself since I was repeating Year 12 I didn’t qualify for Austudy allowance. I moved into a town house in Subiaco with a sister and brother

from Esperance. He was the lead dancer with the Madame Debussy Ballet Academy and worked at the Perth Concert Hall during the day, so it came to pass that I worked there during the night along with a triad of other students. As it turned out my small world was thrown open with the international artists like Country Joe McDonald, Rod Riguez, or embraced by the witty silence of the legendary mime artist Marcel Marceau. In spite of difficulties like suffering bouts of hunger, or walking home from work late at night, having accommodation problems, I managed to survive that year and went on to graduate Year 12 at Oxford Street Leederville Technical College. I promptly enrolled in the primary teacher education program majoring in Aboriginal Education feeling confident that I had been serendipitously delayed to find that my true pathway revealed itself at the right point in time.

Like occasions before, as an undergraduate at the formally known Mount Lawley Teachers College aka Western Australian College of Advance Education aka Edith Cowan University, I only managed conceded passes until it came to Indigenous Studies. From the very first class it was like a light had been turned on and I could see exactly where I was going and what I was going to do. To me learning about Australian Aboriginal peoples was enthralling because it was so fascinating. I graduated with my degree and a little later headed off into deepest darkest northern Australia where this narrative will also take you.

The getting of a vocation

Once I completed my Diploma in Primary Teaching, I left Perth. That summer I headed to Cactus in South Australia with three mates to go surfing. Living on the ground under the stars listening to the sound of the ocean pounding into my consciousness re-confirmed in me that I did not want a job teaching in the city. Writing about living in the bush close to the healing powers of the ocean reminded me of something that I had read by Germaine Greer about how Australian parents were becoming aware of how their children were turning “feral” as they sought alternate paradigms to the status quo, that they were inclined to, “...covet no man’s goods, and are happy to follow where ever the waves are, living by and for the moment, and occasionally attending secret gatherings deep in national forests where strange things are done and said and stranger substances ingested” (Greer, 2003, p. 59). On the premise that all things are all possible, by the time we were ready to

head back home to Esperance my physical, spiritual and mental health seemed greatly improved by my “feral” experience.

On the last morning as we were packing up, my friend Tai wanted one last surf at the break known as Castles. I recall sitting on the rocky point watching him paddle out in the predawn light, sliding through the grey ocean that looked more akin to mercury, when suddenly in one graceful and effortless action he sprang catlike to his feet and glided through the barrel of a silver-white cylindrical wave. That image of him at Castles became my solace when several years later I received a late night telephone call with the news that he had been killed with two mates in a car accident. It seemed nothing changes. Another generation of young mates killed in car accidents and tragically it hasn't stopped there.

After we got back to Esperance I started working as a deck hand on a tuna boat fishing in the hundred isles of the Esperance Recherché Archipelago, and it was good to get the city schedule out of my way of thinking. I had not endured the city particularly well; in fact, apart from the Aboriginal Education component of my studies, the only thing that kept me in Perth for four years was playing basketball. I played for the Stirling Senators and although I didn't amount to much, I loved the rigor of intense training and playing at an elite standard with girls who exhibited passionate commitment to the game. I was out at sea when I got a radio message informing me that my application for a teaching position had come up at a school in Arnhem Land in northern Australia. We steamed back to port; I packed my bags, farewelled my family and flew north.

As I disembarked at Darwin airport the heat hit me in the face and literally took my breath away. It was as if I had walked into an enormous outdoor sauna, totally sapping me of all my energy by the time I had walked the short distance from the aircraft across the tarmac into the airport. What had I been thinking? I had completely underestimated the fatiguing capacity of the tropics on humans and this was where I was planning to live. I was met at the airport by a Department of Education official telling me that there had been a change of plan and that I was now, today, being sent to The Island to the Angwura Community School. While I was trying to make sense of this news inside the equally hot terminal, I immediately

noticed a very tall Aboriginal lady with pearl-white hair who appeared calm and graceful. It turned out that not only did she board the same plane as me but we got to sit across the aisle from each other. I learned that she was the wife of the Chairman of the Northern Lands Council but, more importantly, she was Mrs Jedda Baron from Rapid River. At that moment in time I never thought this meeting would set a trajectory that was the start of a very special relationship and one that would go on to significantly influence the course my life, but more of that later.

My first placement to another world

Flying onto The Island I could see an extensive but dirty mine site with a gaping hole in the ground with stockpiles of black dirt interspersed with a series of tailing dams. I was met by a member of the Angwura school staff and taken to stay with a Mount Lawley Teachers College graduate whom I had studied with. As we left the airport I noticed the car park was full of white four wheel drive vehicles with orange flags and siren lights. BHP had established a lucrative manganese mine on the island and a township called Yangula that provided large spacious elevated homes, luxuriant tropical gardens and superb sporting and social facilities for their 2000 or so staff. Where I lived was diametrically opposite to the white township. Nothing was familiar, not the smells, the noises, the bony women brightly clad in their “mission” dresses, the naked children, the campfires at night, the steamy temperature, everything about the daily rhythm of life was as foreign to me as if I had gone to live in Africa.

I remember turning up early to the school and being introduced to my class. I have to say that my first day was an unmitigated disaster. I was an Aboriginal Education Major graduate who had spent three years learning about Aboriginal ways of knowing and I was shameful. Imagine what it is like for the majority of teachers when they arrive in remote schools after completing a one semester taster unit constituting their entire treasury of knowledge on teaching Aboriginal students. Is it any wonder we continue to fail these kids and their communities? Like so many before me, I shamefully arrived with all my Anglo Celtic-centric ideas into a world that applied Indigenous epistemologies. To my distress, during the day none of the students looked at me much less talked to me. I knew I was white but this was ridiculous, I felt as though I was actually invisible. Being the youngest of

11 children, I had often felt superfluous and was quite used to being overlooked. The anonymity allowed me time to do things without the harassment of older siblings always wanting to know what I was doing. Having said that, I knew that I was loved, cherished even, and whenever I wanted company it was there in abundance, surrounded by older sisters who were always suggesting great games to play. But this was different and not to be noticed at all, for so long, was really unbearable.

So in the cooler parts of the afternoon, since none of the locals invited me crabbing or fishing, I would go across to the basketball court by myself and put up some shots. I would play visualising I was at Perry Lakes Basketball Stadium and I would run through all the skills that I had learnt. At first I didn't notice the rustle in the undergrowth near the Pandanus palms that bordered the courts, but after a couple of days I could clearly see the kids in the bush were watching me. Not before too long the little troupe had surrendered their inquisitiveness and ventured out to play. After about a week of spending afternoons at the court they finally asked me, "what's your name?" When I said, "Helen McCarthy" they all laughed yelling, "Helena Makarda" and while the ringing of laughter eventually abated, the name remained. Every afternoon I would play with the kids, ask them about their country, their families and learn their Aboriginal names. Likewise they would ask me about my family and country and over time became comfortable enough with me to start teasing me, or for Darbi Lara to tell me that my nose was long...just like a crocodile's. It was when one of the assistant teachers at the school, Jara Amarda, asked me if I wanted to play basketball for the Angwura team in the white township of Yangula, that the students began talking to me in the classroom.

The forging of friendships

Playing basketball with the Angwura girls made such a significant difference to my life. Suddenly I was included in everything, and my little blue Suzuki would be seen roaring around the community full of girls heading to training or to basketball games.



Figure 1. The Island Basketball Team (McCarthy, 1982)

Very soon playing just on The Island wasn't enough, we started coordinating trips to Darwin, arranging accommodation and registering to play in the Northern Territory Basketball Championships. We flew to Darwin and played against the city teams and girls from major regional centres. We played extraordinary well together and while we missed out in the finals, much to our surprise I was awarded the trophy for the Most Valuable Player in the Northern Territory Basketball Championships. We flew home happy because what was mine was theirs.

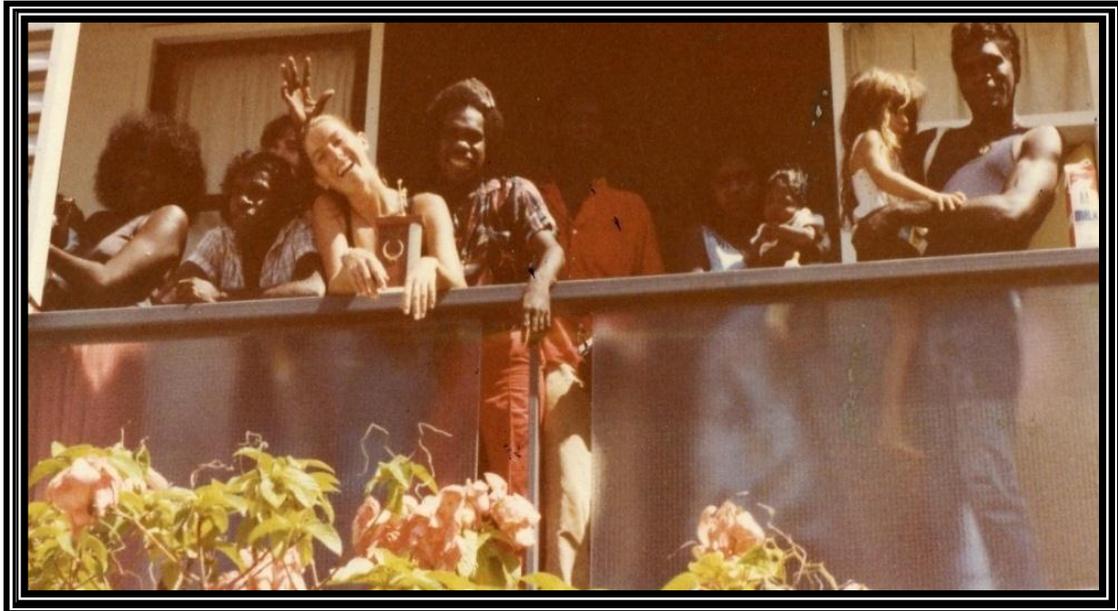


Figure 2. After the Northern Territory Basketball Championships in Darwin (McCarthy, 1982)

While all the girls were noteworthy, two in particular made my life on The Island deeply consequential, Mily Wurra and Jara Amarda.

Mily

I came to befriend Baru Island girl Mily Wurra through basketball. The first night I played basketball I noticed her immediately. Over the course of my sporting life I had played with some very good players and she was up there with the best of them with her exceptional tactical capacity to outmanoeuvre opponents, her intelligence and speed. She was married to a German named Rex and had travelled extensively around Europe before returning home to live on Baru Island. Rex had helped Mily's father establish their Homeland outstation at Arum in the north of South Bay which became renowned for its extraordinary organisation. They incorporated infrastructure to maintain a store, a school and homes for all members of the Wurra clan. They established productive and creative gardens and one very remarkable omission on the island was the absence of mangy camp dogs. The community was held up as one to emulate and was constantly being invaded by bureaucrats wanting to visit and take photographs to demonstrate to other Homelands what could be achieved and sustained.

I remember the first time I saw Mily, it was at her younger sister's funeral; she was devastated, seething with rage, throwing herself on the ground, wailing and smashing a bottle relentlessly against her head to draw blood. In the Aboriginal way, the more blood that is let, and flows, the easier it is for the spirit of the deceased person to return to their mythical place of being. If you refer to Chapter 5, anthropologists Berndt and Berndt (1977) explain how the body is recycled back to site of the spirit. The name of the deceased is no longer used and from then on is only referred to in their family or clan terms of their relational association. Some Aboriginal peoples use a generic noun to identify the name of the recently deceased.

Mily and I spent a lot of time together over the basketball seasons but it never seemed to be enough for me. She was articulate and witty and being in her company made me feel as though I was holding water in cupped hands, knowing inevitably regardless of the effort to hold it, it would seep away and be gone. Mily was able to interpret and translate our two worlds and explain to me what was happening and why things in her culture were done the way they were. She always seemed to pull me out of tricky cross-cultural situations and protect me from possible harm, later elaborating on what could have happened and why I needed to be more alert. It reminded me of something that Diane Bell had written about her friend the late Topsy Napurrula Nelson.

Topsy led me by the hand (sometimes physically) through the maze of knowledge required of me as an adult woman in a desert community. It was she who either nodded approvingly at my response or moved to protect me from dangers of which I was unaware when we found ourselves in unfamiliar situations. On reflection I now can see turning points when, having demonstrated competence at one level, I was permitted to proceed to another (Bell, 1985, p. 4).

Later that year, thirty-five dancers, basketball and soccer players were invited by the Melbourne Chilean community to attend a Dance and Sporting Cultural Festival. Mily insisted that I was selected in the basketball team, for as far as she was concerned I had proved myself to be an island girl. We chartered a Fokker 50 aircraft and flew down to Melbourne looking amazingly professional in stylish uniforms sponsored by BHP. The games we played that week were among the best I have ever played in my sporting career, and I recall how led by Mily, we took it right up to those savvy Melbourne players. As part of the cultural exchange in the

evenings each group performed, the men sang and played the didgeridoos and the women danced. To move in rhythm and perform as a member of an Indigenous dance troupe, me the white girl from Esperance, left me feeling truly honoured.

Yakuwa anguwura-(You and me forever)

Today I received the sad news that my special, revered friend has died.

I started this journal with the news of the birth of Mily's second daughter born August 1984 and here I write two years later, the death of Mily.

I immediately rang her Aunty at Angwura and she told me no one was sure what happened, me conjuring up in my mind as she spoke that this could never be "Black Fella magic". She said that Mily had not been feeling well and then collapsed. She was at Numba and by the time the Flying Doctor finally got there, it was too late.

I think back of our time together, playing basketball in Nhulunbuy, Darwin and Melbourne, all the times we sat together on planes, in reception halls, terminals, hotel rooms; always together, always talking, so busy examining the world of words and languages, sharing yarns. She would always toss her head back and laugh and re-tell me the Butterfly story.

I sit and write thinking about the unexpected gifts she brought me in Melbourne, her frequent spontaneous generosity and the beautiful pandamus basket she made me as a going away present when I left the island. I remember walking across the tarmac to the plane thinking I had missed her when suddenly I heard her call out my name. She ran out to me, her face sweating and excited and she was puffing. We both just burst out laughing and she hugged me while the plane full of passengers watched and patiently waited...no one seemed to mind. I guess they could see for themselves the depth of feeling in this friendship as one pretty black girl with wild hair embraced a sobbing white girl whose tears poured out over her crocodile nose.

So many people have called me at Miling to ensure that I have heard the sad news. There was a big meeting at Angwura today, women wailed and over a hundred island and Numba men met to discuss funeral business. It would have made an impressive sight; in my experience I have never seen that sort of congregation, evidence of great respect for this young woman.

She leaves behind two husbands and two daughters.

She was an ambassador for cultural collaboration and cohesion; she talked about being one with all people and reconciliation before anyone else even started using the word (June, 1984).

Jara Amarda

The other essential partner in my acculturation was Jara Amarda whom I referred to in the preamble. Jara and I met as teachers at the school and then went onto play basketball together with Mily. From the outset Jara talked long and passionately about education and how she felt it needed to be established. Coming from a family of innovative artists and community leaders she grew up surrounded by motivated revolutionary thinkers. Her uncle, Nanji Amarda, was President of the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation and Chairman of the island Trust and was awarded a Member of the British Empire (MBE). Nanji was also a very powerful ceremony man. At one stage he imposed a ban refusing to allow permits to all government officials coming onto the island, including the Federal Government Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. A report had been released about The Island's youth crime rate and a task force had been formed without any consultation with the Aboriginal people and this had caused great offence. The ban was also extended to non-Indigenous people and as a consequence our school was closed until the Department of Education and the Council met to discuss the civil implications of the ban on members of staff. At one stage there was talk by Nanji that all the white school staff had to leave The Island since it seemed that we were not doing enough to keep the community youth out of criminal activities. I implored Jedda and Mily to help me to stay and asked Jara to talk to her uncle. Gala Lara, oldest brother to Jamba and husband to Jedda's friend Wudari, whom I had befriended because he reminded me of my dad, and had followed around and pestered until eventually one day he just made room for me, was my life line. I believe he advocated on my behalf and spoke out about the need to keep the staff and not send us all away. The Recreation Officer at Angwura and Ulla wrote, "in 1987 when Angwura Community School was closed down for a month, I recall one of the elders speaking to the Minister for Education stating, "we need more people like Helen in this school as I find Angwura in great desperation for someone of Helen's talent" (G. Esperan, personal communication, 1989).

Looking back now I think how radical and singularly revolutionary Nanji Amarda was. He made a stand to take back the power and decide as both a community and as a local council who were going to teach their young and establish clear pathways to engage their youth through their problematic transition into

adulthood. This was the ilk that Jara Amarda emanated from and her persistence to reform education in her community has led her to continue with formal studies and take on complex senior leadership responsibilities. This PhD dissertation is my promise to her. Amandangwa - (truly).

Aunty Jedda

When I wasn't hanging out with the Angwura girls I was at Aunty Jedda's. At that stage Aunty Jedda was living in Yangula and each weekend I would go into town to be with Aunty Jedda's daughters, Wilma and Idaho, and would inevitably end up camping over. I'm not sure if the Baron family even wanted to adopt a homeless white girl but I was certainly happy to adopt them. Over time Aunty would take me fishing and show me the "right way" to throw a line or sit on the beach with me under the Casuarina trees and tell me stories about her children and her life growing up on a cattle station at Rapid Valley. Aunty Jedda said, "my uncle and my mother had a white father and their mother was a full blood Aborigine. Their father you know developed my mum gathered them all up into one whole family, used to look after their people at Borro there. Then the policeman went around and collected all the half castes from outstations like that and took them to the mission there, mum too" (J. Baron, personal communication, 1993). She talked about being taken from her mother and father, "I cried for my mum, I grabbed hold of her skirt you know, I cried. But they said we had to go. So they took us away to the mission and there were hundreds of children already there" (J. Baron, personal communication, 1993). Aunty Jedda said once she got to the mission she just tried to make it a good place for herself and her siblings, "we had clothes, one dress for walkabout, one dress for school and one dress for church" (J. Baron, personal communication, 1993).

Being around Aunty Jedda presented me with the opportunity to get to know the women elders in the community whom she had grown up with and had continued to share long-lasting fellowship with. Wudari, Imogene and Gulid immediately come to mind, their riotous exploits and wicked sense of humour were legendary. They were three amazing artisans who continued to carve, paint, sing, dance, and walk for hours hunting and gathering, often carrying their grandchildren on their backs. These women also took time to guide me "Aboriginal way" and shared with me their stories about the events that had carved the shape of their lives. Imogene

would demurely cover her mouth when she laughed, like the missionaries had taught her to do as a child while Gulid was always tossing her head back laughing, with a mouth full of missing teeth. Again the Piercy poem *For Strong Women* resonates when she writes, “herself strong every morning while her teeth loosen and her back throbs. Every baby, a tooth, midwives used to say and now every battle a scar” (Piercy, 1982). Likewise Aunty Jemma would patiently answer my questions describing for me in scenarios the cultural setting in which many of my dilemmas were embedded, especially when I told her of the problems I was having with the students in my class and the fighting that was continuously happening. She guided me and suggested things I could do that would alleviate certain situations and essentially everything she recommended seemed to make a difference.



Figure 3. Aunty Jemma Baron from Rapid River (McCarthy, 1984)

When we were not at her town camp most weekends would see us out camping along the south side of The Island or at Sugar Creek.

Erriberriba-wa - (Going bush)

We left Friday night to drive south to Sugar Creek firstly along the jungle track then along the sandy beach. The full moon rose in total brilliance while we set up camp and drank steaming billy tea. When the tides were right we went crabbing while the Baron clan screamed and laughed and ordered others, especially the younger ones, to run errands, playing on the pecking order like only large families can.

I fell asleep to sound of the incoming tide as it lapped upon the lava formed rock and coral. Sunrise was spectacular as was the smoked black toast and billy tea. After breakfast we went back over to Sugar Creek to go shell fishing amongst the densely populated mangrove swamp, famous for crocodiles. The Baron clan with all their adopted white kids, me and Grenni and Boy, bent over like number seven for hours, plucking and swearing and ripping and tearing our bodies and clothes to reap a pillow case of cockles.

Later we sat around the fire with Aunty Jemma and Uncle Jack listening as they yarned and Uncle carved animal shapes into the soft wood he was working. They talked about what it meant to them to be a survivor of the stolen generation, to witness transformation of people and culture, progress not necessarily beneficial to the original islanders and the build up of commercial ventures on the island bringing with it money, machismo and hedonism. I was suddenly conscious that this world of theirs was so fragile and how others, predictably “outsiders”, made precarious decisions that impacted, often diabolically, on many indigenous inhabitant’s lives.

The moon rising tonight looked like a huge over ripe orange suspended yet ascending. I sat atop of the Toyota with a torch straining to see “red eye” croc spotting while the others dragged the net across the creek. This was the very place where years before Kael Lara was snatched from out of his mother’s arms by a crocodile but she brazenly fought it off. Legend has it she poked it in the eye, grabbed her bleeding baby and ran (May, 1982).

Not long after this camping trip Uncle Jack and Aunty Jemma separated. The news was totally devastating for everyone, the families were traumatized and Aunty was in a state of shock and deeply offended by her husbands’ action. It was not a scandalized drama played out for all to take part in, rather people all over just wanted to show their respect to Aunty and let the whole affair quietly implode on itself. Aunty Jemma moved back out to Angwura even though BHP management insisted she was welcome to live in town. The Angwura Community Council President, Jamba Lara, guided behind the scenes by older brother Gala and Nanji, quickly got plans in place to arrange a house for Aunty.

So it came to be that Aunty came home to Angwura and by her mere presence made the community a better place to be. It also meant that I could walk over to Aunty Jemma’s camp after school each day and spend more time with her. Somehow her pannikin tea always tasted better than mine and if I was lucky I would get to her damper just minutes before all the others arrived home. I was not entirely sure how Aunty coped in the days and years that followed the annulment. Sometimes she would make a quiet remark but mostly she would shake her head and say, “take me bush my girl” and off we would go. All I know is that everyone rallied to her aid and

showed her such care that it truly exemplified her status in the eyes of so many and as for Uncle, well for me anyway, he just ceased to exist.

Jamba Lara

Jamba Lara continued to play an invincible community leadership role the entire time I lived at Angwura, when he wasn't looking out for Aunty Jemma he was working very closely with the school. Prior to this position he had been heavily involved in the mining company, operating as a fully qualified plant operator, driving the giant scraper and working extensively with the predominately non-Indigenous workforce. To me Jamba was the prince of transition, who looked as comfortable sitting on the ground eating fish and damper surrounded by his two wives and many children as he did wearing a dinner jacket at any BHP function in Melbourne.

The language of The Island

The Island language is spoken exclusively by all members in the various communities. It is expected that it is the language of instruction, trade and fellowship. Standard Australian English is spoken, but as a fourth or fifth language, and in its island isolation has developed into a dialect of English forming Aboriginal English. As soon as I got to The Island I realised that I was going to be totally excluded from community life if I didn't understand the language, so I started lessons. There are two dedicated non-Indigenous linguists, Dr Janet Stanley and Dr Jane West, who had have lived on the island for decades documenting the language ensuring its existence for future speakers. Apparently The Island language is the ninth most complex Indigenous language in the world to learn and only having an undergraduate background in linguistics afforded me great disadvantage. After my laboriously tongue-tied lessons I would walk home through the camp and try out my newly constructed sentences. I am sure that the kids would wait for me to appear just so that they could have a good laugh at my entertaining mispronunciations. I would be forming sentences that equated to the Queen's version of The Island language and say something like "I am going home" which sounds like, "ninglikajama angalu-wa.", when the kids would simply convey the same message with "angalu-wa" and the fluid like motion of their hand to their chest flicked

outward and upwards in the direction of their house. Sometimes they merely pouted their lips in the direction of their house and said nothing.

Reading body language became an equally important quest as an effective way to communicate over distances which accounts for much when it is too hot to walk or talk. Similarly reading the mood of the community was also an important skill to acquire or the unsuspecting White Fella could find themselves seriously compromised in the middle of something that wasn't their business.

Awiyemba - (Fight)

Coming home from basketball training tonight I called into Jamba's house to check tomorrow's excursion with him and just as I was getting out of the Suzuki the most horrendous fight broke out. I ducked for cover into the Lara's camp as a throng of people came running and shouting up the centre of the road welding nulla nullas, spears and woomeras. To the unskilled eye it could have seemed like a free for all. What was happening and who was challenging translated immediately into an unambiguous kinship obligation being played out.

Next minute several women of the Amarda clan were set upon and a few were thrashed and forced down onto the road. Jamba leapt up grabbed his woomera and spear and threw two hunting spears into the crowd intending to miss but interrupt the fighting. Instantly spears were whizzing all over the place and for about five minutes the community erupted with people running everywhere to try and escape fatality. Jamba's eldest daughter Wanda threw her baby into my arms and quickly followed her father and mothers into the fighting. Jamba's wives and daughters stride powerfully into the maelstrom strong, fierce and protective of their clan as I sat speechless surrounded by frightened little children and nursing mothers. I couldn't believe the intense antagonism yet in a bizarre way it seemed so healthy to spit it all out in the open and deal with it once and for all.

The fight was about a brother and a sister who were petrol sniffing and since the community wanted to enforce a zero tolerance approach on sniffing many members of the families wanted severe punishment for the sniffers and this was causing the dispute. As people argued Jamba, as council president, sat by the fire listening. Looking at his profile in the shadow cast by the fires I saw such a magnificent strength, a wise, competent and compassionate man who was always trying to establish a cultured future for his children and his clan (August, 1983).

Before long I had got into the habit, not un-similar to mothers when they sit and from a short distance gaze over their children, while they construct or challenge themselves in play, and I would observe the students as they focused intently on the

task at hand. Often I would experience a sudden overwhelming rush of admiration and deep respect for them.

As the years past, no longer did I experience those gut wrenching mornings like during my first year, when I would walk to school and dread what was waiting ahead of me, especially the constant fighting and the incessant teasing. In the same way, it took over a year for members of the community to talk to me as I walked past them because they assumed, like the kids had done, that I would be like all the other White Fellas and leave soon after arriving. And now finally after all this time I had graduated to the privileged position of being invited, even if it was in baby size steps, to the ceremonies...Yo!...Makarda aka Crocodile-Nose gets a “guernsey”.

The Ceremonies - sacred and sacrosanct

Over the following months preparation for the ceremonies took up all energy and spirit. I always tried to write notes in my fieldwork journal immediately after what had happened and the significance of the proceedings but my words often failed dismally to accurately describe the awesome experience.

Amarda-langwa - (Ceremonies)

Each afternoon I have been going to the ceremonies. We sit and wait in the late afternoon sun as that wonderful awe inspiring indisputable sound of the didgeridoo and clapping stick music permeates its way through the jungle to our ears. The kids sit sucking on turtle egg while the women industriously pick and click nit eggs on each other's heads.

Then on a seemingly invisible command the women rise simultaneously and walk into the bush towards the clearing. We sit with our backs to the clearing until we hear the clapping sticks and the men moving nearer. We set off quickly to our moiety poles and stand huddled close together with our backs still to the men. The moiety Morning Star pole is said to be like the dead person's body so when we look at the post we remember the departed spirit. The men approach us led by the ceremonial leaders of the appropriate clans and linguistic units. Using the wooden clapping sticks to pulsate a guiding beat they direct the singing of the totem songs of the moieties, invoking the sacred names of the dead person's water hole and country with its mythical associations. Carefully we listen out for the signal before we step away from the poles and face the men and watch them dance in front of us.

There is this strangely powerful mix of tension and timelessness, that in celebrating death is in fact celebrating new life, new possibilities. Painted up the men's bodies seem so much more impressive even commanding, it is as if their cultural authority is restored. Then in ritual reciprocity, us

women dance. This is all practice for the Mortuary ceremony which will be performed over several nights. It is exciting and frightening and spiritual all at once.

After the practice is over we all pile into trucks and Toyotas and head back through the bush along the corrugated track blanketed by dust as the sun sets on another day. It is so funny when a big truck cruises past and in the back are about twenty heads with their faces all coated in the traditional white clay or red ochre with intricate animal totems meticulously painted upon their upper bodies.

We could be right back in the dream time. Living close to these people has taught me that “transition” is not an easy phenomenon. I feel an inner sadness that I can’t quite put my finger on. I am learning the Aboriginal way, socialising in their world using the appropriate symbols of an insider but still it is their world...not mine. It is not my language, my colour, my dreaming... yet I am absorbed in something that I am committed to and don’t want to be separated from (September, 1983).

The Mortuary Ceremony is conducted over several weeks and commemorates those who have died in the previous year. The final day of the ceremony climaxes with the arrival of the sacred dilly bag, delivered in the mouth of one of dancers, closest in relational connection to the deceased. The bag is conical in shape, made from twine, painted in ochre with feathers woven in to it. It carries sacred emblems and artefacts.

sacred dilly bag dreaming ceremony

shoulders smooth, muscle strong, feet quick, stamping, synchronized with the song.

stomach painted nungumadjbarr totem, he danced for his clan, away from his own mother land.

woomera raised, chest high, arm bent before eye, spin, turn, dance, and yearn to the dead man’s dreamtime lullaby.

I saw him in the bank, dressed in long sox, long shorts, white shirt, gold watch on black wrist. I noted as he turned his back to me a smudge of ochre still behind his knee.

waiting in the queue I recall the sights, the ceremony in the black of night. Painted bodies in fire red nagas, didgeridoo drones, and clapping sticks reply all to the beat, alive, thrilling, move the dancers’ feet.

transfixed, overwhelmed, I am alone, one white face, galaxies away from my home.

finally it’s my turn in line, he deals with me efficiently, I move to leave, he smiles...reaches out and gently touches me,

I glance down at my elbow to see a smudge of ochre still on me.

The sisters

For the first four years at Angwura I lived behind the Marba sisters' camp. Four sisters lived in close proximity of each other; one of the sisters, Missy, was not married but helped her eldest sister Loi who was married to Kael Lara, famous for surviving the crocodile kidnap, left with crocodile claw scars down his back. Two other sisters, Diva and Florence shared a husband Axel Lara, Kael's middle brother, in the house next door. The widowed mother of the sisters Dadiwonga also lived at the camp and sometimes Kael's younger brother Jack-Boy stayed there too. Since there were many young children to care for, having me and Missy around helped significantly especially when it came to hunting, as we were all able to carry the smaller children through the jungle. As it turned out Diva's youngest child baby Carma grew up with me being a natural part of his world and him in mine. I carried Carma when we foot-walked through the bush or watched over him when his brothers and cousins treated him rough.

Baby Carma

I woke up on Sunday morning to Diva banging on the door yelling out my name. Baby Carma was screaming in shock and pain as blood oozed out from his head where Agarlara his equally little brother had stabbed him with a sharp knife.

We put him in my car and raced him to the clinic but the nurse could not attend to him since the clinic was closed because two island men had died during the night in Darwin. This is the Aboriginal way - services are closed out of respect for the dead, meantime the living bleed to death.

We returned home to do our own medicine making with the help of grandmother Dadiwonga (August, 1983).

Each night Carma would wait for me and when he saw me coming across the clearing as I walked back from Auntie Jedda's camp, he would call out my name. We would sit around the camp fire and tell yarns and gossip about the day, watching the kids play while the sisters sat picking lice out from each other's hair and cracking them loudly on their hardened fingernails. Life was good at the camp when the husbands went away to drink at night. This was for all but for one particular sister. When her husband got back all hell would break loose, as he consistently abused her in his drunken state. I have to say when I finally left the island I was completely

worn down by some men's violence against their women. As I have said unequivocally before I was strongly afraid for my sisters.

Strongly afraid

I'm tired and confused. I wanted so much to be a part of this world, wanted so desperately to be accepted, even considered forfeiting my own culture so that the transition would be total...but I didn't...I held my own while accepting theirs, at first easily.

Now as the years have slipped by, I have discovered that I cannot stay while certain mind-set and attitudes concerning violence prevail. I cannot stand for it when my sisters, cousins, come to my door under the veil of night distraught and fearful.

These proud elegant women bashed and bleeding, no pride left in them to hold up their swollen disfigured faces. I listen to what they endure from their drunken men, stories of rape, hostage and sodomy.

These men persecute their woman as though it is their right, their prerogative to browbeat them as they please; to these bullying bastards she is less than chattel (November, 1984).

Needing to know more

After four years of living and working with these extraordinary women and their children, I knew I wanted to be a better teacher, an effective teacher. I wanted all my students to be able to learn to read and write and use White Fella mathematical concepts in a daily practical way. Pragmatically I wasn't quite sure how I was going to become a better teacher but I knew I wanted to give back to the women somehow. I wanted to be able to teach so well that it achieved widespread literacy, especially amongst the girls. In this way they could possibly get jobs and have a chance to make informed choices about their lives. To cover my bases I applied to do my Bachelor of Education in Perth and as well I applied with the Australia Volunteers Abroad organisation to work in Africa. The envelopes from each organisation arrived on the same day and both letters confirmed my place in their programs.

Unsure of what to do, I consulted my next door neighbour and friend Fannon. Fannon, also known as Fannon Fantastic, had been team teaching the Year 7 primary class for 18 months with me. Fannon had taught at Yirra on the mainland prior to coming to The Island and she knew great and important things. With her friend

Phoebe she had ridden a horse from Sydney to Darwin, she was a member of a street troupe performing circus acts and she wrote letters of support and sent money to the Women of Greenham Common. She instigated fabulous lessons, and led the class on magical journeys through talk and writing which overflowed into weeks of in-depth analysis, which the students responded by eagerly wanting to know more. Through integrated and holistic processes we rode the rising swell of accomplishment and our classroom became the place where we all wanted to be. Each morning I arrived at seven o'clock. I created the worksheets for the oral English development tapes which I had recorded the night before, started drawing up the thematic extravaganza on the blackboard which we built onto everyday with the students, and got the room ready for the inundation. The students would arrive chatty and eager, just as Fannon would arrive on her bike juggling her cup of tea.

For reasons none of the teaching staff were privy to, the post primary teacher was sacked and sent off The Island. I was called in to the Principal's office and directed to take her class. I could barely believe it. It was already late October and there were only ten weeks left of the school year. Fannon and I were achieving astonishing results with the primary students; their proficiency in all subjects was comparative to those students attending the town school. I desperately wanted to stay with these students until the end of their primary year, not to take on a new class. Several of the post primary girls were infamous for their hand to hand combat, fighting any other girl who even accidentally looked at their boyfriend, often arriving at school hung over, or grumpy from being up all night on the oval with their "fish" (boyfriend). Some girls were pregnant; some had toddlers at home and only attended to have a comfortable classroom to sleep in during the day. The majority of the girls though, were exemplary. Many had been my students from previous years and I can remember reluctantly handing them over to the secondary section. I had hoped that they would stay motivated and attend school regularly and continue their trajectory with their studies and move into meaningful employment.

I soon realised how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to return to the original group of students I had taught. These were the ones who had pushed me to new levels of provocation and understanding. Now I was back with these young women and the multiple dimensions of our previous shared experiences moved us in

to a space that I had never anticipated. It seemed that the hermeneutics circle was complete; it was providential to spend the final months on The Island to enjoy all those previous problematic complexities that learning and living within their world for all this time had taught me well and now I finally understood how it worked. I have to write I finally felt synonymous; a part of the place and space. Also it gave me the opportunity to work very closely with Jamba Lara's wife Diyalaguna who was the senior girls' teacher.

In the meantime the deadline to respond to the offers needed me to make a decision immediately. Fannon advised me to get the degree first and volunteer after, at least that way I could be of some help.

On my very last day of school Fannon brought the students from the Year 7 class to the secondary school. Working with these highly motivated students and having the privilege to learn from and team teach with Fannon was one of the most significant privileges of my teaching career. There I was, on the very same basketball court where it had all started, only this time I was surrounded by friendliness and laughter and the bitter-sweet thought that it was all about to end.

I flew out to Perth and set myself the goal of completing my Bachelor of Education so that I could get back to the island with the hope of becoming a better teacher. It was interesting to return to Edith Cowan University at Mount Lawley campus and listen to the lecturers. This time I asked questions, debated and discussed issues that I needed answers to. It became clear to me that I didn't have a lot of time; I had to get educated and get back out there amongst it.

Another space

The island seems like a technicolour dream I have awoken from, not sure whether to believe it or not.

Funny how it is the small things that give it away, like using my hand in a questioning up turned motion or picking things up from the floor with my foot.

My dad laughed when I dropped on the ground a shirt I was hanging on the clothes line and effortlessly flicked it back up with my foot. He asked "Did those island girls teach you that?"

I know within me are learned sacred codes, ways of knowing that have been deeply etched within my psyche, as there are some things that linger in a space that I never totally understood, but only got to guess at its sanctity (December, 1984).

Each year during the dry season special mortuary ceremonies take place on The Island and on my four week inter semester break from university, I flew back to commemorate the first memorial year of Jara Armada's father's passing.

Back to my island home

It is interesting to observe that during the year the communities seem to suffer from a malaise of sort, a melancholy brought on by great sadness due to the high number of deaths that continue to occur. Then suddenly with the commencement of the ceremonies everyone appears invigorated, it is like a gesture of resistance, a hope towards restoring the real Aboriginal way of life. Drenched in symbolism, the ceremony protocols are extremely rigorous. Dancing goes for many weeks and every stage is marked with strict disciplined responsibilities.

Aunty Jemma and her family met me at the airport. It was so good to be back at her camp with a mug of sweet billy tea and damper. Aunty Jemma's dampers were legendary and we all hoed in, cutting large chunks of the light fluffy bread and dousing it with golden syrup. That night the Baron clan went into Yangula to have dinner at the social club and as we walked into the front bar where the Angwura people socialise, I glanced over to the bar and noticed a new bartender. He was tall and bony and had hair that looked like someone had upturned a bowl of spaghetti on his head. Throughout the night our paths crossed and Idaho told me that he was an old family friend and special mate to her brother Neva. She reminded me that I had met him in Darwin several years before at her sister's house, which I did recall later. Aunty Jemma told me how Daniel Prince had come to the island as a kid and camped with her sister Chi's family and had now returned to work on the island. His family were from Darwin and had been there before "Tracey" which in Northern Territory talk translates into a sort of reverential regard held only for those who lived through the cyclone. Nodding her white head of hair affirmatively she added, "Princey is a proper good boy, my girl", and then systematically set about conjuring up some old fashion match making.

I spent the rest of my stay sitting down on the beach under the Casuarina trees with Aunty Jedda listening to her telling stories about growing up at Rapid River. She told me about her sister Aunty Chi how as a young woman had been selected to play the leading female role in a motion picture made in the Territory during the fifties called “Jedda” but had withdrawn at the last moment. The movie was about an Aboriginal girl who was raised by the white station owner and how she goes in search for her cultural heritage but encounters tragic consequences. Apparently the last roll of film was destroyed when the plane carrying it to England for processing crashed and they had to do a remake in Sydney. Even as an older woman Aunty Chi remained exceptionally elegant and whenever she went down to the oval to watch her sons excel on the sporting field, she was never without luscious red lipstick, immaculately manicured fingernails and pedicured painted toenails poking out of her peep-toe stilettos.

Fremantle

After the ceremonies I left The Island and returned to Fremantle to complete my studies and later in the year Daniel, under the spell of Aunty Jedda’s matchmaking potions, came down to Perth to meet up with me. The Brown sisters whom I was sharing a house with graciously accommodated his discernible Territorian ways. Daniel, on the other hand, found our vegetarian diet testing, couldn’t quite come at substituting ricotta cheese for butter and the thought a house without a jar of Vegemite as blatantly sacrilegious. It was a typical student house filled with lots of rigorous discussion but not lots of money.

Burning the midnight oil

Last night I ran out of wood for the open fire in my bedroom. I walked outside and stood looking up the street in the crisp coldness, ready to drive to the 24 hour petrol station that sold wood, when I spied some in front of a house just one up from ours. It had a quaint white picket fence with daisies growing along the border and a paved curving path that led up to a front door with stained glass inserts. Wicker chairs and an old table out the front begged humble luxury and the cushions on the ancient seat seemed to beckon one, to come and sit.

Stealthy I helped myself to an armful of their wood and left a note announcing my crime saying how I was going to be burning the midnight oil to get my essay written, and desperately needed their wood to help me through my plight.

Next day I left a big bunch of cornflowers by their door with another scribbled note of gratitude. This morning at 6:30 am on my way to submit my assignment I came upon a letter that read:

Dear Helen McCarthy,

Two beautiful bunches of cornflowers far outweigh a few miserable sticks of semi cured Eucalyptus the balance of civilities has swung too far in your favour. Fortunately for me I have a powerful weapon to redress this: my notorious banana and walnut bread. Taken with a cup of tea, it will provide strength necessary to face your essay which is probably on some appalling subject such as environmental ethics or philospectronomy or Durkheim's theory on suicide.

I suggest you bash on the door if you see a battered Holden station wagon in the drive or if timid by nature, ring first.

Yours sincerely,

Rimbaud Finlee-James
Purveyor of firewood
(June, 1985).

I never did call in for cake and tea but always wished I had. All the while as I was studying in front of my blazing open fire I could smell Rimbaud Finlee-James's semi cured eucalyptus smoke and immediately it would trip me off in contemplation straight back to the smoke of the ceremonies.

Skin Sisters

We all went to the meeting place, the two moieties splitting into those who must paint up with white clay and those who must wash down in red ochre. As I stood there Kit-Kit Amarda and Jara Amarda painted my legs, arms, back and chest, then covered my face and wiped my hair with the red ochre.

Once painted up we sat and waited. The young boys sat at the moiety trees whilst the men sat afar ready to dance. The ceremony-all in my heart and head-was as it is sacred, sacrosanct and transcendent.

After when the final dance was done we turned and walked towards the sea. Jara on one side of me and Gera on the other, we held hands and as three Amarda sisters walked towards the turquoise blue ocean.

The men sang the totem songs the entire way and after they had reached the water, clan by clan washed their painted bodies in the Arufura Sea. Amarda clan was last and all the while Jara and Gera held my hands tight.

I remember feeling exuberant, at one with the trees, the sky, the ocean and the two girls whose skin shared the same colour as mine (August, 1985).

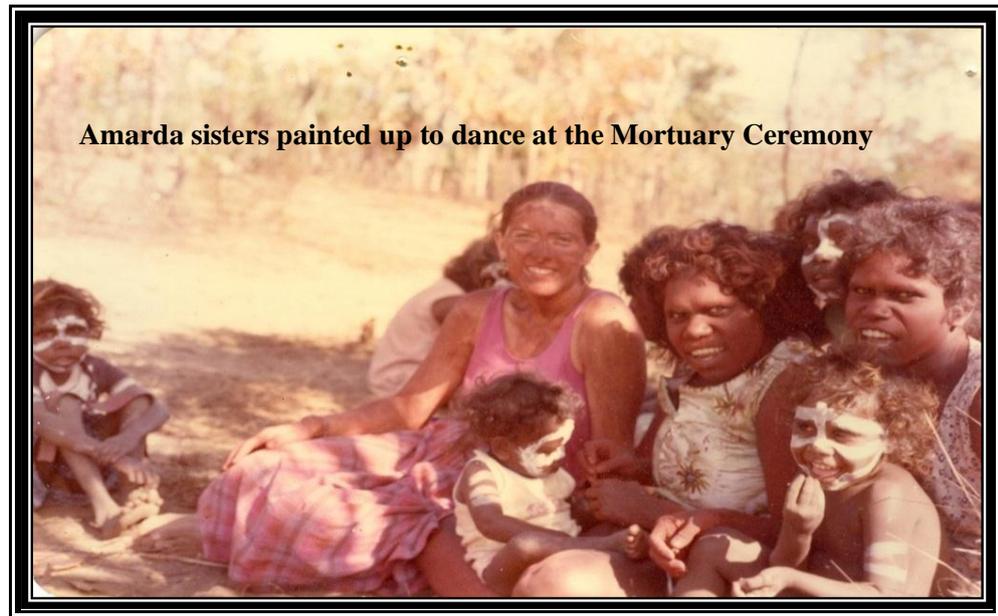


Figure 4. Painted up waiting for the men to return to the Moiety Pole
(McCarthy, 1984)

Having these visceral experiences helped me stay focused with my studies and I graduated with a Bachelor of Education. After my final exams I left the jacaranda tree lined city streets and flew north to the bilingual school on Miling Island, a part of the Crocodile Island Group in the Arufura Sea while Daniel went to work in Kalgoorlie.

Miling Island

I arrived on Miling Island like a pilgrim. Years before I had read the 1975 ethnographic works of Stephen Harris in his PhD doctoral study *Aboriginal Learning Contexts* which had fascinated me, instigating a real longing in me to immerse myself in the same setting. The island itself is only seventy square kilometres and two thirds of the land mass is below the high tide level. There are about a thousand Aboriginal people originating from thirteen clan groups whose spoken languages amongst others include Djambarrpuyngu and Gupapuyngu. About fifty non-Aboriginal people live on the island predominately in essential service roles. Like many of the early settlements in the Territory, the island was started up as a Methodist Mission in 1923 and the people were encouraged to leave behind their traditional land and become centralised into one Christianising locality.

The school was headed up by Gerry James who had extensive experience assisted by his wife Therese Joy-James. I had met Therese at Mount Lawley Teachers College and ended up teaching with her at Angwura and with Gerry at Yangula Area School on The Island. This was also where I met and team taught with Thea Henry and Cal Mills who continued to stay and teach in the Territory for over a decade. Gerry was an extraordinary Principal and greatly respected by the Aboriginal people. I have no doubt that my apprenticeship under his guidance was the making of me.

One of my roles, apart from being the junior post primary girls' teacher, was working with pre-service teachers enrolled in the Batchelor College, now known as the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, coordinating the Homeland Outstation Schools with Lea Roberts and Djamji. We would travel by four wheel drive vehicle or by boat out to various schools or fly over to nearby island Homeland schools. As soon as the single engine Cessna aeroplane had touched down on the gravel runway a four wheel drive covered in kids would appear. They would pile in all our provisions and head to camp where we would be met by the head teacher Milmen and share a big mug of sweet black billy tea and damper.

Then for the next four hours we would work under the bough shelter with the students and teachers sharing the teaching and learning. Nothing can quite match the sensation of sitting under a tree, sipping billy tea getting acculturated.

At that stage Miling Bilingual School was having ongoing power outages which caused the Principal to close the school at the start of the academic year due to potential health problems. He was in desperate need of an electrician and asked if anyone knew of anyone who might want to live on a tropical island with great people and exceptional fishing. I rang the Kalgoorlie Primary School where Daniel was doing electrical repairs and so it happened that he came to live on a very small island in a very big sea.

d.j.p

he leant in and hung a string of lights around my heart...
he brightened my existence...
my very own electrician.

Living on Miling Island was worthy of note as the Miling people were very friendly and inclusive. The community had decided that no alcohol would be permitted on the island and so tea or kava became the preferred drink. Whenever one would visit the home of a colleague the host would inquire Darjeeling? Lapsang Souchong? One would only offer an Assam tea like Irish or English breakfast in the morning and of course Prince of Wales was the afternoon tea of choice. For all dry foods and heavy goods barge orders were done and the joy experienced by everyone in the community when the barge would finally dock was undeniably a heightened social occasion. Urgent or perishable foods came in on the mail and passenger planes each day with Saturday morning the preferred day for the teachers so they could meet the plane immediately it buzzed the community to collect their not cheap supplies as this poem implies.

perishables

they arrive...everything's dubious.
bananas cantaloupish,
broccoli marigoldish,
croissants sapodermish,
eggs golden syrupish.
boxes busting unpacked from planes, perishables and papers,
mailbags, mirth and merriment, with anticip...ation we turn the beast for home.
doors slam, dust rises, cockatoos in trees screech raucous riotous screams,
not unlike our own.
ice cold tim tams with fine italian coffee, we pour over our tattered
Australians reading snippets out loud, midst burping, slurping, munching.
oh these are our joys in this isolation.

Chapter summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the early years of experiences and influences that over time shaped my sensory and cognitive development. It recounted the people and events that became significant features in my life and how I then responded to their varied needs and characteristics.

Chapter 4 tells of what occurred when specific unacceptable dealings and unprofessional events reverberated within the community in which I lived and taught which called me to action or at least action a force of change, a fight to make a difference.

Chapter 4 – Awiyemba – Fight against the Old Boys' Network and for Women's Rights

The purpose of this chapter is to explain some of the many and varied settings and situations, that occurred in the process of my enculturation. In Chapter 3 the reader was introduced to the other I, or Makarda Amagula. In Chapter 4, the reader now reads of the events that occurred while living in the place belonging to the other. It begins with familiarising myself with the rhythm of life in an Aboriginal community and school and moves onto recognising how something was not quite right, especially when I sat around the camp fire at night, listening to the parents talk about what they saw was happening. It was suggested that some members of the teaching community displayed behaviour that was grossly inadequate and this appeared to impact negatively on both their ability to manage schools or be providers of education. My actions motivated by the desire to expose elevated levels of nepotism and unethical behaviour by some members of the teaching community resulted in an awiyemba.

Pedagogy and the art of self defence

When I commenced my undergraduate degree I had no idea that I would need to know so much, about so much, to operate as a teacher. The reality of the vocation calls on expertise in a plethora of fields; linguistics, psychology, anatomy, philosophy, history, art, law, the list is endless. This is my account of what unfolded throughout the course of my teaching profession as a classroom practitioner. It presents the everyday fights to stay living in a hostile world I found myself in.

A day in the life of a teacher

When I left Esperance I was given a journal with encouragement to write about my experiences. At the time I did not think much of the idea but later when I knew I would begin forgetting events I started to document events daily. The following excerpts from my journal depict some of the bewilderment I first endured when I arrived on The Island.

I'm so tired of working long hours, reading, gathering and stratifying ideas to create motivating learning so the kids can learn through experiential discovery and not White Fella rote way. I am missing the love and security of my family so much that it hurts. I await their mail frantically. I feel as though I am losing grip without them. I am lonely and isolated and their mail is my lifeline.

Nothing is predictable or comprehensible. When I first started teaching I was shocked one day when for no apparent reason, on no observable signal, the entire class got up and ran out of the classroom. Puzzled I ran out after them calling them back. I stood there totally mystified, had there been a fire evacuation planned and I had not been informed? They ran on across the oval and stood among many others watching some event that was going on at a particular house. Later some of them wandered back in, sat down, picked up their work from where they had left off and appeared totally nonchalant by the whole foray (May, 1981).

Coda: Now whenever I hear "Awiyemba!" (Fight) I am the first out the door, leading the pack down the track, getting to the fight on time. I am completely incognito in my mission dress although perhaps my crocodile nose is a giveaway. I don't know. I am looking through my white eyes, at my black world, and all I see is "same-same" (October, 1984).

Having said that it is all very well to hear the word awiyemba and run to the place of the dispute but when it is you that is the ensuing victim, it is not such a lark.

I love big burly arms

Fighting persists in the camp. Two women have been evacuated from the island to Darwin Hospital with intensive head and body injuries. The kids who do come to school have been restless, fighting and teasing. Everyday fights end with kids throwing desks and chairs. God no one listens, it is just bedlam. One student was teased and became out-of-control throwing chairs around the room and to prevent injury to the other students I took hold of him, got him outside and told him to go home. After some time the kids settled back into their work and all was fine until the busy hum of the classroom silenced and the reason soon became evident.

Women began assembling outside my classroom door and it crossed my mind that this wasn't a good sign knowing that inevitably such a meeting is accompanied with a Nulla-Nulla (fighting stick). One of the women asked me to step outside and I could hear the kids whispering "Awiyemba, Awiyemba" (fight, fight).

Once I was outside on the veranda one of the ladies asked me what had happened. I explained in English and she translated my version of the event to her sister in Anindilyakwa. The aunty (mother) of the child turned to me and fiercely denounced my story raising her fist towards my face and calling me "rubbish one" and a liar. She circled me slowly, angrily wetting me with

profanities and derogatory remarks. I could feel my legs shaking and was so scared that she was going to flog me with her Nulla-Nulla that what happened next surprised me as much as everyone else.

Instead of withdrawing I stepped towards her and asked, "What would you have done if your son was quietly doing his schoolwork and suddenly got his head split open by a chair?" To my amazement they conferred for a moment and then the posse of supporters, and those in it for idle curiosity, just turned and left. I walked back into the classroom still shaking thinking, what just happened? Did I scare them? Do I look like a threat? For the first time, I was really glad that I was a basketball player with big burly arms (September, 1981).

At university the one skill no one mentioned that I would need working with children was the art of self defence. For reasons that were not clear to me there was one student who had a penchant to inflict pain on me. She was the tallest of all the Year 5's, physically matured and very strong. Recently streamlined into my group from the remedial class she reacted violently to anyone who came within her personal space, lashing out at them as they moved past her. Whenever she spoke to any of the students it was like she was barking at them and I often heard her growling to herself when she was not happy about something. One day without warning she attacked me with a pair of scissors which apart from really taking me by surprise, frightened me. I remember looking at her beseechingly with this expression on my face of "Why do you want to hurt me? I came here to help you!" After school I walked over to her camp and spoke with her father about what had happened. I found it difficult to believe that two calm parents could produce such a disgruntled daughter.

That year was my Cherry-Louise year. I consulted neurological journals, read psychology books, even pondered star signs in an effort to crack the Cherry-Louise code. I made a point to always tell her parents about her day and what was happening in her school life. I recorded this entry in my teaching journal;

How life can spin

Today Cherry-Louise said I could be a Wurra and I am ecstatic. Cherry-Louise who used to viciously deny me, threaten me with scissors and throw desks at me has proclaimed that we are "sisters". On her instruction we are going for a ride to town and I am going to take her in my "dirraka" (car) just the two of us (February, 1982)

A later journal entry documents what occurred as I drove to town with my former bête noire:

Cruising with Cherry-Louise

Went to Cherry-Louise's camp to speak to her mother to make sure it was "Meningarba" (good) to take Cherry-Louise into town today as we had previously arranged. Her parents were happy to see her so excited and I could see how proud she was as she sat up high in the car as we drove through the camp. I remember thinking how refreshing it was that she wasn't embarrassed by me, not sliding down in the seat so no one could see her like the other kids did. This girl was impervious to shame and I loved her for that. At one stage she even waved!

We talked all the way to town and she had so much gossip to tell me. She is really maturing into a very special young woman and is trying hard to manage her less-blatant angry behaviour. Spending so much time with her down the river and after school I think we have really made huge advances on her social skills. I wonder at what changes or unpredictable events tomorrow can possibly bring (February, 1982).

After this excursion to town life with Cherry-Louise was very different. She adopted me as her sister and then self-appointed herself the role of assistant teacher. She was capable and gentle and I was grateful to have her in my class as she helped me interpret the ways things were done.

Likewise over the course of time listening to Aunty Jedda and Jara I found that I moderated my classroom behaviour significantly to accommodate the natural ways the students appeared to want to learn. I became less critical and more personal; this often allowed me to be more spontaneous focussing on the holistic needs and engagement of the group rather than insisting on the hierarchal needs of the teacher. These transferable skills then permitted me to move into the Miling Bilingual Community School program effortlessly, working closely with Yolngu staff who delivered community initiated programs into the curriculum in both Standard Australian English and the vernacular.

Awiyemba – Fight against Old Boys' Network and for Women's Rights

After one year, I transferred back to Angwura Community School, back to the Baron family and a larger community of Anindilyakwa speakers. I applied for the position

of English as a Second Language Coordinator the following year and worked with neophyte teachers at Yangula, Ulla, Angwura and Numba on the mainland.

At the end of that year I applied for the promotional position of Assistant Principal at Angwura and was successful. The Acting Assistant Principal immediately appealed my application and the Principal told me that I was not his preferred candidate. At this stage of the appeal, what should have been a routine professional procedure turned into two opposing factions. I hoped to encourage greater Aboriginalisation of the school curriculum with an Aboriginal Principal and Aboriginal Assistant Principal in Training, greater emphasis on the Indigenous Language Programs, more Aboriginal Assistant Teachers attending Batchelor College to complete their Diploma of Teaching and greater community involvement through open days and collaborative community driven projects. Having been at Miling Bilingual Community School where Balanda and Yolngu staff spoke the vernacular, wrote curriculum materials together, developed programs using the natural environments, and Yolngu staff held senior leadership roles in the school. It became very evident that greater cohesion existed when schools were staffed with local people which in turn led to constant rates of student attendance.

My neighbour who worked at the Council told me, "we had lots of meetings with those two men doing lots of talking" and May Amarda, Jara's older sister came to my house telling me to be careful because the Acting Assistant Principal had a piece of paper asking people to write their name down to help him because Helen McCarthy was stealing his job.

Subsequently a letter emerged stating how the community wanted the Acting Assistant Principal for the position 6410 Senior Teacher Band 2/Substantive at Angwura Community Education Centre signed by the Deputy Town Clerk on council letterhead and was submitted to the appeal's board as evidence of his suitability for the position. The council secretary told me that she had not written the letter and when she checked the official council files, there was no copy filed. The Acting Assistant Principal lobbied heavily on the fact that if a woman took the position she would not be able to handle the volatile situations that often occurs at the school. Ironically the Acting Assistant Principal, like me was there in 1987, when the male

Principal tried using brute force to break up a school-boy fight, converting the fracas into a community riot with the school experiencing a full-scale lock down.

I won the appeal but later decided to transfer the promotional position over to Senior Lecturer with the Open College of TAFE Centre, working as the Adult Educator at Angwura. I had several reasons for doing this, one being that I wanted to work closer with the adult community who were now very familiar to me, and I wanted to help them into meaningful jobs or improve their personal circumstances. Another reason was when I accepted my Senior Lecturer Duty Statement it was on the proviso of the tenth and final duty which was to, "carry out such other duties as required by the Regional Coordinator". This enabled me to operate in the community within the context of the Open College which had quite different processes and procedures to that of the school.

Shortly after I took up the position as adult educator, the Principal called me to a meeting and asked me to read my Duty Statement and to sign it. As I read it I noticed that there were now 11 points and instead of stating that I would be under the direction of the Open College Regional Coordinator, the document now read, "Other duties as requested by the Principal". The Principal then asked me to sign the new Duty Statement with a covering letter of acceptance. I contacted the Open College Regional Office and was told to sign nothing. I was advised that the Duty Statement was a legal document, and they would investigate as to why it had been amended without consultation with the College, the Teachers Federation and the holder. From then on, my ability to fulfil my professional role at Angwura became increasingly difficult.

Motherhood

As well, I was now the mother of James John McCarthy-Price aka Kariba Amagula. On the odd occasion due to unforeseen circumstances James would come to work with me. Although this was not Northern Territory Education Department policy *per se*, it was not uncommon for babies and small children to attend classes with their parents. Child Care Centres are a Wurramangkdirra (non-Aboriginal) concept and were quite unfamiliar at that time within the Warnmamalya (Aboriginal) community. It was expected that a toddler would be with its mother and if James

wasn't hooked up onto my hip, people wanted to know where he was. Members of the community showed great concern for Kariba telling me he should spend more time at the centre with me giving them greater access to him. To stand before a class breast feeding my son was essentially mirroring the behaviour of my students who sat before me on the floor breast feeding their children. I think that the commonality of us as women and mothers enhanced us as learners and teachers and we shared the unambiguous goal to get Aboriginal people qualified, to become the rightful teachers of Aboriginal learners.

Quack

The TAFE Centre became the hub of the community with many women taking advantage of having for the first time a female coordinator. Also having Aunty Jedda sitting up on the veranda certainly gave it an air of distinction as well. My first job was to listen to what the adults in the community wanted, then I went about writing up submissions to get funding for the projects. For example, I organised an eight week Silkscreen Workshop which turned out to be extremely popular with the men, especially the older men who took the opportunity to screen-up their totemic stories. While they calmly cut out their designs they yarned giving them the opportunity to tell the younger ones sitting and watching them work their traditional stories.

One of the men in the community Donaldo, known affectionately as "Quack" started the course but could not quite manage to hold the trimming knife because of his trembling hands. His shaking was caused by long term alcohol usage. Each day he would come and sit and watch then walk away. Some weeks later he had quite remarkably reduced his drinking at night consequently arriving earlier and earlier each morning to work on his screen. As he progressed slowly on his masterpiece, his shaking abated. His magnum opus became the most sought after of all our orders, it showed his story of Yukurrirridangwa, the Sawfish, carving its way through the land followed by the stingray and smaller sea creatures wanting a pathway to the centre of the island to the source of all important knowledge. It was great to listen to him tell the story of the sawfish and often the little kids would sit around him and listen. Other men would arrive and stop to listen too then get caught up in the camaraderie and soon the traditional stories would be flowing.

Quack gained kudos and a reverential reputation and plans were made to build an architecturally designed artist studio for him and others at Angwura. None of this ever happened...Quack-gentleman and artist-was set upon, robbed and stabbed to death by a drunken man from the “Long Grass”, a place in Darwin where derelict people sleep.



Figure 5. Quack’s silk screen of the traditional story of Yukurriridangwa the Sawfish (McCarthy-Price 2010)

Awiymba - The Island Affair Defamation Case

A few years previously the Federal Government had passed a law called the Affirmative Action (AA) (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act in 1986. Universities and colleges of advanced education had started their programs in 1986; larger companies in 1987 and all companies with 100 or more workers the following year. To my way of thinking, Affirmative Action seemed to be a natural progression since more women were entering full time employment and a law that addressed any sort of discrimination in the workplace appeared due. Like many women of the 1980’s who began to pursue their careers fulltime, issues such as dealing with child care, post graduate studies and for others dealing with aged parents to list a few had began

to impact on my life. I was now pregnant with my second child and I wanted to know more about this legislated framework that was in place that recognised, valued and adapted the workplace to meet both employee and employer needs. I met with the Northern Territory Teachers Federation Women's Officer who gave me several AA information kits, and then I went home and created a small poster, briefly explaining the Trades and Labour Council AA kits and wrote an open invitation to meet with any others who may be interested to discuss the new law and its implication.

One person in particular who was also very interested in the idea of instigating Affirmative Action for Women was the art teacher at the White township school. Jacqueline Indy agreed to have the meeting at her home in Yangula. At the designated time six people arrived and one teacher called registering an apology. Travelling to each of the four schools in the region as part of my ESL coordinator's role I thought I had an understanding of some of the objectionable activities that were going on in schools but what was disclosed that evening was more insidious than even I was aware of. Unbeknown to the attendees of that meeting the Minutes which were intended only for the Regional Superintendent, the Women's Officer and attendees were copied and widely distributed. The following document was circulated to all schools by Secretary of the NTTF Mr Cal Yagan in March 1990.

The minutes and a covering letter were sent to the Acting Superintendent East Arnhem land, the Women's Officer of the Northern Territory Teachers Federation and to those who attended the meeting.

The minutes were then widely distributed around and off the island by the Principals of Umbakumba and Alyangula after the Umbakumba Principal had either been given or picked up a copy of the documents. The minutes and covering letter were viewed by some on the Eylandt to be defamatory and in the face of a continuing refusal by two of the women (*Jean Guernier and Helen McCarthy*) whose names appear on the minutes and letter to apologise for their contents, writs have been issued by the three male officers against these two women.

In continued discussion with the two women and with other people on the Eylandt it became evident that a "Pandora's Box" could have been opened, as it subsequently has been. A number of statements were written by various individuals outlining in detail what they consider to be serious mismanagement, discriminatory and harassment practices.

The Federation Executive was of the opinion that these substantial and serious allegations required investigation. All of this information gathered at the time was made into a dossier and given to the Commissioner of the Teaching Service in mid 1989. The advice given to the Commissioner was that there appeared to be major problems on the Eylandt in that serious discrimination and harassment were aimed at particular individuals. The dossier was subsequently given to the Department of Education and upon continued pushing by the Federation office Messrs. Wauchope and Cluney conducted an investigation into the allegations.

This investigation commenced in September 1989. It should be noted that the ABC 7:30 Report is genuinely investigating this affair and it has its own additional sources of information (Young, 1990).

A newspaper article titled *Application dismissed: Furore over letter* dated 16th March 1990 by John Loizou in the Territory News followed, reporting;

An application to have the ABC and the producer of its Territory based 7:30 Report, Les Rochester, make available documents used in a program about a supposed "old boys' network" within the Education Department was dismissed in the Supreme Court yesterday.

The defamation allegation stems from a letter written by two teachers, Helen McCarthy, a teacher at Angurugu and Jean Guernier, a teacher at Batchelor College, wrote to the Superintendent at Nhulunbuy, Phyllis Codd (Loizou, 1990).

On the 9th May 1990 a motion was put to the Legislative Assembly in the Darwin parliament listing the motion to censure the Minister for Education Mr Tom Harris for failing to protect the rights of teachers, students and parents on The Island and failing to exercise proper authority over his department generally and in particular, failing to ensure that a thorough and impartial inquiry was conducted by his department into the substantial allegation concerning individuals and the education system generally on The Island calling on the Minister to resign. This had evolved from 20 statutory declarations containing 63 specific allegations with the allegations grouped under five headings; the behaviour toward European (non-Aboriginal) teachers by a Principal or Principals, behaviour towards Aboriginal teachers, trainees and students, behaviour in the community or school environs, the misuse or damage of school property and the administrative failure or inadequacies. The Opposition Leader the Honourable Member Mr Graeme Smith concluded:

Does the Minister really expect people who have put their jobs on the line and made formal complaint to him and to his department to say, on the basis of an informal and secret inquiry of which no public report is made and from which no action results, to be satisfied? Does he really expect that?

Those people put their necks out. In some cases they put their jobs on the line. Their future career prospects in the Northern Territory Teaching Service are right out there on the line and the Minister is telling them: "We have had a report. It is an informal report from Messrs Wauchope and Cluney. It is a secret report and we are not going to do anything as a result of it". Does the Minister really expect any reasonable person, any person who has had the guts to get up and say that something in the system stinks and to ask for help in fixing it, will be satisfied with that response?

That is the core of the government's problem. It has brave, gutsy teachers out there who are prepared to stand up when they think that there is something wrong, not out of personal interest but out of a genuine desire to improve the system and make it work, and it will not even listen to them and treat them seriously. They want those allegations investigated given that there are so many allegations that are consistent across those twenty statutory declarations; they have the right to have those allegations investigated.

Through his inept handling of this matter he has brought the teaching profession into disrepute in the Territory, has caused teachers and others unnecessary angst and has created a situation where it is very difficult indeed to see how the problems on [The Island] may be resolved. For those reasons the minister should be censured and should resign (Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, 1990).

From the first meeting at Jacqueline's house on that late balmy afternoon in April the Island Affair Defamation Case took five years of our lives and energies, undertaking and meeting legal requirements in the meticulous procedures of writing interrogatories, meeting with lawyers, documenting allegations to disclose the unprofessional conduct that had been occurring on The Island.

My main source of motivation was having overwhelming endorsement from the rank and file membership to support us financially in this affair and working closely with the Northern Territory Teachers Federation Executive, most notably the General Secretary Mr. Cal Yagan, whose powerful edict for social justice brought us right through to the end. Needless to say for Jacqueline and me the whole affair left us totally depleted, the report was never made public and the perpetrators were either promoted elsewhere or allowed to continue in their current positions without castigation as the Leader of the Opposition stated:

People who have made complaints are still on [the Eylandt], working side by side with the people they have complained against, doing their best to deliver an educational service under those circumstances. They are very brave people indeed. Every day they hold their heads up, they go to work and put up with what must be a fair amount of subtle discrimination and subtle contempt from other members of staff, particularly those about whom they have made quite serious allegations. They are not helped in doing their job by the failure of the government and the minister to take these matters seriously (Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, 1990).

Knowing that many of the 63 allegations within the 20 statutory declarations that were either written by Aboriginal teachers or about conditions they were forced to endure, failed to get due consideration was indefensible. Once again the system had unequivocally let Aboriginal people down.

The Passing of a Lady

I had arrived at the Darwin Private Hospital and just given birth to my daughter Billi, named after Aunty Jedda's sister Aunty Chi's son who had been killed in Nhulunbuy whilst working on the new airport, when we got the news. Aunty Jedda was being evacuated from the island to Royal Darwin Hospital by the Royal Flying Doctor after suffering a heart attack. The two hospitals were connected by an undercover pathway but I never got to walk across it. Aunty Jedda from Rapid Valley was laid to rest in peace near the banks of the Angwura River, alongside where the sawfish had journeyed up and carved its meandering watery path to the centre of The Island to the source of sacred knowledge.

Moving on

Life changed for me without Aunty and I really felt that we had no reason now to stay. I felt exhausted by the defamation case but heartened that things appeared to begin to change. It was uplifting to know that something like seven Aboriginal teachers were now being mentored into Principal roles and generally there was a tangible sense of optimism in the region about indigenising the curriculum and re-engaging communities in their children's education. We left The Island for Raminginning in Central Arnhem Land where I worked again as a Senior Lecturer for the NT Open College.

By this time Billi was two years old and five year old Kariba/James was attending Raminginning pre-primary school speaking Djambarrpuyngu. Whilst I still loved living amongst the lush and antediluvian plains of Arnhem Land with all its creeks and tributaries some things that previously hadn't bothered me at all, oddly became tiresome. One such chore was the monthly orders to Darwin for dry foods and heavy goods brought in by barge. Instead of it being a great social occasion it all became all too difficult to drive the thirty kilometres to the barge landing especially during the wet season when the muddy road became four-wheel drive only access. Sometimes due to the movement of tides the barge would come in late and we would have to get up out of bed to get to the barge landing in the middle of the night before the tide turned.

Further was the continual concern of my children's health as they ran around the community exposed to Guardia, tapeworm, conjunctivitis and other tropical diseases. One night and this memory still reverberates with me, I went into our one air conditioned bedroom that we all shared, to check on James who wasn't feeling well. I remember opening the door and being hit by an appalling smell, looking down on the bed was my darling little boy, covered in vomit and convulsing. I was now pregnant with my third child, my third wet season pregnancy and I was beginning to feel that this was not where I wanted to be. It felt right that it was time to leave the bush after 12 years of living and working in remote communities teaching with the NT Department of Education.

Union helps again

I applied for a teaching position in Darwin and was offered Elliot, another remote community that was at that time experiencing violent race riots. At this point in time due to my stage of pregnancy I applied for Maternity Leave for six months, leaving Raminginning and moving to Batchelor, uncertain of what was going to happen to my substantive position. Once again I had to call on the Northern Territory Teachers Federation to advocate on my behalf as the Department of Education failed to recommend me for any metropolitan positions regardless of my extensive length of time in remote schools.

During this interlude I gave birth to my third child, a daughter named Jesse, my sweet reminder of Aunty Jemma. Sometimes when I am calling out for my daughter I have this strange sensation that I am actually calling out to Aunty.

After several months of negotiation with the NTTF and the Department of Education I accepted an offer of redundancy and on the 31st of July 1993 I left the Northern Territory. I remember that day clearly because it was the morning after I had attended the wake of my dear friend and team teaching colleague Fannon Fantastic, who at the age of 38 died of a melanoma, leaving behind her shattered husband and their two small children. Regrettably at this same time of her illness my youngest brother Sam had also been diagnosed with cancer. Fannon had urged me to go home and be with my own family consoling me that I had done my job by instigating The Island inquiry and now it was up to others to take up the mantle. As we were packing to leave for Esperance I got the news that my youngest brother had passed away...just two days after Fannon.

Going home

Going home to Esperance was different for me; I now had a partner and three small children in tow. We started building our house on the beach, and James was enrolled as the foundation pre-primary student in our brand new fledgling Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School alongside the church that had been built on the funds raised by Father's "every bottle is a brick" mantra. I began working at the Tertiary Centre which had recently broken away from the State Technical and Further Education Department joining the Independent Colleges.

My role was Aboriginal Education lecturer working with adult Noongar and Wongi students. The class was large, intergenerational and congenial. In our daily operations as a group of collaborative teachers and learners we applied Indigenous epistemology and Aboriginal ontology which inevitably resulted in significant numbers of students completing their studies and going on to graduate. Then, just when the Wongi and Noongar people started to gain a sense of accomplishment and hope for their future, there was a change in government policy that demanded a style of teaching named Flexible Delivery and Competency-Based Education. I saw these economic rationalist buzz words as a means for enrolling more students and reducing

critical human resources such as face-to-face teaching time, and life as we had always known it, ceased to exist.

This change did not sit well with the Wongi and Noongar. They did not relate to self-paced, self-directed, individual, flexibly scheduled learning at a range of times and locations.

Consequently the dilemma facing Indigenous learners is the tension between the 'flexible' paradigm, which translates into individualistic learning pivotal to the 'user choice/user pays' ideology and the 'communal/familial' paradigm that appears central to Indigenous living and learning. For many Indigenous learners these philosophies are diametrically opposed to their world views and collaborative approaches to learning where the needs of the group remain central (McCarthy, 2002, p. 99).

Whilst I could empathise with their plight I was building a house, building a school, raising three small children, involved in a plethora of community groups and had just started researching for my Master of Education dissertation about Aboriginal women's economic contribution in Arnhem Land. The Noongar and Wongi ladies came to me and said, "we are not happy. This place is where our two opposing clans come together on neutral ground and we come to learn for different reasons. Some of us just want to be able to write a letter to Homeswest or help our kids to do their homework, some want to get a job and others just want to try and change their ways now they are out of jail. Can you tell that mob what we want? We will tell you what to say and you write it down on the paper". Since I was just at the start of my Master of Education inquiry with Charles Darwin University looking at the economic contribution of women in Arnhem Land in a region that I wasn't quite sure I was ever going to return to, made me think about the ladies proposition. But the thought of taking on another commitment was simply non-negotiable.

Representing the Mob: silenced but not speechless

Thirty one students participated in what became my Master of Education inquiry, the topic switched from the economic contribution of women in Arnhem Land to investigating the impact of the newly introduced flexible styles of delivery on Noongar and Wongi adult learners. The investigation examined their ways of knowing and learning and what their education meant to them and why their ways of knowing and learning needed to be considered by the Department of Training.

While it took several years to write I believe that our findings were similar to those of the Department of Training policy makers, who eventually began to recognize that for Indigenous students, learning is not merely for the acquisition of information linked exclusively to employment. Rather it is a combination of elements that include the students' histories, dreams and experiences which must be inclusive in the learning environment so as to substantiate the reason for why the student has come back to learn in an attempt to improve the quality of their life. I was grateful for the opportunity to represent the voices of these silenced but not speechless students. One of my thesis examiners wrote:

This is a well written, well researched master's thesis and a credit to both candidate and supervisor. Its great strength is that it dares to give Aboriginal adult learners a voice. I say dares because it is no longer easy for a white researcher to gain the trust and confidence of Aboriginal informants and ensure that research concerning them fulfils the stringent ethical requirements that are, thankfully, required today. Helen McCarthy's long association with Aboriginal people, her painstaking efforts to benefit rather than 'humbug' them and her use of an interpretive approach to discover the impact of changes in their educational provision makes this a model for other master of education theses (Christie, 2003, p. 1).

As well as working in the general education for adult Aboriginal and now non-Aboriginal classes, I went on to work with people wishing to pursue university studies as mature age students. We set up the Foundation Studies class as part of the Curtin University preparatory course that was also running for international students at the Bentley Campus in Perth. The course was set up over two semesters and gave the students time to learn the art of critical thinking, essay writing, theories of learning and how to work effectively and collaboratively within small groups. Watching the students evolve academically and affirm their learning by taking on new ideas and worldviews over the two semesters was hugely rewarding for me. Regrettably, it was proposed by management that the course was not financially viable and there were plans to reduce it to a shorter course and to a flexible mode of delivery. This concerned me greatly as I had witnessed how well prepared and resilient the students from the previous years were to take on the rigour of undergraduate studies and I doubted presenting the course this way would prepare the current students as well.

However my long service leave was approaching and as a family we were going to Europe for four months to motor home around England, Wales and Ireland. Lizard Jaragba my friend from The Island had gone to live in Northern Italy and we planned to stay with her and use her home in Torino as our base. In the midst of all of this Daniel was recruited in response to the crisis in East Timor after the Indonesian invasion as part of the UNESCO peace keepers as an electrician restoring power, leaving me alone to care for our children for 15 months. The thought of finally getting together as a family and journeying to Europe took precedence - the changes at my workplace to the students' program were introduced in my absence.

Coda

I haven't made fitting reference to colleagues, Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, whom I have had the privilege to befriend, to meet and work so closely with over the course of three decades. I think back on all the time spent in meetings and workshops, planning and scheming, talking passionately about education and critical pedagogy long into the night, indigenising the curriculum, returning to postgraduate study in an attempt to make sense of what we do as educators and learners. The friendships formed on solid trust evolved slowly after all those years of living in isolated and distant places. Even after we worked closely together all year we would often go on to travel together in the semester breaks. Weekend after weekend we would sit around in the sweltering heat or laze by the water holes drinking billy tea, talking emancipatory theory and revolutionary action. I end this yarn by telling of one friendship that spanned across not only time but country too.

When I first got to Angwura, I shared a house with an American named Desiree Blonde who was a teacher for the Hearing Impaired from Fergus Falls in Minnesota. That year Desiree invited another teacher and me to share a white Christmas with her family in America. While they flew directly to the States I forged on with my lifelong goal that I had on so many occasions dreamt of doing.

First I planned to travel to Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands to visit my idol Margo Oberg. I had written to Margo asking if I could enrol in her Surfing School at Poipu Beach at the Kiahuna Resort on Kauai and she had written back enthusiastically confirming my place in the class and what I would need. Margo had

won the World Surfing Championships the previous year as well two years prior. She was to compete in the World Surfing Championships that were being held at the time of my arrival. She said I could meet her on Oahu. When I got to Oahu, Margo was defending her current title and went on to win that year's World Women's Surf Championships, back to back.

I rang Margo tonight, she is leaving for California for another surf competition so my big exodus to the South Pacific in search of my guru in her watery shrine, the epitome of my dreaming has been busted in an uncanny crossing of paths and I am sad for something that might have been...but wasn't.

Even though things didn't turn out as I had envisaged, I was still satisfied that I had done something that was really important to me, to do. For the first time in my adult life I actually had the resources to live a dream. Weeks later I flew to Los Angeles and San Francisco before heading to Minneapolis/St Paul in Minnesota. There I was crowned with a heartfelt gift of Midwest hospitality and I laughed my way through my first white Christmas with the Blonde family. Later at a noisy bar on New Year's Eve, my path crossed that of a young man whom I ended up spending several years penning long letters to. He was a Civil Engineering student and after he graduated and had acquired sufficient funds flew across the vast open spaces to northern Australia. That same month Daniel Prince, the "uncivil" Electrician arrived on Miling Island. I knew it would be Aunty Jemma's commanding matchmaking powers that would be the final arbitrator.

Now decades later, like every year, the first Christmas cards will be for Desiree and her mother and our friendship continues to link us, as does Jara Amarda, whose personal prescience about future Indigenous survival and the way education could evolve is indeed the real naissance of this exploration.

Finally, writing this chapter in this auto/ethnography has given me the opportunity to re-read my teaching journals and dairies. Apart from having to relive the bits about how many of us had to contend with people in managerial positions who were in Aboriginal communities for all the wrong reasons exerting unnecessary chaos, I am energised when I re-read my words. I am strengthened recalling how Fannon and I, in a team teaching partnership, had the pedagogical responsibility for a

large group of enthusiastic Aboriginal students. I acknowledge we were able to construct an all-embracing integrated thematic curriculum that evolved over the time of a whole school year that actually interested and engaged the learners, known to us because of the way they owned the burgeoning curriculum framework and how they propelled it by their contagious vigour by seldom missing a day of school.

To find a pathway back to these sources of my knowledge reminded me of what I have been taught by Aboriginal people, what they know spiritually, intuitively and traditionally what works for their children and how we can never stop until the creation of an authentic educative curriculum starts.

Chapter summary

To recapitulate, Chapter 4 provided a brief array of autobiographical experiences which consequently lead me into this inquiry and focused on how I applied auto/ethnographic orientation in my professional practice as a teacher/learner and (re)researcher. By using a combination of tools such as diary entries, film, poetry, prose, journal writing I was able to reflect on my past practises in some attempt to make sense of what I needed to do to engage and be relevant in my teaching and how the experience of acculturation shaped my actions as an educator that lead to The Island Defamation Case.

Chapter 5 continues the story of the fight for culturally sensitive and relevant education for Aboriginal girls. I suggest before education can be considered other important contributing factors must be exposed and acknowledged if girls are going to be given any chance to find suitable pathways to leading productive and meaningful lives.

Chapter 5 – Awiyemba – Continuing the fight for culturally-sensitive and relevant education for Aboriginal girls

I came to help and instead became incendiary

I often ask myself the question: where does contemporary education fit in the lives of adolescent Aboriginal girls? As a teacher of this group of learners for over a decade, the issue continues to resonate deep within my thoughts. In an attempt to answer this question, I present the chapter in four sections, (1) my own stories, field notes and reflections based upon my “lived reality” as a “participant observer”, living and working in Aboriginal communities. Writ large with many digressions and genres, similar to “the tradition of the bricoleurs of Levi-Strauss” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 130), descriptions of experiences built up from what I have at hand. (2) my observations and experiences as a teacher of Australian Indigenous students in light of the United Nations International Children’s Charter, sanctioning the provision of Education for Girls. In this case the focus is on Indigenous girls, as opposed to making an inference to all girls. (3) the International Rights of Children juxtaposed with the statistical and reported findings of what seems to be occurring in some Indigenous settings: determining the human rights students are entitled to, followed by a snapshot of the actuality of the situation and (4) a definition of Australian Indigenous knowledge, and a call for its inclusion within the Australian National Curriculum.

It must be noted that before I can write of learning and teaching and children and transformation, I first have to include a historical section in my dissertation for the reader who might not be familiar with the history of Australian Aboriginal Education. I must review what has been the conventional *modus operandi* of the past. Traditionally Indigenous communities have endured a plethora of laws and acts and government edicts forced upon them. It appears they have been over governed and underrepresented as a people, and as a consequence often been left confused, and alienated.

Systemic subjugation

I write of my experience, how erroneous mainstream learning paradigms may be for some and how they appear to continue to be forced upon Indigenous communities of

learners. However before I can start to write about learning paradigms, I feel I need to raise an urgent social issue that impacts on many young Aboriginal girls' educational aspirations: the issue of sexual abuse and domestic violence. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1968) before we as educators can assist a learner to reach the pinnacle of self actualisation, we must concern ourselves with the schemas further down the hierarchy, with the needs for safety, shelter and protection, with freedom of exploitation, of with the right to play and rest, and the right not to be neglected or harmed by adults.

I came to study teaching because I felt education was the critical nexus, where small changes could over time result in significant personal transformation and enhancement. Also I wanted to teach specifically in remote and regional communities where I would get to "know" the students; both the inside of school and the outside of school lives, but nothing quite prepared me for the reality of this aspiration. Singularly the issue that had the greatest impact on me throughout my period of immersion in Arnhem Land Aboriginal communities was the treatment of some girls and women by some men. When I first witnessed these dealings, I thought I could rely on my memory of the event because of its shocking impact on me. However I soon found that these events became predictable, just as the previous unfamiliarity of these violent events, became horribly familiar to me. As they began to occur more and more and merge into each other, I started to keep a journal in an attempted to write and record them as accurately as I possibly could, and as a way of dealing with the impact of the violence on me. Using Trebuchet MS font Size 11, I begin with the alleged provoked bashing of a young wife.

Mijiyanga makarda-manja - (Out in the deep sea in a small boat)

While most weekends in Arnhem Land were a procession of unhurried days fishing and swimming in palm frond water holes or sitting in the moonlight eating mud crab in front of a camp fire, quite apart from this idyllic picture postcard setting was something far more sinister.

It has been six anxious days of waiting for news of young Dingarna Baru. She was on Emerald Island when her husband bashed her with a woomera and rumour has it, speared her. She ran and hid, spending the first night somewhere on the beach and then walked around to the second cove and found an old boat supposedly got into it and attempted to get back to her parents on the main island.

The tides that run between the two islands are so strong that a drifting dinghy could end up absolutely anywhere. There is so much expansive ocean that her chances of being spotted are negligible. Today the National Sea and Air Rescue have been called in, one helicopter, thirty-two men searching the island and fifteen men in dinghies with local men searching on foot, manning the radio twenty four hours a day and all ocean going vessels notified.

A fifteen year old girl out at sea alone in an unseaworthy boat, bleeding and in pain, no water, no food, no shelter, no knife or fishing line. What must she be thinking?

What crime could this child have possibly committed that provoked such a violent reaction from her husband? (October, 1984).

The most disparaging aspect of living so closely within the community was being privy to and witnessing both domestic violence and abuse against women and adolescent girls. I was asked by a community leader why I was leaving Arnhem Land. My answer came fast and furious, I believed that there was too much violence against women and young girls and no one was doing anything about it: not the school, not the church, not the police and certainly not the Australian Government. I felt that I could not stay and witness the young post Primary girls that I and others had nurtured from childhood, whom we watched mature into competent women, get married young and often become victims of violent crimes perpetrated on them by their husbands.

In my view saying nothing at the time made me compliant, almost as bad as the man who wielded the machete, so I began to write prose in a cathartic attempt to make sense of this world. And maybe subconsciously I wanted to provoke the women and girls to write their stories the way they wanted to have their lives play out. Like I said, I came to help and found my actions becoming increasingly incendiary. I wanted to stir the women to find their own voice and to personally take responsibility for the quality of their lives, to articulate its purpose by way of living it. The violence in their lives was unrelenting. I penned this poem of patriarchal systemic abuse; written late one night after a group of women, running from their drunken husbands, came to my house for shelter. I watched these mothers as they tried to calm their tired trembling children, and I wondered how these little kids could possibly be expected to be at school the next day. Later after they had left and crept back through the night to their silent camps, I wrote in my journal:

Blackman

Blackman, how come you can see the goanna track and swift fish in the sea?
Blackman, how come you can hear the beguiling bush and sense its surrounds?

Blackman, how come you can show such care for your mother's brother's cousin's welfare?

Blackman, how come you can dream visions ethereal beyond all realms?
Blackman, how come you can tread this land, wise, intuitive, in perfect command? So then tell me...

How come so many of the children you breed often go hungry in terrible need, as they run through the night escaping abuse while their mothers are used, and brutally bruised, because their drunken husband needs an excuse to be 'a man'.

Tell me...can you see your culture so proud, when you grovel in your vomit at a pub's back door weeping out aloud?
Or cut down your mother, spear your brother, bash your wife, then run to the jungle for your old way of cover?

I stand here and watch but I cry at the sight, you so proud in the day but a dog by the night.

I cannot stay and teach your young bestowing their culture as proud and strong,

No I cannot stay and teach your young, to have them grow up as their fathers have done.

To live amidst two moieties prolific in ways, now deadened by alcohol and left in an incoherent haze.

Never will the Blackman rise while there is this fluid that blinds the eye, angers the heart and clenches the fist, I will not continue to witness this.

I am beholden but I cannot stay, while human right injustices don't see the light of day.

I know this country and I know its song, but I now know I cannot belong.

I never wanted to change your story, only ensure that the children grew up knowing its glory.

That is, to grow up black is to grow up free, to grow up with every possible civil liberty

(March, 1984).

I had come from a family that had its fair share of drunken fights causing us younger ones to run into the dark and hide in fear, so I wasn't completely naive to what was happening in the camps at night. Nonetheless, I did suffer disbelief that children could be exposed to such unrelenting appalling behaviour by violent drunk adults. My disbelief prompted me to write more stories and poems. I wasn't sure what it was that I was writing, but I found words began to pour out of me in an attempt to make sense of what I was witnessing and hearing. Stories of domestic

violence and sexual abuse against women, including underage children, were frequent. Later, I felt such relief when I read the words of feminist socialist Jewish writer Margaret Randall who wrote, "...the power of words, their energy and ability to ignite our clarity and tenderness, our deepest feelings and most elevated intelligence - is capable of freeing us of what is necessary for our survival and healthy growth" (as cited in Browdy de Hernandez, 2003, p. 170). "Healthy growth" in my case meant making sexual abuse visible, so that surviving it was possible. It concerned me greatly that the wider Australian community seemed oblivious to the entrenched and inherent horrid realities of what life is like for many Aboriginal women and girls. Maybe people are simply badly informed about what is happening under the guise of "culture" in some Aboriginal communities.

Likewise Jewish Latina Diaspora survivor Aurora Morales believed that, "individual abuse and collective oppression are not different things. They are different views of the same creature. Personal abuse is the local eruption of systemic oppression, and oppression is the accumulation of millions of small systemic abuses" (as cited in Browdy de Hernandez, 2003, p. 5). After a period of time, hearing the ongoing personal abuse and watching the collective oppression of many Aboriginal women and young girls, became untenable for me to bear. I could not ignore it, so I started to talk about it to the women I had developed close relationships with, about going to the police and reporting domestic violence or finding out about how to take out restraining orders. Coincidentally the Federal Government launched a series of television advertisements focusing on exposing domestic violence as intolerable and unacceptable behaviour. I took advantage of these powerful images of violence against women and used them for oral communication discussions about domestic violence with my students. Some of the domestic violence advertisements used Aboriginal actors in Aboriginal settings and the message became notably relevant. Over time a small wedge of resistance seemed to appear among the women who started to talk openly about domestic violence. As well, there had been several women's conferences concerned with the increasing rates of domestic violence and more information about accessing relevant services circulated the community. I believed there was a subtle, though definite shift, in the attitudes of what many women considered as acceptable behaviour by their men, for the treatment of themselves and their children.

Historical and socio-political influences on educational delivery

For me personally, growing up with the socio-political influences of the 1980's meant that I was the beneficiary of the powerful civil rights movements that led to the Afro-American black power rights, feminism, gay consciousness and a new wave of interest in the narratives of migrant and ethnic minorities. Paradoxically the emancipation that was afforded me by the northern hemisphere liberators did not permeate south deep enough to touch the lives of Australian Indigenous women. I was aware how whiteness in all its embarrassing Eurocentric domination, could impose patriarchal and ethnocentric ideals of privilege and superiority. It seemed to me that what was not white was made invisible, what was not male was marginalised, by racist one dimensional colonialist views. While I quickly concede that I would rarely impose my socio-political worldview on the women I shared my days and nights with, it was not difficult to find researchers who confirmed what I was witnessing: that Aboriginal women seemed "less equal". Anthropologist Keith Cole who spent over fifteen years conducting research among Aborigines of the Northern Territory revealed that:

The history of the Northern Territory is one long sad story of abuse of Aboriginal women. Formally their husbands bartered them with Makassan trepanners and Japanese pearl divers for goods and alcohol. Aboriginal women were taken by pastoralists and settlers in the early days of white settlement (Cole, 1981, p. 40).

Similarly, Cole (1981) warned in the contemporary world of cash economy now established on The Island by Broken Hill Propriety (BHP) Mining Company, women and young girls were reportedly again used in prostitution and other illicit relationships to obtain grog. When I lived there the mining company had stringent policies and if non-Indigenous men were caught with local Aboriginal females the men would have their work permit revoked, their employment terminated and be removed from the island. Yet in spite of these stringent rulings, solicitous behaviour continued.

In terms of status and importance, Aboriginal men appeared to be employed in the most influential, best paying and senior decision making positions on the local government council. They seemed to fill the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Commission sitting-fee-paying and executive positions. Aboriginal men appeared to have the more interesting Community Development Employment Program jobs. They reportedly took more trips to Darwin and Cairns – where they could participate in drinking, gambling and infidelity - than the women. From what I observed, the bulk of unpaid caring work was left to the women and young girls: the menial hunting and gathering, the monotonous cleaning, the constant and repetitive social, physical and emotional responsibility of raising small children and babies. Bell (1993) wrote that:

The nurturance role is now expressed more symbolically than it was prior to settlement life, when women's control over the lives of the family group and bodily care and functions was more immediate and direct. Nurturance is now being stated in terms of country and relationships. However, it does partly explain women's low status on settlements, for the task they have set themselves and the means with which they seek to obtain harmony, are constrained by the male-orientated and dominated European controls and policies which govern Aboriginal affairs (p. 51).

When Bell, a white woman and Anthropologist, was invited to speak at the 1989 conference on the Rights of Subordinate Peoples she asked her friend, the late Topsy Napurrula Nelson from Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory to collaborate with her, and they researched the treatment of women and girls in Aboriginal communities. Their paper titled, *Speaking about Rape is Everyone's Business* called for the acknowledgement of the fact that Aboriginal women were being raped by Aboriginal men. Public reaction was instantaneous and furious. Much of what the authors were trying to say was rendered imperceptible as twelve prominent Aboriginal women, lead by Indigenous writer Jackie Huggins challenged Bell, arguing that as a white woman she had no right to discuss Aboriginal rape. The signatories to a letter to the editor - Jackie Huggins, Jo Willmot, Isabel Tarrago, Kathy Willetts, Liz Bond, Lillian Holt, Eleanor Bourke, Maryann Bin-Salik, Pat Fowell, Joann Schimider, Valerie Cragie and Linda McBride-Levi - disputed the intra-racial rape debate as “everyone's business”:

It is our business how we deal with rape and have done so for the last 202 years quite well. We don't need white anthropologist reporting business which can be abused and misinterpreted by racists in the wider community. They feed like parasites on this type of thing (Huggins et al., 1991, p. 506).

According to Sutton (2001) the debate resulted in a second publication by Indigenous researchers: Indigenous scholar Judy Atkinson published a paper titled *Violence in Aboriginal Australia: Colonisation and Gender*, Audrey Bolger a book titled *Aboriginal Women and Violence*, and Victoria Katherine Burbanks' book titled *Fighting women: Anger and aggression in Aboriginal Australia*. Sutton believed that, "scholars have been far from silent, they have even transgressed and said the unsayable but who has been listening?" (Sutton, 2001, p. 142).

A full decade later, Aboriginal academic, Boni Robertson, published her findings in the 1999 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force Report* on violence in Queensland which documented "appalling acts of physical brutality and sexual violence being perpetrated with some families and across communities to a degree previously unknown in indigenous life" (as cited in Rintoul, 2001, p. 21). It seemed to me at long last, although tragically too late for many, the language to talk about the violence against Aboriginal women and young girls, not only by non-Indigenous men but also by Indigenous men, was beginning to percolate into both Indigenous and mainstream consciousness. An article in the Inquirer Section of the *Weekend Australian* in 2001 disclosed:

This week Huggins stepped forward to praise Evelyn Scott, the former chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, after Scott revealed that her daughters were sexually assaulted as children and that many of the problems confronting Aboriginal youth could be traced to childhood abuse (Rintoul, 2001, p. 21).

This was a significant revelation, and it seemed it was enough to break the code of silence and bring the issue of abuse against women and children into the fore ground. These revelations coincided with some of the most prominent Aboriginal male leaders being implicated in rape allegations, carried out over the previous decades:

It is the intersection of colonial oppression and violence, gender and race. There needs to be an extensive education campaign, an across the board "shift in consciousness". They're systemic problems. Much of the violence today is alcohol related. You have also got to address the deeper problems of alienation (Rintoul, 2001, p. 21).

Rintoul believed the deeper problem of alienation commenced in the late 1800's when under Government decree, many Aboriginal people were removed from their

traditional lands and re-located into unfamiliar artificial communities. Amalgamated often with groups of people that they would not under normal conditions associate with, resulted in tension and fighting. It also caused a profound sense of confusion, alienation and disconnection.

As I started this chapter, I wrote I was unable to write about education because I needed to first raise a more urgent issue that impacted on many young Aboriginal girls' educational aspirations: the issue of sexual abuse and domestic violence. Subsequently what follows next is an extension of that same claim. Before I can suggest the issue of future educational strategies, I am required to trawl the past and expose the sorts of experiences that were endured by many Aboriginal peoples. I am obliged to detail the repercussions that came from these historical experiences and locate them in terms of how they impacted on a people, estranged from the very thing that defined them and gave them life - their land.

Alienation and assimilation

To fully understand the implications of the soul-destroying action of invasion and how it perpetrated its force on Aboriginal peoples, I draw attention to and underscore the innate relationship Aboriginal peoples have with their lands. Anthropologists claim that:

Before birth, a person's foetus is animated by a spirit which breathes life into it and, so to speak, makes it human: that spirit is derived directly from a mythical being who continues to exist, spiritually, at a particular site. The very fact of this spiritual animation means that the child who is born is not only himself (herself) a manifestation of a sacred mythic character, but also has a very direct and significant linkage with the site (*and* country) associated with the mythic being. And this has social and ritual implications (Berndt & Berndt, 1977, p. 138).

I know this to be serious women's business because after experiencing a dream or receiving a sign, the women would journey out to fertility water holes within their country to specifically swim in the water so the spirits could come into them and procreate new life. If I ventured along, the women would be very stern constantly shooing me away from the water hole, prohibiting me from swimming in case a spirit accidentally came into me. From early childhood children are connected to their acknowledged landscape and are engaged in learning the songs and dances that make

up the complex network of religious and economic duties. As they grow older they are sustained by their relationship of reciprocity to the land and take the role of guardian seriously. As such:

A spiritual linkage existed/exists between a person and a specific site or part of the country by virtue of his (her) birth. This is more than an association with a piece of land-any land, specific land. It is rather that the land is him (her), in spiritual terms. It cannot be removed from him (her)-not even by death, since this concept is relevant to both past and present generations and the spiritual part of man/land is considered as being eternal, returning on death, for recycling, to the mythical being concerned or the sphere associated with such beings (Berndt & Berndt, 1977, p. 138).

After the British invasion in 1788, the English colonised Australia on the grounds that Australia was not inhabited naming it, “Terra Nulla” or empty land. According to English law, if there was no indication of agriculture or “evidence of dependence” on the land, then by association, this implied that the inhabitants therein were not recognised as the rightful residents. Congruously, if I was asked to chronicle one aspect of Indigeneity that has made the most definitive impact on me, it would unreservedly be their symbiotic synergy in terms of their relationship between clan and land. This awe-inspiring commitment to honour and live by their country affiliation lead me to write the following vignette to illustrate this dependence, after hearing the news that my friend and neighbour’s wife had been diagnosed with an invasive cancer.

Bella

Bella, Naburru and I went out to the top landing this morning but the motor wouldn’t start on the outboard. Bella’s head was paining her so Naburru drove us out to her country so that she could sleep on the beach under a Casuarina tree where the spirits would softly lullaby her to sleep.

He gathered some Star Boronia or Engbajengbaja and crushed the leaves in his hand and soaked them in water and then poured the cool water slowly over her head.

While she slept he told me the stories of how the Round Stingray or Yimaduwaya is ready to catch when the Red Kurrajong or Miyarrawa flowers and the Wild Plum or Mangkarrkba turns green and how when the Cocky Apple or Mukuwara flowers it is time to catch turtle or Yimenda. He told me how to find the wild bee honey called Yilyakwa and how to treat the Zamia palm or Burrawang nuts to leach out the poison. I would say he had a dependence on the land (August, 1984).

Attrition of this dependence and vital affiliation between clan and land arose as a direct result of colonisation. As a consequence only small numbers of Aboriginal people living in entirely non-colonised areas had access to their lands, albeit increasingly and under prevailing pastoralist or mission infiltration until the early 1970's.

Exception to hegemony

Aboriginal peoples were not compliant recipients of colonisation; they were cognisant of how estrangement from their land that came with the widespread pastoralist and mission infiltration, would catastrophically erode their cultures. For example one of the first groups to demonstrate this dissent led to the 1946 Western Australian Pilbara Strike (McLeod, 1984). The strike lasted for three years when stock workers from twenty three language groups walked off twenty five stations on 1 May 1946, demanding better wages and working conditions.

In 1963 the Yolngu people of Yirrkala in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory protested plans to have bauxite mining on their land. They created a bark petition written in both English and Gumatj and presented it to the Commonwealth Government thereby creating the first official Indigenous document, requesting mineral exploration to be halted until bipartisan negotiations took place. This was soon followed by the walk off by the Gurindji people of Wave Hill in the Northern Territory in 1966, who after many years of requesting their lands back from pastoralists proceeded to take the matter to the High Court, influencing momentous and far reaching legislative changes. The picture of Gurindji traditional land owner Vincent Lingari holding out his old gnarled hands as Labour Prime Minister Gough Whitlam poured red dirt from Gurindji country into them became the iconic image of possibility for the right of land ownership.

These seminal events were seen as the declaration of Aboriginal rights as were the historical guerrilla warfare acts of retaliation against the Swan River colonists by Nyungar leader Midgegooroo and his son Yagan (Green, 1984) or the resistance to invasion by Jandamarra and the Bunuba (Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 1995) of the Kimberley to name but a few. With the conservative William McMahon's Prime Ministership in 1971 policies of integration/assimilation began to move towards

community self management. Indigenous self determination continued under the following incumbent governments of Whitlam (1972-1975), Frazer (1975-1983), Hawke (1983-1991) noted for accepting the Barunga Statement of 1988, and Keating (1991-1996) conspicuous in history for his 1992 Redfern Speech in December to launch the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous peoples.

A shift in consciousness

The former era pontificating systems of control imposed on Aboriginal people by governments, church, state and private enterprises shifted and the concept of self determination became favoured. For many people working in Aboriginal Affairs the concept of self determination through the creation of the Outstation or Homeland Movement was considered a sanguine means to decentralise the clans who had been fused into disparaging centralised communities. The Homeland or Outstation Movement decentralised missions and/or communities where Aboriginal people had been forced to reside and returned them home to their traditional lands. This augmentation seemed to offer Aboriginal people personal control and a more authentic lifestyle by way of moving back to their country hence semi-traditional way of living. The following vignette illustrates the definite sense of hope and pride I witnessed visiting many Homelands. This pride was exhibited by way of high levels of sanitation and order around the camps, well cared for vegetable gardens, large areas raked free of litter, fewer mangy dogs and well maintained essential service equipment. Homeland schools were established and children were taught by Aboriginal teachers supported by visiting professionals. There was a distinct preference not to leave the Homeland but rather have services brought in.

Banyarna - wa (Going to our Homeland)

Damija, Gularriya, Lizard, See-Anne and I flew to their Homeland Bunyarna today as the sun sparkled on the blue waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. We landed on the rough gravel air strip bouncing and bobbing along the last section until finally, thankfully just before the trees, we came to a stop.

We trudged our way through the jungle to the community delivering perishables and boxes of stores to the Jinabas, amidst kids and marbles and bags of ceremonial white clay, and then trudged our way back again.

On takeoff, we flew out very low over the sea and buzzed a dinghy, shrieking with delight as the occupants, with eyes as wide as saucers, prepared to dive overboard to save themselves. Yakki!

I love doing deliveries to Homeland communities; people look so healthy and positively involved in living. There is no grog - all the Homelands are dry, it is the people's choice. You can feel the difference: there is no fear, no frightened women and children, just family groups living in peace in their country (April, 1984).

Government subvention

Over the period I have lived in Aboriginal communities, it has long been recognised by community members that grog has been a significant contributing factor to their problems. It has been linked to the degradation of Indigenous society with a direct correlation between elevated levels of sexual abuse, domestic violence, suicide, depression, incarceration, fatality rates and family dysfunction. Bell (1993), Rintoul (2001) and Sutton (2001) suggest that systemic problems of violence and sexual abuse encountered in Aboriginal communities were essentially alcohol related. This shift towards and reliance on alcohol was historically marked by the introduction of a welfare system that saw widespread acceptance of a passive reliance on government subvention. Also the result of the 1976 referendum gave Aboriginal people full citizenship rights and consequently the right to access alcohol. How did the introduction of modernised humanitarian values enveloped within laissez-faire policies, specifically in terms of transferring authority to the Aboriginal residents in their own communities, impact on the peoples of the first nation?

According to Anthropologist Peter Sutton:

This sudden release of external controls seemingly presupposed that the old pre-colonial ideological and coercive systems of social discipline would revive, even after having been so thoroughly smashed and displaced in so many cases by enforced change and the effects of an often brutal frontier where terrorism was practised against the original inhabitants. Or perhaps it presupposed that the people would replace their own cultural values overnight (Sutton, 2001, p. 129).

Freed from long-term hegemonic control, it soon became evident that the moral and socio-political powers once controlling customary behaviour, such as the formal right way marriages for the continuity of traditional cultural allegiance, be it if necessary through sanction or sorcery and the uniquely Indigenous community orientated values of reciprocity, locality and tribe, began quickly to fall away.

Sutton (2001) claimed that the insidious process towards inept community management was exacerbated by the introduction of a significant injection of government funds such as supporting parent benefits and other welfare payments, reduced and, “devalued the traditional male roles” (p. 130) within the family and clan. Simultaneously, with the introduction of equal wages for Aboriginal stock workers, followed closely by the comprehensive mechanisation of the pastoral industry, significantly reduced the need for the services of Indigenous stock workers leading to a movement off the stations and into fringe settlements and towns. With greater unemployment and unprecedented amounts of legal tender known as “sit down money” more time became available to participate in the consumption of alcohol and kava.

The coming of violence

The degradation that ensued in many Aboriginal communities around Australia was summed up in the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report stating that, “the death rate of Aboriginal prisoners in 1987 and 1988 was approximately half that of Aboriginal people on non-custodial court orders, presumably because of the better and safer living conditions found in prisons than in many Indigenous communities” (Sutton, 2001, p.144).

Over the course of the last decade, unparalleled full blown and unrestrained acts of violence began taking over from what seemed to have been “acceptable” during pre-colonial times. These previous Acts of Aboriginal Law were carefully orchestrated, judiciously co-ordinated, channelled retribution with the intent to reach a compromise rather than to draw blood. The intent of the frightening display of shouting detailed monologues full of mythical allusions and cursing along with the rattling of spears in a full frontal attack on the accused was amply terrifying. The intent was to fling the spear within a few centimetres from the victim or if the spear thrower was sufficiently enraged, hit the victim ideally in the thigh, in a gesture not designed to wound, but at times unfortunately did, often proving fatal. Berndt and Berndt (1977) describe that across Aboriginal Australia significant variation in ritual processes occurred but suggest all groups had some level of moral, ethical and religious codes to conform to. If these codes were not adhered to negative sanctions were performed. This new wave of violence however, was a historic shift as the

2000 Queensland study into Indigenous community violence by Memmott, Stacy, Chambers and Keys titled *Violence in Aboriginal Communities 2001* affirmed. They found overwhelming evidence that what has emerged in contemporary Indigenous communities is a social climate of “Violence Tolerance” which has become an intergenerational norm for some families. The authors termed this violence tolerance pattern “Dysfunctional Community Syndrome”, whereby multiple violence types occurred increasingly and with greater intensity. They believed that, “a typical cluster of violence types in such a dysfunctional community would be: male-on-male and female-on-female fighting, child abuse, alcohol violence, male suicide, pack rape, infant rape, rape of grandmothers, self-mutilation, spouse assault and homicide” (Memmott, Stacy, Chambers, & Keys, 2001, p. 51). I have known “Dysfunctional Community Syndrome” because I began witnessing this syndrome from the 1980’s leading me to document events like the one described in the following vignette drawn from my journal. Living behind Diva and hearing her and the sisters endure this unmitigated gut-wrenching violence was unbearable as this vignette demonstrates.

Divas Story

It seems every house in the community has music bellowing through their open doors, a cacophony of confusion pouring out from huge cassette players onto the street. The late afternoon sun casts long shadows and the occasional breeze captured by the fronds of the banana leaves, casts shadows on the side of the weather board houses. The end of work siren is barely audible above the raucous shrieks of the white cockatoos as they launch up in unison off the bony arms of the Rain Tree to form a feather sheath across the sky.

A gang of girls pass by rolling two derelict tubeless bike wheels along the hard black earth, the rims twanging in vain appeal. The girls whoop with glee and applaud as the wheels eventually wobble away under their own momentum in two different directions. A car starts up and rumbles noisily by, its exhaust pipe loose and guttural. Immediately a child screams out recognizing it is being left behind and throws itself onto the ground kicking and crying hysterically. It picks up a stone and viciously threatens to throw it, arm held bent behind its head it stares ominously after the vehicle. Tears mixed with dirt stream down its sullen cheeks to join the ropes of snot moving towards a down turned mouth. In the distance the community church bells match the twanging bike rims in futile appeal. Voices echo across the clearing as young boys with shanghais and limp necked birds head for home in the day’s last light. The car is back, its entire journey around the camp traceable by the suspended dust and its hollow rumble.

Night drifts in. Women with firewood piled high on their heads and babies on their hips pass by. Safe in the company of the group they walk close together laughing and teasing each other, their gaiety matched only by their bright floral mission dresses. Babies suckle on a breast stretched out from these zipper front shifts, their little fingers clutching the dark leathery and resilient bags of milk decorated by deep striated grooves. The now muffler-less car stops to pick up a group of men as a soft breeze eases it way in through the louvers and out again. It carries a faint cypress pine-like perfume, if the breeze were a drink tonight it would be Retsina.

The porch of “his” house is empty. He has left but a powerful residue of his presence remains and he will be back. Smelling of cheap scented soap he has gone to town in the muffler-less car to drink his full. But she stays, prisoner in her own home and victim of her cultural expectations of what a wife should be. She closes her eyes and sees his, full of malice, red, angry and shining with vindictiveness demanding food, demanding her. She knows his voice will smash her peace, wake her young, his hands bash and violate her. Like the time in his drunkenness he had dragged her still sleepy from her bed and made her scrub the floor. Shameful of her own weakness she obeyed him and as she knelt he stood over her, with his belt in his hand whipping her to work faster. Or the time he had tied her to the bed, chained like a dog without water or food for two days until she pleaded she would do anything he wanted. The stench from her own excreta had stung her nostrils and although fatigued from desperately trying to undo the tight ropes that burned into her wrists and ankles she had refused to submit. Then he had come to her generous in his offering to let her go but on one condition. She had looked up at him through swollen eyes, her throat parched dry unable to speak. Outstretched in his hand he held the powder milk tin demanding she eat what was inside before he let her go. He put the tin down on the mattress and watched her pitiable stricken body heave its way across towards it. At the bottom of the tin two cockroaches scurried around each other, antennae twitching, their black flattened bodies repulsive and stinking. She cried and begged for his mercy pleading to go free to see her children. But he sat there, his eyes mocking her and his callous laugh teasing her. And then to ensure she understood her place in the hierarchy of their relationship he stood up, undid the zip of his trousers and urinated on her. Her children had seen her stumble towards them naked, her eyes flooded with tears of humiliation. They had stood, transfixed, babies so innocent of all this evil, confused by the games their parents were playing.

Now sitting cross-legged on the floor holding the sleeping baby in her tired bony arms she muses at the total futility of it all. Her need for peace is taking her thinking to the outer bounds of rational thought. Picking up the pannikin of tea she looks down into the big cup. Her own image is mirrored back and the cuts above her swollen eyes from where he hit her last night, distorts her face. Whenever she has fled to escape him he has always found her and dragged her back, not even the jungle could provide her safety from him. He and his brothers had sniffed her out from her hiding place like a hound does a fox. Stroking the coffee-coloured delicate face of her baby, she trails her daughters profile with her long slender finger. Her child, fathered by a white man was her desperate attempt to shame her husband and her contempt towards him and the community for their blind

acceptance of violence. This continued abuse against women and young girls was invisible to the eyes of the community elders so damn them, damn them all.

The night noises of the camp fade and the coals in the fire smoulder as the old woman prepares her damper, mixing the flour into fluffy white dough. Though her husband is long since dead she favours the idea he lingers over her shoulder, as she mumbles to herself and coos old songs now seldom sung. Dogs bark and a chorus of their howls strike out and roll around the camp towards the other side of the river. She lifts her head to see what the dogs' commotion is about and sees the lights of the first cars coming back from the Club. She murmurs to herself, "Ngengeriyia-oh my poor daughters - their husbands are back". Some of the men stumble out from the back of trucks while others sleep on regardless of the discomfort of the hard metal tray. Those who are taken by the urge sing the songs of their totem; unceremoniously the sacred words are spat and slurred.

He gets out of the car and leans on the door a moment to steady himself. A rancid smell of beery vomit lingers as he undoes the fly of his shorts and pisses on the hubcap. The old woman watches her son-in-law from the safety of her camp as he uses the hand rail to pull himself up the stairs of her daughter's house. As she takes the damper from the coals she turns and taps it with her gnarled arthritic hand. Then she hears a voice frenzied with drunkenness, angrily accusing. Flesh meets flesh and then another accusing scream cursing rings out before a wail from the beaten woman is heard. The smashing glass has aroused not only the mangy camp dogs but as well curious spectators move towards the house. A hushed tone of "Awiyemba, Awiyemba" is heard nearby. The old mother listens attentively but no other sound comes from her daughters' camp. She calls. A long high pitched animal - like cry is ejaculated into the night sky, its plea searching. Desperately seeking a response the old mother calls again to her under-siege daughter. Other sisters have moved through the darkness away from their husbands' hearth on hearing their mothers' fretful call. In each of their hand is a Nulla-Nulla made of long hardwood, tapered at both ends, worn smooth and stained. Silently they come and slink down by their mother's fire. Their agile legs folding up as they draw their heels securely into their crotch underneath their tightly pulled cotton mission shifts.

Again the sound of smashing glass is heard followed by a long excruciating wail puncturing the still night. This time her suffering is far reaching. In unison the sisters rise, simultaneously flicking their fighting sticks up with their feet to grip them in hand, tight, red heat of retribution burning in their black eyes. They flinch as the tortured cry of their sister spews out like a geyser as he smashes her again. Outside the house a crowd has gathered and they move closer to listen to the drunken accusations he shouts. Bare of curtains through the broken glass louvers they can see his outline as he raises his arm above his head violently bringing it down on his young wife. She falls; her head comes down heavily and hits the unrelenting floorboards just as a warm soft light strangely freeing her passes across her eyes. Momentarily peace is hers; grateful she cannot feel her wretched broken body she slides away in slow motion to some place where his violence cannot strike her. The light is welcoming but then she suddenly remembers her baby and struggles to regain consciousness. She opens her eyes and tries to

reach out to her little girl stranded across the room, frightened and crying for her mothers' protection. Just as she reaches her daughter's small outstretched hand he lunges forward and snatches the child up. In his drunken stupor he stumbles and falls heavily against the jagged louvers.

The sisters run towards the house and immediately a path is carved out by the onlookers. They fling open the door and quickly scan the room. Each sister steps into the room, fighting stick raised above their head, they move in a deliberate circle around the motionless bodies bleeding on the floor. One gently takes the frightened but uninjured child and then they wait. The old woman pulls herself up the stairs breathing hard and joins her daughters, her body aged and worn before its years, hands still white with flour she stands clenching her Nulla-Nulla. He stirs, swabs his head and then moves slowly to stand. The women approach their hatred fired by years of tolerating aggressive and brutal violence. Each know that they are about to unleash upon this man impounded anger, as they feel it rise up and out of their control. They know they need to make a stand, make public the muzzle of suppression and expose the wife bashing, the fighting, the raping and the incest perpetrated against their sisters and young daughters. He cowers, the alcohol had given him a false sense of power and suddenly he is clearly overwhelmed. They move in. Trapped, yet expectant that he will be left untouched, to be saved just in time by his brothers. He knows he cannot be abandoned, his family have cultural obligations to protect him, this is the Aboriginal way. As the sisters move closer he stumbles cowardly backwards, loses his balance and falls clumsily on top of his wife, his sweating palms touch the cold numbness of her living but unconscious body on the floor. Intuitively he raises his arm to protect his head but it is too late, his protest is no match to the sisters' wrath.

The house stands empty. Outside on the weatherboard walls a single red band of ochre has been painted while strips of cloth tied to the wire fence signal that a death has occurred in this place. Families assemble and erect lean-to shelters and bring in fresh sand so that they can sit and perform the ceremonies as they have always been performed. The haunting lingering sound of the wailing keeps pace with the clapping sticks and didgeridoos. The painted dancer's feet stamp hard at the dirt and the dust rises up to hug their ochre and clay covered legs. In careful rapid movement they crouch and spin, woomeras shield their faces and the feathers of the headbands contrast brilliantly on their painted heads. The dancers mimic his totem the Devil-Devil bird and his name now unspoken. Branding tins and stones the women slash their heads and bodies, the bloodletting easing his transition back to his dreaming. Some ladies throw themselves on the ground wailing, others chant the songs taught to them by their mothers before them. This is not especially for him; this is just how it is done. A faint breeze ruffles the coconut trees and fringes the banana leaves. Cars move through the camp, weaving out of the way of the mangy dogs.

Down by the river children run the length of the bank skitching along a dented old bicycle wheel and laugh as it wobbles away down the bank and into the river.

The point of telling this story is to expose the inhumane violence that is prevalent and unchecked. For some men it seemed to be customary behaviour for them to return home drunk or under the influence of an assortment of substances, and abuse their family. The women had no redress to this violence; there were no community safety protection structures, no police intervention, no safe house, or night patrol, to help them remove the aggressive perpetrator from their camp. Systemic violence against women and girls is not limited to only remote and rural communities in the Northern Territory. The suicide death by hanging of a fifteen year old Noongar girl in the Aboriginal Swan Valley community in Perth in November 2002 provoked a huge public outcry which prompted the state's coroner to action. Evidence in the coroner's report revealed that in her short life she had been exposed to sexual violation, violence, alcohol and substance abuse. After the coroner's inquest, the government established a formal inquiry into the sexual abuse and violence in Western Australian Aboriginal communities in January 2002 headed by Magistrate Sue Gordon working in conjunction with Kay O'Hallahan and Darryl Henry. The inquiry published as the *Gordon Report* produced 197 recommendations which had immediate and far reaching implications, exposing the child protection system with all its flaws; resulting in a rigorous reassessment of protocols and improvement to procedures that demanded more dependability and accountability.

Likewise in the Northern Territory, as a result of an Alice Springs magistrate speaking publically on a national television program of the shameful levels of sexual abuse and violence, prompted the Chief Minister in August 2006 to appoint Rex Wild, Queens Council and Patricia Anderson, an Alyawarr woman, to examine the extent, nature and factors contributing to sexual abuse of Aboriginal children with particular focus on unreported incidents of such abuse. Their 320 page research paper titled *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle - Little Children are Sacred Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007*, listed 97 recommendations and exposed Aboriginal child sexual abuse to be an issue of urgent national significance requiring immediate attention. Surrounded by a media throng the Chief Minister stating that the report findings were distressing publically pledged, that, "it's time to break through the fear, silences and shame about what's happening in the bush. Too many families are being destroyed by child abuse" (Wild & Anderson, 2007, p. 41). A short time after

this announcement in 2007, the Federal Liberal Government launched an emergency intervention into Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australian Indigenous communities to investigate the escalating allegations of violence and sexual abuse.

Back to the question: Where is school situated in the lives of adolescent Aboriginal girls?

Take a moment to visualise yourself in the home life of a community described by Memmott et al (2001) that is characterised by pack rapes, self mutilation and suicide, unhygienic sanitation, inadequate housing, broken sleep, poor nutrition, frequent interregional family mobility, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies, abject poverty, depression, low self esteem and numerous substance addictions - you have conjured up a probable reality of many Aboriginal communities. As a teacher, if you have never lived or worked in an Aboriginal community, welcome to this snapshot of their reality. And if a girl from such a community arrives in your classroom, there is a significant likelihood that she will be tired, hungry and possibly unwell or suffering from mental and/or physical abuses. Yet quite remarkably, against all obstacles - there she is. One learns never to take for granted this salient symbol of resilience. Likewise one understands after spending some time in the bush why for many Indigenous students, White Fella schools signify a clean, cool, safe place to rest, where at least there is some tucker and games to play on unbroken computers.

In the next section of the chapter I raise factors that have influenced the provision of education for many Indigenous girls and describe their impact on many young Indigenous girls' quality of life.

Crossing cultural boundaries – Aboriginal learners engaging in education

At the beginning of 2000 ameliorating Indigenous educational disadvantage was presented as a national priority. Despite significant fiscal intervention of \$1.5 billion by the Department of Education, Science and Technology in supplementary funding across all sectors, the gap in primary school level Australian Standard English literacy and numeracy achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous remains immense.

In 1999, William Jonas the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner wrote, “the failure of Aboriginal students to complete basic levels of education amounted to a crisis for future generations. There must be a change to the way Indigenous children and young people are schooled so that the education system can function as a vehicle for cultural and economic renewal” (as cited in Beresford & Partington, 2003, p. 11). Advocates of Indigenous education suspect that it is in fact the system’s lack of relevance that is indeed the problem, as it has the propensity to neglect to understand the cultural needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

Cultural and linguistic differences

A significant concern for Indigenous education is that its providers have to work within the mainstream system, and it has been supplicated frequently by parents and educators that the mainstream model of learning can be extraneous for many Aboriginal students. This premise is based on the recognition that Indigenous peoples’ differences in aspirations, value systems, language, economical, social and religious organisation, as a cultural unit are distinct from non-Indigenous culture. It doesn’t take one long, once immersed in another’s culture, to begin to see these subtleties and nuances and differences in aspirations that make it distinct from one’s own. After several years of formally learning the language spoken on The Island, I was able to get the gist of what the students were talking about in class. The following scenario took place one afternoon when it occurred to me how the mainstream model of teaching does not always transfer across regardless of the best of intentions to engage and as a consequence is often extraneous for many Aboriginal students especially if classrooms do not have Aboriginal staff co-teaching in a both way approach.

Leaves...a lot to be desired

I was walking past the early childhood classrooms today on my way to the staffroom when I happened to look in to see one of the newer, non-Indigenous teachers, seated on a high chair holding up a huge poster while the children sat around at her feet.

It was a picture of a jungle, luscious and green and thoroughly alluring. The kids were really excited by it and were up on their knees leaning forward, straining to get a better view. As they were studying the photograph I could hear them talking in Anindilyakwa about the animals that lived in the jungle and all the delicious foods that could be sourced, as well as sideline chatting about their recent hunt in the jungle for vine to make dilly-bag string.

Then I heard the teacher ask the children very slowly, “What is this picture of?” The kids yelled out as well as other rich and well informed answers enthusiastically in the vernacular “Eka, eka!” (trees, trees).

“No” she said. “They’re trees” (April, 1983).

This scenario attempts to imply how vital these notable and special Indigenous language and cultural differences that the students bring to the learning environment are seen for the unique attributes they are. Schubert (1986) claimed:

Most teachers are from middle or working class backgrounds and constitute a one-sided orientation to knowledge. Knowledge is implicitly viewed as a commodity to be received by teachers and passed along to students. Little credit is granted to students’ ability to be knowledge creators or agents of their own learning and moral agents of their own behaviour and directionality (Schubert, 1986, p. 327).

This is further supported by Boughton and Durnam (1997) who assert that:

...perhaps the most challenging issue of all is to ensure education is available to all Aboriginal people in a manner that reinforces rather than suppresses their unique cultural identity. The imposition on Aboriginal people of an educational system developed to meet the needs of the majority cultural group does not achieve this (Boughton & Durnam, 1997).

Ah Chee, Beetson and Boughton (1997) conferred with Durnam (1997) suggesting there continues to be deep-seated racism in the Australian education system and that it has been one of the most destructive weapons employed against Aboriginal people. “Australia’s non-Aboriginal education systems have been deeply implicated in the systematic efforts over more than two hundred years to take from us our languages, our cultures, and our children, and therefore our essential identities as Indigenous peoples” (Ah Chee, Beetson, & Boughton, 1997). Later research by Partington, Godfrey, Harslett and Richer (2000) in their conference paper “*Can non-Indigenous teachers succeed in teaching Indigenous students?*” testifies that, “it is imperative that rather than providing a mainstream program into which Indigenous students must fit, the system should be changed to develop schooling that is intimately related to the backgrounds and needs of the students” (Partington, Godfrey, Harslett, & Richer, 2000). Partington et al. (2000) claim that statistics reveal the dramatic failure of Australian schools to ensure Indigenous students succeed. They go on to disclose that, “in particular, racism among teachers was an important influence on Indigenous students’ schooling” (Partington et al., 2000).

This view compliments Boughton and Durnam's research into a comprehensive number of inquiries and reports, and who warn that little has been effectively implemented to improve the design of learning relevant to Indigenous peoples and for that reason reform is long overdue. They report that many Indigenous students do not want to fail; like most non-Indigenous Australians, they have aspirations to complete their education and move into careers with the hope of leading meaningful and productive lives.

The impact of lifestyle on Aboriginal lives

There are a number of lifestyle factors that directly impact on many Aboriginal learners in general, and girls in particular, in their attempt to gain an education: geographical location, parental occupation and income status, conflicting legal requirements – white law/black lore, health risks, teacher mobility, cultural misunderstanding and teenage pregnancy.

Geographic locations

One significant factor is the geographic setting in which the community school is located, as this has a direct impact on the likelihood of Aboriginal students completing Year 12 compared to students in non-rural and non-remote areas. Participation patterns indicate Indigenous students in most remote areas are substantially less likely to participate in education compared to their peers in urban areas. Attending school alone is not the only requirement but rather that educational attainment is reached through the ability to attend regularly, participate, retain new knowledge, complete the academic year then go on to graduation. "Nationally, Indigenous retention from Year 10 to Year 12 in 2004 was 45.7 per cent compared with 78.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Nationally in 2004, Indigenous students were around half as likely to continue to Year 12 as non-Indigenous students" (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005).

Parental occupation and income status

A further factor as to why rural and remote Indigenous students have lower participation, retention and completion rates can be attributed to their parental

occupation and income status. Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted in 2003 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) revealed, “that parental level of educational attainment and parental occupation status have a strong association with student attainment and performances” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005, p. 3). For example the main source of work for adults in many of the communities I lived in, was the Work for the Dole Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). These positions provided part time employment for gangs of workers to carry out rehabilitation landscaping and general maintenance and as a consequent many families just managed to survive on the low basic wage equivalent to the dole.

While that was the case throughout the year, annually in July, the mining company released hundreds of thousands of dollars of royalty funds. This money was given in exchange for the lease of the traditional lands and predictably, the glut of funds triggered a week long spending frenzy.

Rupiah comes...Rupiah goes

I am sitting on my porch as the sun sets watching the families return from their hunting trips to the beach or the jungle. Prior to this week they would have been on foot, now they arrive in big gleaming Toyota's pulling shining aluminium dinghies.

Since they all have new bikes the number of kids at school has dropped dramatically. At night until all hours all you can see are the golden reflectors on the bike wheels flashing past like cart-wheeling bananas.

During the day a constant stream of large white goods and stereos are wheeled out of the shop, flash today, broken carcasses tomorrow (July, 1984).

Consequently aspirations of leaving the community to pursue further studies are rare, and most students rely on the availability of the CDEP program to provide them with employment. The 2004 Australian Bureau of Statistics noted that the interrelationship between student performance and parental factors, whereby 40.8 per cent of Indigenous people aged between 19-49 years were not in the labour force and had ceased schooling before Year 10. As a consequence this led to families experiencing long term poverty and deprivation accentuated by the inadequate

provision of appropriate resources, “poverty means nowhere to study at home, lack of privacy for doing homework, and pressures on time” (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 31). Subsequently this reduced access to choice often results in students not being able to contribute to the cultural, social and economic milieu of their community since their inadequate educational qualifications will not allow them to gain meaningful employment or enjoy healthy life style choices.

Conflicting legal requirement: white law versus black lore

An additional factor that comes into play often resulting in a reduction in the choice and chance of workplace possibilities is derived by the reality that education is compulsory for all Australian students to attend school, generally up until the age of 17 although the age may vary slightly from state to state. There are Aboriginal liaison officers’ positions attached to all Aboriginal schools in an endeavour to enforce daily attendance. In the main however there appears to be a distinct lack of importance attached to sending children to school hence truancy is often overlooked. Since the law is neither policed nor enforced, rarely is there a penalty metered out to parents for failing to send children to school. Also the social nature of adult activities often determines children’s school attendance patterns. If parents are not employed they tend to exercise greater mobility visiting other communities for activities such as card games. As a result school age children are often seen wandering around in neighbouring communities caring for younger siblings. In the past, student payments were stopped until parents started sending their children back to school, however the bureaucratic structures struggled under such a system. Eventually a reverse approach was taken for students who demonstrated regular attendance. Schools were given access to schemes that provided additional funding sources to pay for extracurricular activities such as excursions and camps. Sometimes after all the bureaucratic protocols and procedures had been met, and students had started attending regularly the unpredictable predictably happened.

As previously mentioned, the Homeland movement instigated the employment of local Aboriginal teachers who gained their degree via the Batchelor College program. Homeland students were taught in both, the vernacular and Standard Australian English, by Aboriginal staff. These staff members were then given support by visiting teachers from the nearby larger community school. It seemed to

be the perfect scenario, attendance stabilised and children fully engaged in the program appeared to be learning. One such teacher was Nemalgwerumbidja and over the period of his internship, Yenkwa School in Arnhem Land became the model of best practise.

Dakalyingarrijanga-Shining Star

Innovative Homeland Yenkwa started its own Homeland school this year. Nandji's son Nemalgwerumbidja is the teacher. Apart from being the teacher he is a brilliant sportsman and dancer as well as a talented musician. Irrespective of his youth, his leadership qualities shine out. Attendance and retention at the school has been exceptional. The school has become a benchmark for other Outstations to follow. It is so exciting to see Aboriginal teachers and community members taking control of their children's education.

06/06/1983 - Late last night I woke up to the sound of wailing. This morning I learnt of his death by some unknowing all-knowing White Fella who asked the other if they knew the mission man who had dropped dead last night, as though he was some derelict.

Nemalgwerumbidja - Shining star collapsed on the oval playing soccer and died of a pulmonary embolism. He was 22.

The Yenkwa School closed for the month long funeral. His death was so devastating that the school never opened again (June, 1983).

In my experience, white law seldom takes into consideration or recognises customary Aboriginal protocols. One such protocol that must be observed is the attendance of bereavement and mortuary ceremonies which can often add up to several weeks of the school year. Missing weeks of school has dire implications in a system where learning is sequential, often rendering young students with less opportunity to complete their studies and go on to confidently gain employment.

For most students, compulsory education ends in Year 9 or 10. Many of the Indigenous students who elect to leave at this point have poor literacy and numeracy skills. They are as a result, limited to what their options may be for the future. As stressed by many of the Indigenous people consulted, this all too often leads into boredom, despair, substance abuse and criminal activity. The retention of Indigenous student at this stage in their education is, therefore, one of the potential milestones in breaking the cycle of disadvantage (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005).

Disadvantaged groups prone to greater health risks

Research findings by Zubrick (2005) demonstrate that disadvantaged and lower socio-economic groups are more prone to be arrested, as well as suffer from greater chronic health risk behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption, illegal drug usage, unhealthy dietary practice and excessive cigarette smoking. This risk-taking behaviour has a propensity to lead to fatal consequences. The following vignette tells of the fate of Locky Mara; equal parts precocious pest and sanguine cherub.

No match

In between the wonderful news of hearing that I was going to Miling to teach sad news arrived telling me Locky Mara had been killed. He was trying to steal aviation gas to sniff, and one of the boys lit a match to see what they were doing, and the place exploded. The others panicked and took off leaving him.

Later someone returned and dragged him to the side of the road. He was flown to Darwin hospital with burns to 70% of his body but died before they could evacuate him to the Special Burns Unit in Adelaide. Locky was thirteen (April, 1986).

To my knowledge this sad outcome is not unexpected as the report *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People* in Western Australia in 2001 and 2002 found that Indigenous young people aged 12-17 years participate in risk taking activities ranging from smoking cigarettes daily to drinking alcohol in excess to the point of vomiting:

There was little difference in alcohol drinking patterns between males and females aged 12-16 years, but at 17 years of age, a higher proportion of males were drinking alcohol (61.0 per cent) compared to females (43.2 per cent) and those living in the Perth metropolitan area were more likely to drink in excess than those in areas of isolation (Zubrick et al., 2005, p. 8).

Given this situation, data reported from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests that education and employment can contribute to establishing protective effects on health risk problems for students since Indigenous students who had completed Year 12 relative to those who had left early exhibited lower rates of smoking and alcohol use. “Lower substance use was also observed among those who were

employed, relative to those unemployed or not in the labour force” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 2003, p. 8).

Non-Indigenous teacher mobility and misinterpretation

Another issue that Aboriginal students in community schools face is high levels of non Indigenous teacher mobility. A study in 1999 examined teacher turnover in schools in the Northern Territory and discovered that the average stay in the Darwin area was 3.4 years compared the average stay in East Arnhem Land which was only 1.8 years. I recall one Monday afternoon driving out to the airport to welcome a new teacher flying in from Sydney. On Wednesday he flew back to Sydney, he said he would have left on Tuesday if there had been a plane.

1,460 days, 208 weeks, 48 months, 4 years

I am sitting on my porch drinking tea. It is official I am leaving. My application to do a Bachelor of Education has been approved and I am taking leave without pay for twelve months.

I never imaged that I would ever do anything different from what I’ve been doing for the last four years. It is disturbing to think shortly I am going to be living a different space, in a different pace, in a different race, and it only occurs to me when I’m doing something for the last time. Now I look at things longer, I take in the smells deeply, I listen intently, greedily taking in everything, realising now that it is rationed and soon to expire.

After school today I dropped Dyalaguna, the post primary girl’s teacher, off at her house. She got stuck in the back of my short wheel base Suzuki four wheel drive and I laughed so hard I couldn’t move to help her. She was yelling “yakki” and laughing with her bottom lodged firmly up in the air. It was a special moment captured and I thought to myself in these final months together I have worn her down to befriend and trust me...

Big improvement from our first meeting when she blamed me for her daughter falling out of a tree and tried to waddy me to death with her Nulla-Nulla (October, 1984).

Consistently a large number of non-Indigenous teachers are employed by the Department of Education with an unmitigated lack of preparation for living in isolated remote communities as well as pedagogical training in Indigenous epistemologies and/or cultural propriety. As a result of inappropriate screening by the department many teachers arrived willing but ill-equipped to deal with the cultural and linguistic diversity they encountered. Often many left within a short

space of time causing significant disruption to the school as other teachers took on extra classes interfering with their own program. Sometimes the opposite happened and teachers stayed longer for extrinsic reasons; the relaxed casual lifestyle, the ideal climate, the exceptional fishing and the socialising with copious amounts of alcohol. This lifestyle often resulted in teachers arriving to school hung over and insufficiently prepared for their class. These teachers were seldom cautioned for their unprofessional conduct, their poor performance rarely scrutinised since many socialised with the Principal who seemed to condone this behaviour. This was not the case when Aboriginal principal Chris Sarra became responsible for a community school in Queensland.

When Chris Sarra became principal at Cherbourg State School, he replaced nearly the entire school staff because he wanted teachers who were committed to achieving equitable outcomes. The necessary inference there was that the existing staff members were not committed to that goal and hence were not the best individuals to teach those students (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 36).

There is considerable evidence that teachers can make a substantial positive contribution to the academic outcomes and personal self esteem of students, likewise it can be said that teachers can be unsuitable and the source of negative experiences impacting detrimentally on students' achievement and attendance. Research conducted by Partington et al (2000) has shown the dire pedagogical implications of misunderstanding Indigenous students and what occurs when non-Indigenous teachers are unfamiliar with cultural specific ways of their learners. This is particularly the case when it comes to speakers of Standard Australian English listening to speakers of Aboriginal English. Extensive classroom based linguistic research by Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, Konigsberg, and Collard (2004) show that there are cultural ways of organising text built on cultural obligations and responsibilities associated with kinship, as well as lived experiences that students build up as part of their socio-cultural and cognitive schemas. When teachers don't draw on this rich cultural cognitive schema that the students bring with them to the learning environment or suppress it, students tend to feel alienated and have a tendency to withdraw believing that their contribution is not valued.

Teenage pregnancy – An impeding factor for Aboriginal girls

An added factor impacting on Aboriginal girls' capacity to complete their post primary education is the issue of teenage pregnancy. The 2003 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Social Justice Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistical health of children data states that, "teenage births were more common among Indigenous women than among other women. In 2003 the teenage (15-19 years) birth rate among Indigenous women was more than four times the overall Australian teenage birth rate" (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006) as was noted in a recent Western Australian study that "11% of Aboriginal babies born are to mothers aged 17 or less compared to 2% of the total population" (Zubrick et al., 2005). Living in a community for a long period of time often gave teachers like me an opportunity to have the same girls several times throughout the duration of their school life. It was problematic to me to devote much energy and time in nurturing their talents and prospects, encouraging them to go on with their studies, then watch as once they reach a certain age - generally around fourteen years old - they become pregnant.

she's got the belly

I have just returned from drinking tea with Aunty Jedda and listening to her stories. She was telling me about Djida, Wudja and Ima as young girls and how they bore their many children and the hardship of having bush births.

She said that when she got pregnant with her first child she never even realised that she was pregnant and thought it was the water that she drank. She felt movement in her stomach and thought that she must have swallowed a tadpole.

In the meantime, fifteen year old Ani had Tony's son on the 9th of December and Deni gave birth to a baby girl on the 10th December. Colleen and Raelene go in soon to also become fifteen year old mothers...fourteen year old lovers (December, 1984).

It appears to be culturally acceptable for Indigenous adolescent girls to become young mothers without stigma, opposed to the attitude of teenage pregnancy in the broader Australian community. Anecdotal evidence appears to be indicating that a growing number of girls are not returning to school after the birth as the extended families that traditionally cared for the child while she attended school have other

commitments to meet, consequently urging the young mother to bear the consequence of child raising herself. This shift in responsibility, however subtle, has required some young women to take alternate options such as terminating the pregnancy which traditionally was not commonly considered.

The United Nations International Children's Charter and the Australian Indigenous education context

At this point I want to shift the focus of my inquiry to the Universal Rights of a Child according to the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNCF) formally United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds (UNICEF) Charter, and how this pledge plays out in terms of its commitment to provide education for Aboriginal learners and girls in particular. I want to highlight these rights and protectoral caveats that have been established by the foremost leading body that represents children and their civil liberties and juxtapose the charter against what young Aboriginal learners/girls should be receiving, but apparently are not.

Five articles and where they fit in the lives of adolescent Aboriginal girls

The United Nations International Children's Fund Charter is made up of 54 articles. For the purpose of this study I have purposely selected five articles to observe how these articles and the actual life worlds of Aboriginal adolescent learners/girls sit within an international context. I have selected the following five articles 4, 19, 28, 30 and 34 because of their fundamentality. They represent the basic of all human needs, so fundamental that they are akin to the air we breathe, consequently there can be no excuse for not providing them. Whereas perhaps establishing the provision of the other 50 articles may be thwarted due to the excuse of insufficient resources or lack of capital funds.

United Nations International Children's Fund Article 4 - Protection of Rights: "Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled".

Australian Indigenous context - The Government is attempting to take responsibility. In 2007 the Federal Liberal Government launched a tri-state

emergency intervention strategy to investigate the level of protection for children in Aboriginal communities.

United Nations International Children’s Fund Article 19 - Protection from all forms of violence. “Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally”. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them”.

Australian Indigenous context – Past and incumbent governments seems to have neglected to take all available measures to meet their responsibility to ensure children are protected because there is overwhelming evidence that Memmott et al., (2001), Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, (2002), (Wild & Anderson, 2007) demonstrates that Aboriginal children are growing up experiencing dysfunctional community syndrome through encountering daily unprecedented levels of violence not known before. A report produced by the United Nations Children’s Fund has described “Australia’s Indigenous children were among the most vulnerable to abuse and early death” (United Nations International Children's Education Fund, 2004; p.3).

United Nations International Children’s Fund Article 28 - Right to an education. “All children have the right to a primary education which should be free. The convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable of”.

Australian Indigenous context - Extensive longitudinal studies confirm that regardless of the gargantuan fiscal interventions over the last two decades into Aboriginal education, rates of successful participation in primary, post primary and post compulsory education of Indigenous students remains significantly lower than for non-Indigenous students (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Boughton & Durnam, 1999). This disparity can be traced to issues including non-Indigenous teachers’ pedagogical misinterpretation, epistemological misunderstanding and erroneous beliefs about Indigenous learners’ cognitive functioning and ways of knowing, student complacency and truancy, ongoing family mobility, general

malaise, sickness or illness- all resulting in students not being able to reach the level of education they are capable of achieving. Historically these events have had a tendency to be exacerbated by high rates of non-Indigenous teacher mobility and racism in schools.

United Nations International Children’s Fund Article 30 - Children of minorities/Indigenous groups: “Minority and Indigenous children have the right to learn and practise their own culture, language and religion. The right to practise one’s own culture, language and religion applies to everyone”.

Australian Indigenous context - Much research shows and particularly the works of Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, Konigsberg, and Collard (2004) that Indigenous language is directly linked with the child’s social and cultural schema established by the activities and mores of the cultural group. Consequently the incorporation of Indigenous content in the curriculum builds on from and scaffolds the child’s home knowledge making schooling more relevant often resulting in frequent attendance. This has far reaching consequences when the school understands or has empathy significant in “an improved understanding of Indigenous culture improves the spiritual health of Indigenous students which leads to better outcomes in areas such as health, family and community cohesion, education and employment” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005).

Similarly Ah Chee, Beetson and Boughton (1997) in their paper *Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Australia* presented to the Indigenous Rights, Political Theory and the Reshaping of Institutions Conference at the Australian National University firmly endorse United Nations International Children’s Fund Article 30 - when they say:

Educators have long been aware that culture and identity are central to learning. To deny someone’s identity is to deny them their right to learn from within their own experience, their own culture, their right to read the world, from within one’s own framework, rather than one imposed from the outside (Ah Chee et al., 1997).

Yet regardless of ongoing and substantial parental and community appeal to indigenise the curriculum, Aboriginal students still continue to operate within the dominant educational framework.

United Nations International Children’s Fund Article 34 - Sexual exploitation: “governments should protect children from all sorts of exploitation and abuse”.

Australian Indigenous context - Tragically the reality of this article is that there is a litany of studies which seem to confirm the opposite, a report titled *Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (Atkinson, 1990b) shows that 90% of rape victims were women and girls, and almost 20% were raped by a group of men (no details about the geographic location of these statistics is stated). Even more alarming is that young boys have been reported as, “trading their younger sisters to older boys to pay gambling debts or to purchase alcohol. Young girls as young as eight have been sexually misused by adult Indigenous and non-Indigenous men in exchange for beer (p. 40).

It appears that the conscientious effort of an international charter to protect the human rights of children constitutes serious intent; however Indigenous children continue to be victims of violence and sexual exploitation and the crimes continues to go unacknowledged or unpunished.

Confessional tale – A confession of my own culpability

The parity between the International Charter of the Rights of a Child and those experienced by many Australian Indigenous students is far from certain, highlighting the discrepancies between what should be happening and what actually is happening. This uncertain reality is shameful and for the most part it is shamefully reflective of me. As a teacher, I walked away from my professional mandatory duty of care when I left the community because I could not bear the impact of the ongoing violence on me and I feel culpable. I feel I have failed by not reporting incidences of the obvious physical harm inflicted - both anecdotal and witnessed. Instead as a teacher, I indirectly helped endorse systems proliferating mistreatment and made abuse invisible by staying silent whilst living there and then moved away leaving many Aboriginal girls to their own inept devices.

My indirect contribution was that I represented an intervention that ensured many Aboriginal students had significantly lower rates of retention, literacy, numeracy, self esteem and significantly high rates of mortality, juvenile detention, substance dependency, sexual abuse and adolescent domestic violence. This is the quandary I find myself in: regardless of seeing myself as an advocate for indigenising the curriculum, I witnessed much...but was inactive. Australian researcher and educator Brenton Prosser (2008) refers to the work of Boler (1997b) who warns that passive empathy may read the world but not change the world.

Prosser claims:

...looking for a semiotics of empathy, and using testimony to connect individuals to their contexts, groups could move beyond guilt and powerlessness to cultivate democracy through empathy...and that this was a shift from the broader notions of power, resistance and agency for transformation to a more specific focus on the emotive power of hope, anger and excitement to catalyse change (Prosser, 2008, p. 205).

I believe that this dissertation is, to use Prosser's terms, an agent, a means for transformation, an opportunity for me to focus on emotive power as a catalyst to effect change and to make up for, in some diminutive degree, my "walking away" in the past. As an educator I am beholden to challenge my professional roles and responsibilities, and as such refuse to stuff Aboriginal students through the "sausage machine" of mainstream programs. Based on my own experiences, I urge change must come from those who have the ethical responsibility to insist pedagogical decisions must be made by pedagogues - the parents and teachers. "It is imperative that rather than providing a mainstream program into which Indigenous students must fit, the system should be changed to develop schooling that is intimately related to the backgrounds and needs of the students" (Partington et al., 2000).

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

One definition of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) or Native Ways of Knowing (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999) is that it is a polyphony - that is multidimensional and ubiquitous. IK needs to be considered in context of the millions of indigenous peoples' in the world. They insist it does not exist in a vacuum but belongs to the social life of the community and accessing this knowledge in all its representations and styles, is only possible through the collective epistemological understanding of

being one with the community. From my observations and experience from living with Indigenous people for over two decades I would say Indigenous Knowledge is totemic, it cannot be owned and not all knowledge can be shared by every member of the community but rather is the domain of particular citizens, for example, traditional healers or spiritual leaders or elders. I witnessed Indigenous Knowledge to be both formal and informal, and according to Semali and Kincheloe (1999) Indigenous Knowledge production is an organic social phenomenon.

Viergever (1999) reports that there is a growing interest in Indigenous Knowledge, and strategies are being developed to conserve the social structure through which knowledge is generated as there is a desire to safeguard Indigenous Knowledges from appropriation by others. Viergever writes that for Indigenous people the three most important elements of their knowledge are, “ (i) It is the product of a dynamic system (*creative and inventive genius of each indigenous people*); (ii) it is an integral part of the physical and social environments of communities; and (iii) it is a collective good” (Viergever, 1999, p. 337). These elements are based on the principles that biodiversity and peoples’ knowledge are concepts inherent in the idea of indigenous territoriality as the recognition that place or ancestral land is the source of livelihood, the basis of knowledge as well as of spiritual and cultural traditions. As fore mentioned by Berndt and Berndt (1977) the use of territorial resources by members of Indigenous peoples is collective and intergenerational and there exists an intuitive and consummate necessity to live in harmony with the environment.

Indigenous Knowledge systems do not derive their origins in the individual but rather in the collective of the community. Indigenous Knowledge is indigenous precisely “because it is incorporated in a way of life - part experience, part custom, religion, tribal law and the attitude of people toward their own lives and those of other living things” (Reynar, 1999, p. 290). These “other things” according to Sambuli Mosha (1999) such as for the Chagga, a Bantu speaking Indigenous African tribe who live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, include aspects of spirituality and morality, “in fact IK is not IK according to our findings so far, if the moral and spiritual aspects are missing” (Sambuli Mosha, 1999, p. 217). The acquisition of information does not make a person educated or cultured.

According to the Chagga their existential, holistic paradigm is one in which education has two inseparable elements: education for a living and education for life; and knowledge is both information and wisdom. This view is not dissimilar to the Australian Aborigines knowledge systems where they believed they shared the life-essence knowledge with all in the natural environment which included the ancestral world. Berndt & Berndt (1977) recorded that these ancestral, "...beings said to have been present at the beginning of things still continue to exist" (p. 229), are intimately connected with all knowledge generated signifying this relationship represented, "no mere sentimental bond between people and their deities, and people and their land. It was phrased in personal – social terms, and was directly as well as obliquely religious" (Berndt & Berndt, 1977, p. 137). Indigenous Chagga philosophy appears similar, "...a person not only knows that a certain herb has a specific medicinal value, but also *feels* connected to it in the circle of life, and also is *awed* by its essential role in the universal rising..." (Sambuli Moshia, 1999, p. 217). Semali and Kincheloe (1999) concur that IK does not contextually correspond to non-Indigenous notions of knowledge, "thus any effort to understand or use such knowledges cannot be separated from the world views and epistemologies embraced by their producers" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 38). They say IK could hardly have been subjugated by a knowledge system more unlike it.

Consequences for education of "not knowing"

Often mainstream teachers are unaware of the diversely creative and sophisticated Indigenous knowledge their students bring with them to the classroom and since the production of this knowledge originates intricately within their community interactions and is shaped by these meaningful relationships, the capacity for Anglo-Celtic and Indigenous Knowledges to equitably intersect and then integrate is often limited. "What is at stake here is not simply the issue of bad teaching, but the broader refusal to take seriously the categories of meaning, experience, and voice that students use to make sense of themselves and the world around them" (Giroux, 1992, p. 95). Giroux asserted that pedagogy cannot be simply something that goes on in our schools with unmitigated indifference of the community in which it is situated, just as teachers can no longer retreat into their classrooms impervious to the needs of the learners who define that community.

Having established that schools are anything but ideologically innocent, Giroux uses the work of Teresa de Lauretis (1978) who wrote that schools have the power to exercise forms of political and moral regulation and since they have the ability to do this, they also have the capacity to exercise that power to create products of knowledge, meaning and values. On the basis of her work Giroux suggested the need to develop a pedagogy *of* difference and pedagogy *for* difference, “if teachers can develop a pedagogy *for* difference, one which is characterized by “an ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective - a view from ‘elsewhere’”(Giroux, 1989, p. 142).

For several decades Giroux has argued the need for establishing pedagogy of difference maintaining there is a vital need for developing politics of identity, community and pedagogy. It is our social responsibility for all, “teachers to become border crossers through their ability to make a different narrative available to themselves and to legitimate difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of one’s own knowledge” (Giroux, 1992, p. 32). Pragmatically educators must learn to take the perspective of the other, to deliberately submerge oneself into that others’ world to eventually emerge, in hope, transformed. This is possible, feminist writer Stacy Schlauf (1996) believed, but it can only be achieved if we actually speak openly and honestly about changing what and how we teach “...the processes through which we communicate knowledge are as important as content illustrates the practice of building a discourse of solidarity...” (as cited in Browdy de Hernandez, 2003; p. 183). Built into these processes is the underpinning necessity that the knowledge belonging to those of the margins and the periphery is a vital, intrinsic and natural part of the curriculum, insisting that culture and social practises, “no longer need to be mapped out or referenced solely on the basis of the dominant models of western culture” (Giroux, 1992, p. 32). Giroux maintained that critical pedagogy will only exist when the hegemonic discourses that make up the official curriculum of the school have been examined from the perspective of the silenced and marginalised, “...and the self-representations of subordinate groups as they might appear in “forgotten” histories, texts, memories, experiences, and community narratives” (Giroux, 1989, p. 143) become acknowledged and widely known by the dominant culture.

It appears that urgency now exists to move towards a system where the language of education is concerned with an ethos that is central to human society as a means of achieving rightful social integrity, as well be a carrier of culture that begets consequential living. As Rains wrote:

As an indigenous educator and scholar I am gravely concerned that when we fail to include sophisticated understandings of indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, when we fail to teach well, when we fall prey to historical amnesia, when we buy into the contemporary intellectual authority, we are granting jurisdiction over our complacency with the status quo (Rains, 1999, p. 328).

Exemplars of the Indigenous approach

One educator who felt strongly about establishing a pedagogy that took into consideration Indigenous ways was Paul Hughes, a Narunnga/Yunkunyatjatjara man from South Australia. Hughes used the works of Harris (1984) and the Miling Learning Styles Case Studies to set up an Aboriginal Pedagogy Project with Dr. Robert Andrews from 1986-1988 through the Curriculum Development Centre of the Department of Education, Employment and Training. This resulted in a commissioned paper “*Towards a theoretical framework for the development of an Aboriginal pedagogy*” which developed into the Aboriginal Ways of Learning Project (AbWoL) the search for best practise in teaching Aboriginal students. “Teachers, students, and the research suggested that there were patterns in the strengths that Aboriginal students showed in the ways in which they learned. And Aboriginal cultures seemed to have a strong influence on these patterns” (Hughes, More, & Williams, 2004, p. 15). The authors while carefully asserting the notion of Indigenous diversity and the variation in Aboriginal cultures across Australia and the Torres Straits concluded that “learning styles develop through a complex interaction between life experiences, habits and formal instruction. Styles are derived from ways of life, and how adults and other people, including peers, in the immediate context “teach” (Hughes et al., 2004, p.11). As a result of these styles of interaction the Aboriginal Ways of Learning project developed teacher resources, packed with inventories, informative readings, classroom application strategies and case studies reflecting and evaluating past practises - a long overdue contribution to the Aboriginal Education movement.

Similarly, a post graduate program offered within the Centre for Aboriginal Studies as part of Curtin University teaches Aboriginal systems of knowledge. Abdullah and Stringer (1999) reported that the main purpose of the course was not to teach research processes in a piecemeal Approach merely added on to a mainstream degree, but to specifically formulate a course that presented Indigenous systems of knowledge as the central tenet. The goal was to articulate the composition that constituted Indigenous everyday life so students could interpret and name these experiential worlds. For many students it became a way to reclaim their Indigenous systems of knowledge. “The unit also helps participants distinguish between every day, “insider” (emic or phenomenological) types and forms of knowledge that relate to particular Aboriginal contexts, from those that derive from “outsider” (etic, disciplinary or bureaucratic) perspectives” (Abdullah & Stringer, 1999, p. 147). Students were able to distinguish types and forms of knowledge strengthening their capacity to imagine the multiplicity that culture could represent. Holliday (1999) applying the fundamental viewpoint of the interpretive paradigm writes, “the non-essentialist view liberates culture as a resource for investigating and understanding social behaviour... a non-essentialist approach can help us to unlock *any* form of social behaviour by helping us to see how it operates as culture per se” (Holliday, 2000, p. 40). As researchers, the students were able to investigate and then interpret social and cultural behaviours occurring in their communities, gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics that made up the patterns of life of their people.

Establishing a rationale

Without conditions, the need to include elements of emic Indigenous Knowledge into the schooling experience of Aboriginal learners reiterates that teacher training and school based curricula must have interpreted Indigenous Knowledge units; both to enlighten and instruct teachers about Aboriginal Ways of Knowing. Given the certainty that teachers at some stage in their careers will be working with Aboriginal students, possessing a prior knowledge of Indigenous Knowledge would assist them to anticipate the rich cultural and language diversity that the student will bring with them to the classroom, allowing teachers to manage and incorporate IK into their daily pedagogical practices.

Chapter summary

For many adolescent Aboriginal learners mainstream education is problematic for several reasons. These reasons appear to be as a result of past socio-political conditions that have historically favoured a dominant educational paradigm erroneous to Indigenous students. This has resulted in a significant gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Juxtaposing the universal rights within the United Nations Charter of children with those of Australian Indigenous learners again, I noticed that disparity continues to exist.

Furthermore I discussed the perceived problems of the mainstream educational program of study and its irrelevance to Indigenous peoples' ways of living and its apparent lack of respect in venerating Indigenous epistemologies. This chapter set out to validate these claims by incorporating the words and actions of others who have tried to enlighten the Australian public and policy writers by way of reports, submissions, commissioned inquiries, and personal testimonies about what needs to change if Aboriginal people are given the chance to live and participate in Australian society.

Chapter 6 provides a socio-political sketch of the role Catholic Education has played in terms of Aboriginal Education and its attendant role in the creation and application of an alternate emergent curriculum framework at the Aboriginal College.

Section II

Introduction to Section II

In Section 1 the focus of my writing was to give an overview of my personal experiences and professional practice as a teacher in remote Aboriginal communities. This account also included vignettes and poems describing lived experiences in the communities.

Section II begins with Chapter 6 providing a brief historical sketch and an introduction to the role of Catholic Education in Western Australia. This provides a context in which to situate the development of an emergent integrated curriculum that evolved due to the Aboriginal College taking an alternate approach to dealing with at risk secondary students known as the Yorgas Program.

This is followed by Chapter 7 reporting on the Aboriginal College practices and processes and then presents the findings of the study. Chapter 8 asks what happened as a result of the introduction to the Yorgas Program. Chapter 9 suggests that while the Yorgas Program is still developing, given funding it could possibly progress comparable to Djarragun College, a school flagged as a national exemplar.

Chapter 6 – Catholic Education, the Aboriginal College – Past and Present Conflicts for an Emergent Curriculum

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to provide a brief historical sketch of the Western Australian Catholic Education system, and convey how Indigenous Education became incorporated into its operations. From this broad representation a more specific overview of the research site is presented, expounding the origins of how the Aboriginal Catholic College came into being to the present day. This is followed by an account of the events that occurred when a sporting program was created which consequently lead to the development of a curriculum framework to meet the specific and unique needs of the students. This framework, influenced by neoteric mythopoetic philosophy encouraged interpersonal and imaginal ways of knowing rather than the long-established positivist paradigm of Scientism (Webber, 2000). A brief explanation discloses how scientific Cartesian dualism, which emphasises rationalism and logic, has influenced the modus operandi of education in Australia with far-reaching long term consequences for Indigenous learners. Furthermore this chapter presents a synopsis of the emergent curriculum framework known as the Yorgas Program and explains how the model influenced by hermeneutics, concerned with the art of requiring interpretation and meaning or what Healy (2008) refers to as imagination, reflection and practical uses of personal and social myth is applied, in an attempt to engage secondary Indigenous learners.

The existence of Catholic Education in Western Australia

In Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office is responsible for 158 schools with over 67,000 students of which 2,400 are Aboriginal (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2008).

Historical background of the Catholic Education system in Western Australia

Originally when the Swan River colony was being established in 1829, against all odds, a small group of compassionate and determined Sisters of Mercy began the first Catholic school in 1846, to this day known as Mercedes College. In the period following the 1890's, the colonial frontier pushed up into the Kimberley and several Catholic missions was set up at Beagle Bay, Lombadina, La Grange, Balgo Hills and

Kalumburu. The role of these missions were to bring into one centralised place large numbers of Aboriginal people, with the intent to both civilise and convert them to Christianity. During this time, the prevailing racial theory of Social Darwinism held the view that through natural selection, the survival of the fittest would see the demise of the “innately childlike and inferior detribalised” peoples (Beresford, 2003, p. 42). “Racial prejudice towards Aboriginal people encompassed the belief that, due to their intellectual inferiority, children needed only limited access to schooling because expert opinion held that they could not be educated much beyond 3rd or 4th grade” (Beresford, 2003, p. 44). With calculated disregard to the needs of the Indigenous population and to their human, language and cultural necessities, Kimberley elder and historian Peter Yu records that, “all the missions instituted a regime where children were separated from their parents and placed in the missions, in order to destroy the traditional languages and cultural practices of the Aboriginal peoples” (Yu, 1994, p. 25).

In 1947 a Catholic mission was established at New Norcia where children were taken from their parents and housed in dormitories, while the families settled on the boundaries near the mission precinct. Government policy insisted that all part Aboriginal children were to be removed, albeit forcibly, from their families and placed in Christian missions that were heavily subsidised by the government. According to Yu (1994) curfews were enforced preventing and restricting Aboriginal parent access to or from entering the missions and townships after 6 pm, with the Police and Native Welfare Department serving to enforce the colonial system. Chief Protector Henry Prinsep in his Aborigines Department Annual Report in 1902 complained that the natural affections of the mothers stood much in the way, claiming they were extremely cunning when it came to protecting their children hence making it difficult to procure them. In lieu of this, “of the remaining approximately 20,000 Aboriginal children, only about 25% were receiving any education at all, and most of these were in institutions, notably missions” (Beresford, 2003, p. 47). By the late 1940’s there were over fifty government funded missions spread out across Australia. These missions under the leadership of the Christian churches were the forefront of institutionalising Aboriginal children asserting an Anglo-Celtic way of living and learning, within a controlling assimilative regime.

Many Aboriginal and part Aboriginal children who were exposed to this regime suffered greatly from being forcibly separated from their parents. In Arnhem Land part-Aboriginal children were compulsorily taken from their families by Welfare Department personnel to a mission on the Roper River. As adults, many returned home to their country. The following testimony from Aunty Constance tells of her long-term, emotional vulnerability that came from being taken from her mother as a child. Often without any provocation the aunties would recount such stories of powerlessness. It seemed that in telling of their pasts they were trying to unburden themselves from their entrenched childhood sadness, since now as old ladies they had no strength left to lug their melancholy any further.

Aunty Constance

I had brought my newborn baby to show Aunty Constance and was sitting quietly breast feeding my daughter, sipping from a pannikin of tea, when Aunty started telling me about how she felt when she had watched the ABC television series called *Women of the Sun*.

She said how she had watched as this white woman in the story comes up and takes this little Aboriginal girl by the hand and says, “Come on, you are coming to live with me”.

Aunty said “You know, all my life I’ve been living with this hard lump in my chest and I didn’t realise I’d had it ever since I was separated from my mother. When I saw that woman take this little black girl by the hand, it was just as if an explosion went off in my chest. I can’t explain it to you, but truly, it was as if it was me being taken into that house. True God, I cried and cried when I was taken away because oh I loved my mother. I always felt that I had a place in my heart that was wholly and solely for my mother; the holy of holies (June 1991).

She talked about her life with the missionaries and the cruel way she had been treated. She said that her anger was the thing that had pushed her to keep on going. She believed she had to keep busy, to prevent the insidious memories from that time taking over her life. Aunty Constance was awarded a Member of the British Empire Award (MBE) for her community service for helping her people.

Change of attitude

In 1995, the Australian government Attorney General Mr. Michael Lavarch requested an inquiry into the past government practises that resulted from the

separation of children from their families. The inquiry was conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner Sir Ronald Wilson and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner Mr. Mick Dodson. The report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children from their families titled “*Bringing Them Home*” contained testimonies similar to what the Aunties had referred to in particular, “the prevalent abuse of children including physical, sexual and emotional such that mission life was a traumatic experience for many children (Beresford, 2003, p. 53). These children from then on became known as the “Stolen Generation”. Children whose lives were adversely affected by the psychosocial impact of long-term traumatic experiences, whose later role in life as parents as a result of their abject childhood, may well have been directly responsible for causing the next generation to experience deprivation and disadvantage as well. Significant research has documented the long term effects of this act of social injustice and misguided “civilising interventions” of church and state, and how it has resulted in the disruption and loss of one’s positive Indigenous identity.

Reform of government policies

After a protracted period of inaction, the 1970’s saw the first era of reform in Aboriginal education under the impetus of the Commonwealth government. By mid-1980 due to the continuing poor state of Aboriginal education, an inquiry was established by the Western Australian government in 1984 resulting in the Beazley Report. Greater social awareness of the dire straits Aboriginal education was in was heightened by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Australia in 1986. In his address to the Aboriginal peoples of Australia in Alice Springs he lamented that, “the Church of Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until...(the Aboriginal peoples of Australia) have made...(their) contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others” (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2005, p. 1). Paradoxically the Catholic Education Centre, which houses the Catholic Education Office in Perth, was the only building in Australia opened by Pope John Paul II in his November visit in 1986. In his speech, Pope John Paul II said of the building, designed by architect Richard Joseph Denny for the Good Shepherd Sisters in 1903, “may this centre always be a home of truth and wisdom, of faith and goodwill toward all. May it be of service to the

community and work to build your kingdom of justice, light and peace” (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2008). This earnest statement spoken by Pope John Paul II became the edict for Catholic Education to uphold and reflect.

Perhaps provoked by the Pope’s visit and the international press’s exposure of the reprehensible plight of Indigenous Australia, the Commonwealth undertook a three month inquiry into the state of Aboriginal educational disadvantage. “In 1989, in an agreement of historical importance, the States and Commonwealth agreed to a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy” (Beresford, 2003, p. 68). With the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education policy (NATSIEP) significant change occurred within Catholic Education in Western Australia which included the creation of the Commission of Western Australia’s policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The Catholic Education Office established a consultative body in each of the four Western Australian dioceses of Broome, Perth, Geraldton and Bunbury known as the Catholic Education Aboriginal Committee (CEAC). Its role was to be actively involved providing educational advice on a range of matters, monitor policy development and act as point of reference. In 1995, the Aboriginal committee became one of six standing committees of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia which included representation from all four dioceses inviting greater regional synergy. Principles and procedures were developed using emancipatory and inclusive language and the landscape of the educational environment of previous decades ceased, emerging instead to what Freire referred to as, “the dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice” (Freire, 2000, p. 72). As a consequence of this effect the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia Principle 2 and 3 decrees:

Aboriginal students will be provided where possible with appropriate educational experiences that should enable them to achieve educational outcomes equitable to all Australians while maintaining their cultural identity.

Aboriginal people have the right to determine the educational needs of their children and the obligation to support them in that endeavour (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2005, p. 2).

Foremost these principles became the incentive to be enacted and endorsed by all parties in any way associated with Aboriginal education in Western Australia.

Change of focus

For the first time the focus of educational delivery was specifically designed around creating a learning environment where students shared equitable and meaningful experiences carried out in a manner conducive to what may be called Aboriginal epistemologies (Fatnowna & Pickett, 2002; Hughes, More & Williams, 2004). Seen as a significant advancement from the previous policies endorsing government procedures where children were forcibly removed from resolute mothers or denied the right to speak in their own languages. Similarly procedural policy included the full integration of Aboriginal studies into the curriculum, with appropriate resources developed within the local school context. Using the Two Way Approach, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people and teachers could learn from each other, “a Two Way Approach to education is experienced when the Aboriginal perspectives in the teaching and learning process are given equal importance to that of the non-Aboriginal culture” (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2005, p. 2). Further to this, Aboriginal people were strongly urged to participate in and be represented on decision making committees within schools and parent groups. These changes promoted a liberating sense of promise to envision that the previous hardships would be ameliorated in the new milieu. A deeper exploration of this theme will be presented in Chapter 7 where the research participants’ stories reveal their interpretation of Aboriginal education under the Catholic Education system specifically at the Aboriginal College.

The research context: the Aboriginal College

At this point I refine the focus from the larger structure of Catholic Education system to one school in particular that represents the site of this ethnographic inquiry. The Aboriginal College was established in 1986 as a secondary Catholic school for students from Years 10 to 12 in the Edmund Rice tradition.

Early influences built on the Edmund Rice tradition

Briefly, Edmund Rice was born in Ireland in Westcourt Callan on the 1st June 1762 and went on to become a successful entrepreneur. After the untimely death of his wife, he turned his attention to the uncared and uneducated street kids of Waterford and became renowned for his untiring efforts to achieve a better way of living for the underprivileged. He set up his first school in a converted stable in 1802 and eventually established the Christian Brothers Order (Trinity College, 2007).

The Aboriginal College was originally founded in 1897 as an orphanage. With no roads established, a jetty was needed and a rail line was constructed to relay the large limestone blocks. The building was finally ready for occupation in September 1901 for the care and education of underprivileged orphaned boys. From 1901-1930 approximately 150 boys ranging from 6-14 years lived at the institution with most leaving at 14 when government funding was withdrawn. On 20 September 1941 it was renamed from the Boys Orphanage to Boys Town. It was a self-sustaining residential community with a dairy, market garden, bakery and trade centre. During World War II the boys were evacuated to Bindoon and Tardun, and the RAAF occupied the site from 1942-1945. Post WW II saw the population at the orphanage increase to 249 boys in 1954. According to Heritage Conservation consultant notes (Allom, Lovell, & Hocking, 1998) it became a treatment centre for adolescents with problems in 1970. Day boys ceased to be enrolled by 1977 and residency declined to 30 boys in 1980. As a consequence of low enrolments Boys Town eventually closed in April 1984. It was re-developed to become the Aboriginal College in partnership with the Christian Brothers, the Nyungar community and the Catholic Education Office and re-opened in 1986.

The Aboriginal College opened as a co-educational school with the aim of catering for secondary students in the 15 - 18 year old age group with a focus on bridging the gap between school, technical and further education. Redesignated to be a day school the residential component of the original structure was replaced with classrooms, therein creating a need to source off-site hostel accommodation. Presently, hostel accommodation is in short supply or, “not ideally sited and as a consequence extensive travel time is endured by students in getting to College”

(Edgar, Idle, & Wade Architects, 2007). The Christian Brothers handed back a parcel of the land to the traditional Nyungar owners and to the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) as a gift on completion of a realignment of boundaries for the provision of boarding facilities.

Vocational focus

With the introduction of the Aboriginal College, curriculum was developed using a flexible model incorporating a strong vocational education base. This curriculum framework continued to be established under the new leadership of an Indigenous Principal who believed the main focus of the College was the pastoral care of the students and the development and maintenance of relationships. “If you don’t get the relationships right, it has the potential to make the delivery of curriculum more difficult. In the end it is not what you taught but how you taught that your students will remember” (Western Australian Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Council News, 2005, p. 3). From the mid 1990’s attendance increased from an average of 25 students to an average of approximately 50 students in 1997.

Changing directions and the future of the College

In January 2000, the so-called Football Academy was established under the leadership of a Western Australian Football League (WAFL) and Australian Football League (AFL) ex-coach. Having recently retired from coaching an AFL Western Australian team he was invited to do relief teaching at the Aboriginal College. During the sport sessions he noticed that the boys were on task and focussed, compared to their performances during other times of the day. He observed that individual students developed positive behaviours which improved the more they trained and played football together. “Of the twenty boys who completed the year in 2000, 17 returned in 2001, three were drafted into the AFL, three gained employment, one completed a TAFE course and one returned to his community. In Term One of 2001, enrolments grew to 165 boys” (Clontarf Foundation, 2008). The success of the program was due to a number of factors which also included the establishment of ex-AFL players employed in the program to provide mentoring and life skills coaching. The boys were encouraged to develop appropriate behaviours and attitudes that sustained them both in their sporting and school environments.

The program aimed to divert dysfunctional behaviour or reverse “... an anticipated downward spiral that may otherwise come to characterise many students’ lives; of non-attendance, lack of qualifications, skills and experience for employment, increased risk of developing unhealthy lifestyles, lacking regular physical exercise, having a poor diet, using drugs and becoming involved in crime (Penney, Taggart, & Gorman, 2004, p. 5). The program continued to grow and attract substantial federal funding and in 2008 there were 18 Football Academies between Western Australia and the Northern Territory with 1600 boys enrolled.

Aboriginal College: Girls’ Academy

With the success of the Football Academy it became evident that the girls also needed some other extrinsic reason to attend class on a regular basis. Unsure of exactly what they were going to establish for the girls, an opportunity presented itself when the Director of Role Models WA, Mr Reed Graceland (a 2000 Sydney Olympian Australian and Western Australian State Basketball player) visited the Indigenous ministry Ms Mary Jordan at the Edmund Rice Centre of Christian Brothers. Ms Jordan invited Mr Graceland to take a tour of the college and meet the Acting Principal Mr Sonny Dee. At that time the Aboriginal College had 130 boys and 50 girls enrolled however the Football Academy was the major focus of the school program and the girls appeared to be detached and disengaged within the school setting. Reed explained when he first arrived at the College he had no idea where any of this was going to lead him. He had only visited with the intent to express an interest in the possibilities of starting a basketball program. He recounted, “I just took it for granted that it was boys I would work with. But the Principal’s eyes lit up like a Christmas tree and he said, “you know that would be great, but the girls here don’t have anything”. He said there are, “130 boys here and 50 girls and the girls here need a sense of identity, a sense of belonging or something that they can take ownership of” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 3). Reed said the Principal, “convinced me that the girls were most in need, so I agreed to come along and help out” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 3).

The Acting Principal Mr Sonny Dee agreed to establish a pilot program for the girls, creating a working party including the Aboriginal liaison officer Ms Justine Hope. The trial had endorsement from the College Board but attracted finite funding

for only three years from the Catholic Education Office. In the meantime, the objective was to source possible funding from all sectors of the state and federal communities to ensure the program could have a future.

On the understanding that the Catholic Education Office was planning to pilot the program for only three years, Reed recognised he had little time to establish the Academy. His focus was to effect change in the way in which the girls saw themselves. He proposed a plan and told them, “we are going to start a basketball program, we are going to be one of the best teams in the state, and we are going to look the best” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 5). He threw the girls a challenge asking if they were prepared to take it up, “you won’t wear second hand uniforms, and you won’t wear second hand shoes. You will get the best uniforms, the best shoes. You are going to get the best and in turn I will expect the best!” (T2, FI, 2006, p.6). When the girls agreed to be a part of this new order, Reed recognised that he also had some adjustments to make, “I took the time to understand their culture, where they are coming from, the way they listen and the way they learn and then I made my message clear without lowering my expectations of them” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 6).

Researcher’s commentary

At this stage of the program Justine did it all; she organised and washed the girls’ uniforms, bottled the water, arranged the buses, negotiated with the teaching staff to make sure the girls were attending classes and getting their school work done, taxied students to work placements and negotiated student outcomes with employers. Lastly but most importantly she ensured the small room was always stocked with food and good will.

Reed dealt with the coaching sessions and game plans and sorted traineeships and work experience linked into TAFE courses and spent time sourcing funding.

Setting up the Girls’ Academy

In 2003 the Girls’ Basketball Academy was launched and consequently continued by two key members of staff, Head Coach Mr Reed Graceland, and the liaison officer Ms Justine Hope and whenever possible by the Assistant Principal. Coach Graceland was employed on a part time basis. Ms Hope was employed fulltime and had been working at the Aboriginal College since 1991. The liaison officer’s role was to

provide the coach with assistance in establishing the girls' on-and-off-court-program as well as assisting the new coach to work through salient cultural and gender issues. Some members of the Physical Education Department staff were involved in the program and other members of the general teaching staff to varying degrees.

A strategic planning day was organised, bringing the 50 girls together along with a select group of people who represented potential board members for the program. At the meeting, the coach invited three girls representing three regions - the Pilbara, the Metropolitan and the Kimberley - to speak to the audience. The girls spoke about the importance of being a part of a program that afforded them a new sense of purpose, a safe place to learn and to share knowledge, to institute teamwork through playing basketball and their understanding of the importance of committing to regularly attending classes.

Coach Graceland addressed the audience and spoke about the future in optimistic and achievable terms since, “we will establish a career path for the girls” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 3) ensuring that they will graduate with a certificate, confident, having a pathway so “they go into some sort of apprenticeship or traineeship so that when they finish Year 11 and 12 they have Certificate I or II behind them” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 7). It was taken from the girls' positive feedback that they were enthusiastic to succeed in school and buoyed by the opportunity to use sport as a significant component in their learning program. College statistical data showed erratic attendance and high rates of absenteeism as the present mainstream curriculum did not appear to engage many of them. The girls were eager to work together to establish a program with the Girls' Basketball Academy staff. They felt encouraged by the chance to have something that they had the capacity to inject some of their ideas into and in part “own”. The key objective of the trial program was based on the premise that participation in the classroom was rewarded with participation on the court.

The coach, qualified with a Master in Education and a Leadership degree, maintained that the Girls' Basketball Academy program reinforced his personal and professional belief that sport and education were intrinsically linked. He believed if he could use sport and the girls' love of playing basketball as an incentive to get

them to school daily, provide them with an enjoyable experience while they were there, they would be more inclined to attend regularly. If the girls attended 80% of their classes and submitted all their assignments they would qualify to play basketball. Likewise, if they did not honour this commitment as well as exhibit appropriate behaviour in class, they would not get court time. The Coach recommended, “I will provide a very enjoyable sporting experience as long as the girls do what’s necessary to become a better person. They are not involved in the basketball side unless they are working towards achieving academic outcomes” (T2, FI, 2006, p. 3).

Over the course of the term, specific resources such as training and official game uniforms and specialised basketball shoes were purchased and a room earmarked for the Girls’ Basketball Academy was made available. The girls began to see themselves as belonging to something special rather than being the envious observers of the Football Academy whose facilities and opportunities to access privileges were ever-present. The girls’ attendance improved as the year progressed as did their overall personal hygiene and general appearance with more girls, for example, wearing the Aboriginal College uniform. There was also an observable, enhanced sense of pride amongst the group witnessed by the Girls’ Academy staff and other College teachers.

Emergence of an integrated curriculum

As well as working to improve attendance and retention at school, the Girls’ Basketball Academy staff established a Workplace Readiness Program in conjunction with Swan TAFE. The girls attended TAFE for one full day per week for four terms. As they achieved competency in their learning outcomes they moved into job placements gaining employment skills. These placements, where possible, had a sport focus such as retail sporting equipment franchises. Role Models WA as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) was able to match the Western Australian Curriculum Council learning outcomes with the relevant Group Training Organisation (GTO) and devise student work experiences within a Workplace Readiness Program with the intent later, “to establish traineeships for the girls in Years 11 and 12” (p. 10).

The incorporation of school learning with the world of work specifically within domains that interested the girls, such as in sporting retail and sporting corporations, was not previous College practice. Linking the girls' interest, with potential workplace traineeships encouraged the students to commit to their studies and push on through to Year 12. Archival records show that before the Girls' Basketball Academy started in 2002, only three girls had graduated from the Aboriginal College. Coach Graceland claimed that the Girls' Academy had engaged and consequently retained a large number of girls encouraging them to go on to graduate from the Aboriginal College. In 2006 he stated that eleven girls would graduate, "so it's a 300% increase in girls graduating that the sporting program can take a bit of credit for" (T2, FI, 2006, p. 8).

As a long-term practitioner in Aboriginal Education, I was quickly convinced that this statistic was nothing short of miraculous. I was keen to investigate further what made this pilot program so significant.

Federal recognition and support

In May 2006 the Australian Government announced its plans to support an innovative project aimed at engaging, motivating and leading Indigenous youth towards lifelong- learning by providing a wide range of educational activities through a variety of sports. The focus was on healthy and positive lifestyles, mentoring and leadership, career planning and sports including football, basketball and netball with the emphasis on using sport to motivate the students to achieve in school therein opening the door to future opportunities (Minister for Education Science and Training Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues Media Release, 2007).

In March 2007 a significant breakthrough occurred when the Girls' Basketball Academy successfully secured funding from the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Training as part of a new school-based sports academy for Indigenous students named the Sporting Chance Program. The \$19.6 million four year program until the end of 2010 had two elements: 20 school-based sports academies for secondary students and education engagement strategies for primary and secondary school students. The Girls' Basketball Academy was one of 20 schools selected

nationally. The Aboriginal College was chosen to host the Australian launch of the Sporting Chance initiative. As a result of this project, the name was changed from the “Girls’ Basketball Academy” to the “Girls’ Academy” to promote and engender greater inclusiveness. It was only one of only three sports-focused academies to be established in Western Australia.

The most immediate observable change in the program came as a result of this funding. Instantaneously capital works commenced and a refurbishment program saw more resources, human and otherwise. As the newly appointed Program Manager suggested:

Certainly since being granted the funding, Coach Graceland has been given the opportunity to employ two Indigenous women Development Officers, a Program Manager who oversees the program and DEST funding and requests, so on the floor, it has certainly given room to move. The Development Officers put in more culturally appropriate and specific Indigenous activities and events that we can actually administer, and we have access to our funding to enhance the school program that is currently on offer now, and there is certainly a lot more leeway for us to develop and design (T13, FI, 2007, p. 2).

As a consequence of this shift, “Black Fella-way” activities were negotiated and agreed upon to ensure they matched the diverse interests and needs of the students. The program writers were adamant about making sure the design to link schooling not only to technical vocational competence, but also to scaffold skills towards gaining increased self efficacy, self esteem and self assuredness was achievable.

Educational paradigms for Australian Indigenous education

The opportunity to create a curriculum program in the Girls’ Academy that afforded individual students a personal interest and, “the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder” (Dewey, 1916, p. 115) characterised by the ideal of shared interest, freedom in interaction and democratic participation became possible for the first time. This approach to setting up learning was a radical shift to how education had been previously presented to the girls at the College. Past paradigms of school learning had been atomistic, built upon scientific methods of reductionism and positivism, with quantitative, empirical and rational subjects highly regarded while the expressive, artistic and mythopoetic subjects rated modestly. Hedley Beare, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Melbourne

concurred that this learning, "... is mechanical rather than organic, structural rather than florescent, and is built on the image of the production line" (Beare, 2001, p. 38). He described the knowledge schools often provide as linear and age related, designed on the assumption that at certain ages certain things are learnt. He believed schools systematically and intentionally quarantined themselves from the homes and parents of their students, spawned delineated roles and generated prolific bureaucracies, and sanctioned mechanical pre-determined assessment, timetables and competitive behaviour.

Maude Kingston, visiting Retention and Participation Support teacher at the Aboriginal College shared a similar view with Beare and suggested, "the beast of the secondary structure has become a given. We don't question it and we have to encourage teachers to question it. Like the subjects, teaching styles, and timetabling rules - we have to remember why we put them in place". She fervently maintained, "we have to dig deeper and unpack stuff. We have to keep talking, thinking, and trying different things, not just keep on going, when we have got an extremely different cohort to the average high school. We can change anything; teachers have to be encouraged to implement reflective practice" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 3). Consequently the design of the up-and-coming program was pivotal in identifying what attributes the students brought with them to the learning milieu, "it's the kids that is what makes this place different - the kids, their language, the way they communicate, there's lots of different things. We must address that specialness of them; develop specialised, interesting, creative ways of addressing the needs of this Indigenous cohort" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 4).

In conjunction and collaboration with the Girls' Academy Program Manager, the Retention and Participation Support teacher developed strategies to incorporate material relevant to the learners and reduce the traditional Eurocentric mainstream curriculum content. When non-Eurocentric material was offered it appeared the girls responded favourably to it and became willing and active participants in the learning process. Since Research Questions 2 and 3 were designed to investigate what an effective learning context might look like and how then was the Aboriginal College accommodating this, the matter of Eurocentric curriculum content and delivery became central to the study. Ubiquitously it appeared "Western" ways of knowing

were privileged over Indigenous ways of knowing and it seemed that this delegitimising tradition had been perpetuated unimpeded through-out the centuries as Europeans colonised and settled around the world. In the last decades while there has been a paradigm shift, Reagan suggests, “given the evidence now available, it is simply not credible to believe that non-Western approaches to childrearing and education are in any way inferior to those to which we are more familiar” (Reagan, 2005, p. 248). However for many educators this shift appeared not to have occurred swift enough.

A critical perspective on traditional Eurocentric curriculum content

The establishment of the traditional Eurocentric curriculum according to Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) arose from the notion of rationality during European Enlightenment, emerging in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Kincheloe and Steinberg believe that as a scientific construct, rationality emerged as an instrument in which civilisation and savagery could be delineated, “thus in its rationalistic womb, whiteness begins to establish itself as a norm that represents an authoritative, delimited, and hierarchical mode of thought” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 5). Aided by “Western” scholars delegitimising “primitive” or non-Western societies socio-cultural systems suggests that this Eurocentric influence, or as Frankenberg (1993) proposes, “the notion of epistemic violence...” was one of the exclusive ways of experiencing the world. According to Wilber (2000), Samuel P. Huntington asserted that the waves of consciousness unfolded many more worldcentric ideals. “Huntington’s analysis gives nine of these huge *civilisation blocks*: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japanese” (Wilber, 2000, p. 115). Whilst acknowledging the existence and orbiting influences of these other civilisations of human culture, the authoritative hierarchical mode of thought originating in Enlightenment Europe, became scientism, “the belief that there is no reality save that revealed by science, and no truth save that which science delivers” (Wilber, 1998, p. 56).

Whiteness as an ideological configuration akin with privilege and domination

In the centuries that followed the Enlightenment era, rational thought represented orderliness and self control, objectivity and masculinity being particularly sought and

venerated, and preferred over experiential insightfulness. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) write, “those unable to regulate their own emotional predispositions and gain a rational and objective view of the world...who were being colonised, exploited and enslaved...were viewed as irrational and inferior” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 6). And so it came to be that those viewed as “irrational and inferior” represented non-whiteness, framed within the construct as signifiers of deviance, violence, chaos, lacking self regulation, savage-like, different. Likewise under this dictum, “irrational and inferior” also included all form of non-male. As a consequence of this demarcation, regimes of difference produced and racialised relationships of whiteness as an ideological configuration akin with privilege and domination, and non-whiteness or displaced blackness or other; including non-male, equivalent with subordination and oppression. The convergence of privilege and the personal accumulation of material wealth cultivated the nexus for capitalism and colonialism, allowing colonialism to become a rational response to white racism and the propagation of patriarchal domination.

Similarly McLaren (1998) believed, “whiteness constitutes unmarked patriarchal, heterosexist, Euro (centric) practices that have negative effects on and consequences for those who do not participate in them...it functions to instantiate a structured exclusion of certain groups from social arenas of normativity” (McLaren, 1998, p. 67). Feminist theorists would argue that modern patriarchy created the normative conditions for the exclusion of women by representing them as different, identity-less and as other, therein legitimising patriarchal supremacy over them. Dillabough (2000) asserted:

if we take this analysis of modern patriarch seriously, then the very idea of possessing an “identity” (when equated with, for example, Kant’s “rational man” or Hegel’s powerful man) becomes impossible for women, since their inclusion in the state is based upon the experience of further domination (Dillabough, 2000, p. 318).

The relationship of theory and practice, language and power

Espousing “high theory” as their argument, supreme and domineering, socio-political, male consciousness required rationality to be associated with authority, while the identity of female represented the antithesis - irrational, emotional subjectivity. As a consequence of this prevailing attitude dating back to the

Enlightenment era, women were restrained and conditioned by these images, as the largely bourgeois, male tradition of power and privilege, honoured the rational thinker of high theory within the dominant educational discourse. Lather (2000) referred to this academic big talk and high theory as, “a masturbatory activity aimed at a privileged few” (Lather, 2000, p. 293) and called for the use of other practices of representation to make clear “...the relationship of theory and practice, language and power, and the need for new languages to create new spaces for resistance and the (re)construction of knowledge/power relationships” (Lather, 2000, p. 292). Referring to the postcolonial and ethnographic work of McGee (1992) *Telling the Other*, Lather concurred that to achieve gender power equity and ownership, language must have immediacy in its understanding, and a transparency in its meaning, and that the message must be positioned in the register of the “real”. Lather claimed it must speak plainly, it must be understood. This reminded me of a story described by Ruth Behar (1995a) when on completion of her PhD dissertation she travelled to Mexico to take her participant, Esperanza, a copy of her thesis to read. She was surprised and offended when Esperanza told her to take the book back with her when she left. Esperanza had no purpose for the impressive book that sat ridiculously incongruent upon the scarred uneven kitchen table, since neither she nor her son could read the big words. Regardless of being the main character of the systemic injustices that the story divulged, Esperanza remained outside of her own narrative.

Giroux (1996) believed there were various ways in which the locked out could become included, for example through, “a pedagogy of representation [that] focuses on demystifying the act and process of representing by revealing how meanings are produced within relations of power that narrate identities through history, social forms, and modes of ethical address that appear objective, universally valid and consensual” (Giroux, 1996, p. 115). By making difference and identity central to the spirit and to the experience of constructing consensual relationships between self and others as a form of cultural practice and production, creates a possibility for the alliance of the political to be forged with the pedagogical.

Constructing consensual relationships between self and others as a form of cultural practice

As a consequence, this action can lead to the emergence of subversive knowledge systems celebrating alternate ways that challenge the traditional composition of the oppressed, the invisible other, intellectually, ethically and ideologically, finally providing them with the opportunity to write their own histories. Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992) in her book *Women Who Run with the Wolves* wrote, “women who become socially, politically and/or culturally conscious often find that they have to deal with a collective rage that seeps upwards through them again and again” (Estes, 1992, p. 29). However this new consciousness and new perspective comes at a price. These women have found that they cannot, or will not, go back to the oppressive lives they represented before they came to their new identity; they asserted that they would not be put in a position where they were compromised again.

In the same way Giroux (1996) described how the shifting narratives of identification provide both a concept of individuality and a dialogic process for self representation by drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha who provided a theoretical marker to interrogate the colonial construction of authority:

Homi Bhabha reiterates this theme by arguing that the issue of hybridity and cultural translation open up a “third space” where it becomes possible to challenge the modernist construction of history, progress, the myth of the nation, and ethnocentrism which lie at the heart of the construction of Western civil societies (Giroux, 1996, p. 76).

Bhabha explored the notion that cultural difference is the process of enunciation where the very authority of culture as “knowledge of referential truth” is at issue. He proposed that:

The enunciative process introduces a split between the traditional culturist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance (Bhabha, 1994, p. 35).

As a consequence of this act of enunciation, the production of meaning requires new places to arise, not found in the established models or system of

reference, or any other liminal spaces where the old traditions fitted. New sites of political negotiation and spaces of fresh possibility emerged. According to Russell (2006) for Bhabha the Third Space was a type of dialogue, “that is, a means for describing a productive, and not merely *reflective*, space or encounter...that this is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space where new ways of being and innovative kinds of cultural meaning can be brought into existence” (Russell, 2006, p. 3).

The importance of the Third Space to, “initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) so to conjure up new ways to open up interaction or a dialogism between the powerful and the powerless. Giroux believed this shift to facing up to the monolithic, one dimensional Eurocentric academic canon and the sovereign “source of truth” was not before time. The challenges influenced and generated by post modernism, feminism and post colonialist movements had impacted greatly on the new world of post industrial societies. New skills that seem universally valid that develop selectivity, choice, inclusion and consensual relations of power were central to critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy and the postmodern curriculum emerged quickly, firmly establishing themselves. Contemporary and *savoir-faire* educators were cognisant of what needed to be done, in view of the fact that the new Knowledge Era had developed in a fantastical short space of time.

The Third Space to “initiate new signs of identity”

Warner (2006) defined the phrase “Knowledge Era” as deriving from the term “global knowledge economy” and is used to describe, “...the global nature of business, banking and finance, television networks, telecommunications, tourism ...in which intangibles, such as information and intellectual capital, have been enabled by informational technologies” (Warner, 2006, p. 16). Warner maintained that the Knowledge Era is an age of greater freedom of thought and access to information, regularly providing a broader and more complex view of the world that often occurs in real time. The culture of the Knowledge Era is one that acknowledges the world view of young people as different and that their learning styles have developed considerably and as such, “...individuals create a unique and often perplexing life-world in classrooms” (Slattery, 1995, p. 103). It was within this

environment of multiple realities and perplexing settings that the Yorgas Program became embedded in the lives of the students and staff. The Yorgas Program used informational technologies to engage students and designed learning tasks that linked directly to essential life and work skills, established in a genuine effort to scaffold the students toward independent learning.

Permission to create a pedagogy of the imagination

In the next section of this chapter, I describe how the College created a curriculum that was in response to identifying individual students' interests and needs and capitalised on their uniqueness by engaging what Leonard and Willis (2008) refer to as mythopoetic, cosmological and narrative dimensions or stories that validated the students' existence. The task was to envisage a curriculum through the process of mythopoesis to, "use story-telling, conversation, social-dramatic play, religious experience, spiritual practice, informal logic, critical analysis, and a comprehensive sense of the beauty of mind and matter" (Leonard & Willis, 2008, p. 266). The process was intimately aligned with going back to the foundations of what represented the fundamental belief system of the students' socio-cultural existence, their perceptual notion of the eternal role of their ancestors, this ubiquitous world view described as the, "traditional belief...the primordial land was *given* (was *there*). The mythical beings shaped it and, so to speak, humanised it...they were mythically substantiated and ritually validated...associated with territories and mythical tracks...themselves transformed into sites where their spirits remain" remained inviolable (Berndt & Berndt, 1977, p. 137).

As a result of paring back to what was intuitively Aboriginal, the consensual negotiated progression focused on generating a curriculum that included and supported individuals and groups reflective in their practice, engaging each other in the process, documenting and evolving lived experience and being responsible for the Self in relation to others. While all members of staff in the Girls' Program were involved in the academic development of the Yorgas Program, the role of the Program Manager was to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge systems, "this is an Indigenous school and certainly we have Indigenous ways of doing things and cultural beliefs that we have to do. We need to be looking at the curriculum, looking at styles of teaching, looking at whose teaching and how they are teaching it,

as an Indigenous teacher would do it differently to a non-Indigenous teacher. Maybe making the classes a bit longer, I look at the structure here and I can see an hour is not long enough. I think the way secondary structures are designed an hour seems not enough. Math for instance could be run from 9 am through till 12 pm so that the kids really get it (T 13, FI, 2007, p. 9).

The negotiations and development of the Yorgas Program was achieved organically, rather than as an external bureaucratic structure implementing discrete standardised measurements within restrictive quantitative conditions. As such the entire curricular experience affirmed multiple perceptions, “from this perspective knowledge combines the infinite with the finite; knowledge is provisional, contextual, and temporal. There is no terminal point of knowing, only continual movement through the hermeneutic circle” (Slattery, 1995, p. 116). Through spiralling hermeneutic processes the Yorgas Program generated the opportunity to apply socio-cultural symbols, codes of behaviour and ways of knowing (Fatnowna & Pickett, 2002; Hughes, More & Williams, 2004) that were intrinsic and natural to the learners. Aboriginal knowledge systems were consciously documented and applied so that the experience was deliberately deconstructed and named, therein sharing its meaning, or understanding its intent, through language. Once this knowledge was contextually embedded in the students’ socio-cultural schema, the intent was to explore elements that defined and enshrined belief, cosmology, ecology, aesthetics, naming the students world in the students’ own language. No longer seen as a single running track but rather a highway of several possible routes through a plurality of learning programs, the new emergent curriculum was delivered in a variety of settings both on and off campus. Old dichotomies were replaced by new Knowledge Era vocabulary with the objective to explain contemporary skills that appear increasingly borderless and transnational. Overall the focus of the Yorgas Program is collegial rather than hierarchical. The resulting curriculum has been co-created by the Girls’ Academy Program Manager Cocious Lido, the Retention and Participation Support teacher Maude Kingston, Natalie Hendricks, Jane Melville and other College staff including the Liaison Officer Justine Hope.

Defining an emergent curriculum

In this new Knowledge Era where people are linked locally and/or globally through an assortment of technologies, generating and processing significant amounts of information simultaneously, with the intent to share data is a new phenomenon. Referring to the work of Prensky (2001) Loader (2007), suggests “it is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous [digital] environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today’s [new generation] students think and process information fundamentally different from their predecessors” (as cited in Loader, 2007, p. 12). The implications of these developments are wide-ranging and it has become apparent that schools must be less prescriptive and become compatible with the new interface where, “the curriculum is far more divided and differentiated, the boundaries between learning, leisure and work are blurred and an influx of students from different cultural backgrounds is res-shaping school populations” (Wadham, Pudsey, & Boyd, 2007, p. 248). Similarly Rheingold (2002) writes young people, “cooperate in ways never before possible” (as cited in Loader, 2007, p. 27) and are changing the way humans communicate by their ability to act together for shared purposes to effect change. As such, group relationships are prioritised and socially engaging, motivated by the sense of connectedness through shared, often congenial experiences. These qualities underpin effective social communication by the ability to both participate in and observe the emerging processes equally.

Wright (2008) referred to the work of Hayles (1999) described this collaboration as a process, “wherein each individual becomes a participant in an epistemology of “emergence”: they come to know through their part in things” (as cited in Wright, 2008, p. 99). She believed that the key to emergence is that it often develops in ways not always anticipated, often serendipitously leading to complex evolutions that are inherently reflective and social. Wright reported, “it changes peoples’ lives because it creates new relationships and as a result creates new knowledge systems and new ways of being in the world” (Wright, 2008, p. 100).

Reverential of the evolving names of these new and promising paradigms and methodologies, the conceptual structure of an emerging curriculum remains central, advocating for teachers to:

1. share intellectual control with students.
2. look for occasions when students can work out part (or all) of the content or instructions.
3. provide opportunities for choice and independent decision-making.
4. provide a diverse range of ways of experiencing success.
5. promote talk that is exploratory, tentative and hypothetical.
6. encourage student to learn from other students' questions and comments.
7. build a classroom environment that supports risk-taking.
8. use a wide variety of intellectually challenging teaching procedures.
9. use teaching procedures that are designed to promote specific aspects of quality and learning.
10. develop students' awareness of the big picture: how the various activities fit together and link to the big ideas.
11. regularly raise students' awareness of the nature of the components of quantity learning.
12. promote assessment as part of the learning process (as cited in Ewing, 2010, p. 47).

These twelve elements identifies the school as a place of shared vision about what the learning task or enterprise is, which then determines integrated methods to stimulate the steps towards achieving the objectives, within an appropriate space in a realistic timeframe. As a consequence the environment fostered self-assuredness where teachers are not controllers but rather connectors, akin more to elders, working in teams across different disciplines and age groups and, “that the heart of the curriculum will shrink to a core of knowings essential to negotiating one’s way around the global community of knowledge” (Beare, 2001, p. 157).

In the next section of this chapter, details of the Yorgas Program are presented, as described by the group of educators who wanted their students to learn within a sense of place.

Establishing the emergent curriculum framework – the Yorgas Program

A set of Academy outcomes were established for the Yorgas Program including the opportunity to:

1. enhance greater engagement of Indigenous young female students in education and sporting programs,
2. to increased retention rates for female Indigenous students in Years 10, 11 and 12,
3. to raise the Indigenous school leaving age,
4. to gain employment and work experience for the cohort,
5. to enhance achievement of high school graduation and employment,
6. to improve education outcomes for Indigenous female students,
7. to improve attendance for the cohort and,
8. to increased enrolment of the cohort in education (Grace et al., 2007, p. 7).

Key learning outcomes were identified that met the objective requirements of the associated sectors including the Curriculum Council of Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office, Swan Technical and Further Education and the Girls' Academy. The spirit of the emergent curriculum framework was to venerate Indigenous epistemologies delivered in a culturally appropriate manner in a timeframe that harmonised with the daily and seasonal lives of the students.

The Yorgas Program was spear-headed by program manager Cocious Lido who had extensive experience in education, coming into the program with a distinguished teaching career background. Her foresight and professionalism enabled her to establish an engaging program that accommodated not only the athletically orientated students, but also girls who wanted to pursue studies in the Arts or Academia.

The current program we have developed is called the YORGAS program standing for Young, Outspoken, Responsible, Girls at School which is the Noongar word for “women”. We thought that was appropriate since the College is situated on Noongar country that it was important to acknowledge Noongar people and certainly Indigenous women (T13, FI, 2007, p. 3).

The program was developed into four specific components:

1. Workplace Readiness & Work Experience,
2. Sports and Extra Curricular Activities,
3. Mentoring, and
4. Team Work & Vision Retreat.

Developed over four terms the main focus was establishing strong academic and workplace strategies in the first term then diversifying into other Western Australian Curriculum Council generic units in the following terms.

The Generic Program (GP) represented a diverse range of broad though relevant units of learning developed by either the College or the community or by private providers. The objective of the Generic Program was to provide a positive contribution to the students learning which then contributed up to 50% of a student's Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) requirement; otherwise they completed ten full year or equivalent subjects to achieve the (WACE) completion requirement. The College selected programs to suit student needs and interests from the extensive list of those already endorsed and more importantly, applied for endorsement of programs such as the Yorgas Program and School Trips that the Girls' Academy developed themselves. As a result the girls completed their secondary education with an array of skills and experiences taken from school based apprenticeships, traineeships, workplace learning, vocational, education and training, university units, community organisations and personal development units, providing them with significant experiences leading them to focus on career areas centred on their interests and aptitudes.

Equally the students were also strongly supported in areas other than academic or workplace focus. A breakfast program was established to ensure the girls received a nutritious diet to sustain them through their physical activities and a safe, comfortable space that was more akin to a lounge room than a school room was created.

The expertise of the liaison and development officers in conjunction with the program manager led to planning activities that increased experiential opportunities for the girls to participate in which included, for example, interstate and international expeditions. The girls had to devise travel routes, consult airline companies, apply for passports, fundraise and reconcile finances, write letters to attract sponsorship, research cultural and linguistic differences of the places they were travelling to, conduct meetings, keep accurate and detailed meeting minutes, negotiate and compromise certain attitudes and behaviours in an effort to achieve group harmony with their fellow students. They attended grooming and deportment classes to learn to exercise the appropriate demeanour when public speaking and addressing an audience, table etiquette and social interaction procedures such as greeting strangers and speaking confidently. They designed and developed a variety of promotional material for the expedition increasing their visual and written literacy skills. As the girls' profile expanded and the program became better known so too did their access to networks such as service clubs and professional organisations to supplement and achieve their learning outcomes.

According to program manager Cocious Lido, while this integration was occurring there was still much to do. She alluded that due to the lack of resources at the school the program was able to devote its funding from the federal government to enhance the program considerably. Access to extra funding embellished the choices offered at the College extracurricular activities meant, "... a combination of everything for instance through Yirriarga Dance Theatre Group, grooming and deportment, anything that we think was lacking in the girls' educational program. We have got that leeway too in the next term; bring in something based around an issue perhaps" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 4). Term 4 was called "Solid", known to the students as the "Fun Term", as creative multiple literacy activities with a focus on teamwork occurred. The girls also went on retreats and participated in activities that reflected on their school year, documenting their story in their learning journal. This enabled them to conclude the year with a clear understanding of what they had achieved and what goals they were going to establish for the coming year.

According to the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2006, "the proportion of Indigenous students who achieved a Year 12

Certificate declined between 2001 and 2006” (Australian Government, 2006, p. 79) however, the number of the Girls’ Academy students accomplishing Year 12 increased exponentially. Based on student testimonies the responsive and inclusive Yorgas Program seemed to recognise the students’ needs, empower them to pursue future aspirations, whilst celebrating and nurturing their Indigeneity. Year 12 student Kate Diamond believed that, “it was good and it gave me something to look forward to every day. I just felt like I was doing something” (S9, FI, 2007, p. 6). Ophelia Currawong said, “I wouldn’t be here if the Girl’s Academy wasn’t here” (S6, FI, 2007, p. 6). Cajun Namma stated, “well I am a part of the Girls’ community and the Academy, so I’m a part of something at school. If the Academy wasn’t here I would probably still be, but (long pause), I just like being a part of the Academy (laughs), just be here with all the girls and for my education” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 7).

Chapter summary

Chapter 6 focused on situating the research by providing a historical perspective of Catholic Aboriginal education in terms of provision and relevance to the learners. Consequently this lead me to consider the place of indigenous knowledge within a world enshrined by powerful patriarchal structures such as the Catholic Church and the Government and how the Catholic Education system operated within it historically, specifically in terms of the Aboriginal College setting. It also examined the concept of the emergent curriculum and how it allowed a curriculum framework to emerge that engages the students through relevance and reward.

Chapter 7 provides the framework titled Methodology Part II continuing on from Chapter 2 Methodology Part I and is set out in two sections.

Chapter 7 – Teaching and Learning at the College as experienced by Students and Teachers

The purpose of this chapter is to report the ethnographic study's findings. By spending an extended period of time in the context as a participant observer looking deeply at the participants' responses, I have tried to link these experiences into commonalities of emerging themes, to illuminate participants' experiences of the research site. These themes emerged through the action of reviewing; extricating, selecting and deselecting to finally display how interrelated words and experiences represented the participants' interpretation of their social and cultural realities within the College. The first section of Chapter 7 provides a general overview to the study and briefly explains the College practices, processes and procedures, data collected from both staff and students in terms of the number of participants and demographical background information. The second section of the chapter presents the findings that represented the environment at the College in which the Girls' Academy was embedded and how this contextual matrix generated the inquiry's thirteen themes, built up from the participant's viewpoint or frame of reference.

At a metropolitan Aboriginal Secondary College in Western Australia the investigation was carried out between the 7th August 2006 and the 9th November 2007. This involved 15 months of immersion within the College campus community, with the majority of 2008 off campus writing up the research, returning informally to member check. The data generated in this inquiry was sourced from 23 participants, consisting of 14 staff members and nine students. Of the 14 staff members six were male and eight were female, three females were Indigenous, one was Australian born Indian and four were non Indigenous. Of the six male participants one was Australian born Burmese, one was African American and four were non Indigenous with extensive cross cultural experience in both Australian and international contexts. All nine students were female and Indigenous.

This qualitative auto/ethnographic investigation documented the introduction of an emergent curriculum framework for secondary students, designed around a program considered specifically to accommodate the students' preferred ways of learning.

Why do the study?

Traditionally attendance and retention levels of female students at the Aboriginal College had been problematic. It was realised that something different was needed in an attempt to generate a more engaging school program. The opportunity to make a difference to the educational program presented itself in Term 4 in 2004, “at the time we had a relieving Principal at the school for a semester. One day we had a visit by a lady from Christian Brothers who came in with an Olympian basketball player. He said he had retired from basketball and that he had always wanted to work with Indigenous kids and that basketball was his specialty. At that time the girls had nothing, the boys had the Football Academy and the Principal offered him a group of girls to start a basketball program” (T1, FI, 2006, p. 11). The liaison officer explained how difficult it was to attract students at the time when, there were misconceptions and stereotypes in the wider community about what sort of school the College represented, “the number of girls here wasn’t that high and the image out in the community, to be quite honest I don’t know if I should say this or not, but I don’t think the Aboriginal community saw the College as a good school for most Indigenous kids. People had heard of the high pregnancy rates and all that sort of thing, so promoting it, getting the girls in to be able to run the program was hard work (T1, FI, 2006, p. 11).

Investigating the College: exploring student’s learning experiences and staff’s pedagogical practise

The College – the facilities

The College, situated in an old stone building by the edge of a river, was built in 1901 as an orphanage, its early history reportedly not a favourable one. Much later in 1986 the building was converted into the present co-educational Catholic Secondary Aboriginal College. In this section of the chapter members of staff tell of their impressions of the heritage-listed building. English teacher, Sam Baker, suggested that the College could have been a centre piece for Indigenous education however, “it looks like a dump. It’s run down, its ad hoc little systems seem to change all the time, and there is very little continuity. I mean this place is a crying shame, I cannot believe how terrible it looks” (T 5, FI, 2006, p. 7). He seemed sympathetic as to why the students didn’t always appear to care about their school:

“Of course this impacts on the kids, of course they look around and they really don’t have a huge sense of pride in the place because the place looks awful” (T 5, FI, 2006, p. 7).

This view appeared to be shared by history teacher and Head Librarian, Jane Melville, who talked about how shocked she felt when she came to the school for an interview, “the front looked great and you walked around the back and it looked like a jail yard or like a ghetto. I had never seen a school like that before. It was just dull and dreary and rubbish blowing around” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 6). Jane referred to her previous placement for eleven years at an all girl school as “homey and protective” in one of the leafy suburbs on the escarpment, and she commented that, “I would hate for my kids to go to a school that looks like this” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 7). She reported to feel frustrated that she could not improve the learning conditions for her students, “I find it frustrating having to work in shabby rooms, and I wish the kids could be given better than what they have. Why do these kids have to have second-rate looking facilities? (T6, FI, 2006, p. 6). Similarly visiting Retention and Participation Support teacher, Maude Kingston, described the physical characteristic of the heritage-listed building as, “the physical-ness of the structure here is difficult. People don’t even know where to come when they come to the school. There are too many doors or scary, kind of closed-off type buildings, and that’s unfortunate” (T 10, FI, 2007, p. 11).

Assistant Principal Dean Whitley, who had been at the College for eight years, clarified for me that approval had been given for the restoration of the courtyard but that the restoration of the swimming pool was not going to be part of the capital works expenditure. He claimed, “it’s very easy for someone new to say this place is a shame, but they don’t see where we have come from. When I came here, there were walls where you could put your hand through to the next room” (T7, FI, 2006, p. 3). He elaborated that regardless of the millions of dollars that had already been spent on the College, “we are really hampered because of our numbers, since I have been here the maximum has been 173 students. That is not a large cohort. It doesn’t attract much money, and we don’t have a building fund that parents pay into” (T7, FI, 2006, p. 4).

Researcher's commentary

I was relieved that I had arranged a time to speak with the Assistant Principal Dean Whitley since I had started to hear conflicting stories, in terms of the strategical planning and future changes at the College. I felt I needed to seek clarification on several of them - quickly. I was conscious about not being seen to be stirring anything up by asking questions. I needed all levels of the College community to be comfortably involved in contributing information to allow me to gain a greater perspective of the place.

He seemed annoyed, although it appeared to me that he had expected the derelict condition of the College to surface in staff commentaries, in particular, the issue of the dilapidated swimming pool and the courtyard. I was pleased that the staff had trusted me enough to say what was on their minds. To me, their honesty was refreshing and consequently significant, almost powerful, because I could see that their proactive conviction was justifiable. Complacency had no place in their feisty desire to effect improvements for their students. They wanted the enhancement and it seemed that they had been promised them for some time. I don't believe I opened a can of worms, I think I just aerated the compost.

Comments of the College's shabbiness stood in contrast to comments from staff noting the buildings' beauty and uniqueness. Beliefs and Values teacher, Angelica De Soul, heartily advocated that the wider campus in which College was situated as in a special position to instigate an integrated and holistic approach to the curriculum. "The school program has to be integrated with what exists on this beautiful property. We have got it all, a Medical Centre, an Arts Centre, a Music Academy and we have got faith. We have got the grounds - but it is fragmented" (T 12, FI, 2007, p. 6).

Jane Melville elaborated that while some areas within the campus was more akin to a prison, she had become interested in teaching at the College because of the building and the grounds. "When we would go to my grandmother's house when we were little, we used to drive past this building, and I fell in love with the place, that's how I came to be here" (T6, FI, 2006, p.2). She assured me that the College had a exceptional and distinctive pace and the building had a special life of its own, "someone said, Maude Kingston I think, a while ago that when you go through the front gates you go into "College Time", and I know what she means, College time is a completely different time to out there" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 3). Jane talked about how she was used to forcing things to happen but when she got to the College, "things

unfolded at their own pace. You can't rush things. You can't force things to happen. I am used to push and shove and make things happen and control the situation but here (Jane laughs) - I have no control" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 3).

The 2007 College academic program commenced with the rear courtyard walls and clock tower painted, while the 2009 College academic program commenced with the building's front facade restored and painted. Restoration is to be continued as part of the 2009 - 2010 capital works plan with a major upgrade to the main building and the central courtyard.

The College student population

The College population consists of all Indigenous students although non-Indigenous students are permitted to attend the school. The co-educational College has an erratic enrolment population of approximately 150 students who come from rural, remote and metropolitan locations. Southern Wheat Belt Year 12 student, Julia Yagan, preferred to travel to Perth and live with her aunty to attending her local high school which she said only had a small cohort of Aboriginal students. "Coming to the College makes you feel more comfortable because like all the kids around here are the same culture or like are all Aboriginals" (S1, FI, 2006, p. 1). Kimberley Year 12 student, Akita Capote, who travelled to the city each year concurred, "the College is a really good school. They arrange classes for you. If you don't think that you are smart they will help you and they will push you through" (S5, FI, 2007, p.5). Like Julia, Akita also valued the opportunity to be with other young Aboriginal students, "it is great being here because everyone is Aboriginal and you get extra support. Everyone here is the same but they come from different places but we are still one blood" (S5, FI, 2006, p. 1). While the student population may possibly have appeared to be a homogenous group of Indigenous students, there were distinct groups and areas within the College surrounds that students from specific regions, made their own. One such place was the central quadrangle affectionately known as the "Kimberley Courtyard".

College leadership

The College from its inception in 1986 was under the leadership of an Indigenous female Principal, Ms Donna Browning, who in 2005 had taken Long Service Leave and was replaced temporarily by Mr Sonny Dee. During the period of Ms Browning taking leadership of the College nominal enrolments matched with erratic attendance patterns caused serious concern, as the school board looked to find options. In 2006 Ms Browning was replaced.

Researcher's commentary

Those who remembered the temporary Principal, previously from the Kimberley, spoke of his ability to engage staff and students and instigate actions on many projects that had been a long time coming. While most of the staff was mindful not to be disrespectful to the previous Principal, they all enjoyed the new injection of energy and hope that Sonny brought to the job. Things began to change, opportunities were taken up.

Jane Melville seemed to believe that the Acting Principal, who had worked previously in Aboriginal schools, was an effective operator. She said he was very honest, fair and direct and that the students in a very short time had gained a lot of respect for him, “everyone got a second chance within reason. He was on the ball constantly, and he was out there and visible to the kids. He was very quick to pick up on changes or anything that needed to be dealt with” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 16). Jane also seemed to appreciate his ability to inform and support his staff, “we were constantly kept in the loop about what was going on. He was very supportive, although so is Ted Cooder to his credit, compared to Donna, who was locked away in her office a lot of the time” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 16). This view was supported by Brother Levi Nummas, a semi-retired ex-Kimberley Principal who believed that, “he was the best Principal that I have worked with, he told us, “I will back you with anything that you come and see me about, I will back you but just make sure you are right” - and he was dinkum” (T11, FI, 2007, p. 10). Brother Levi said in his experience any teacher who wanted to be successful had to build relationships, and it was the same for the Principals, including the present Principal, “Ted here for instance is always around, he goes to the football and the basketball, he is at all the things, he learns all the kids names, and he goes and makes the effort just “being there” (T 11, FI, 2007, p. 6).

Dean Whitley, in his role as an assistant to the Principal, believed that leading a school as complex and challenging as the College was no small feat, “Ted is doing a good job in a hard position. The new principal sees things differently from the old principal and possibly wants to put his own stamp on things. We do have a strategic plan that the previous principal did, but I think the School Board is putting it to one side” (T7, FI, 2006, p. 6). He elaborated that this was a common occurrence when a new Principal came into a school, “the old strategic plan that was meant to go for the next four years will probably see some things retained, and other things which the Principal doesn’t find as a priority won’t be taken up. It’s his first year, so he has had a year to get used to the place and to start to develop his vision, where we are going and hopefully he will involve staffing in that” (T7, FI, 2006, p. 6).

Maude Kingston, visiting Retention and Participation Support Teacher, said that in her experience as a teacher in the Kimberley and as a visiting consultant to rural and remote communities, she had observed numerous complexities involved in the management of Aboriginal schools, “it’s hard, like I said, Ted Cooder as a Principal has a lot more on his plate than running a regular day school. There are too many different bits that have to come together. To deal with the complexities of all the kids coming from everywhere and the different families, is a hard job but it’s worth it, to do it well” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 12).

Alternatively, different opinions emerged with some members of staff regarding the level of benefaction that was received from the College Executive Management and the School Board. Several staff members spoke of the frustrations they experienced by not having certain substantiated initiatives endorsed or greater input into pedagogical issues at hand. One of these issues was the structure of the secondary timetable. Maude Kingston appeared concerned by the way the timetable was constructed within its rigid, unerring time configuration she claimed, “I think we are missing something, we are struggling to find the opportunities to follow through on some of the things that we know work. The way secondary schools work is like this, the grid lines, the timetables, the sort of way we do things now. But is it the way it has to be? Let’s think a bit more creatively!” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 3). Maude said that the students needed a structure, shaped by the influences of their home life, by the beliefs and values they brought with them to school and ways of learning that

were more in keeping with how they lived. She said, “but this needs to be supported by the wider systems and structures within the school to make it possible because very quickly, like last year, due to sheer numbers and staffing constraints, we quickly fall back to this class has to be here, and we haven’t got enough teachers for this and that, so the traditional structures of a secondary school are reinforced. If we continue to stick with them they are not going to provide the type of innovations we need” (T10, FI, 2007, p.3). Maude continued to return to the subject of management and their need to show firm leadership to instigate innovative teaching and learning practices, “I don’t think we have to invent anything new to get it right. We just have to look at how we use it, there are good resources, there are good people, and we just have to help them and manage them and support them. It comes from the management, the leadership, the people who need to get it right. We need these structures and practices from management to help the teachers do their job better, to meet the needs of their kids” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 7).

Physical Education Teacher, Tai Hay, appeared to feel a similar sense of disillusionment in relation to the Management’s style of leadership. He said, “there are people who are trying to make improvements but in the end, the management, the whole management team, kind of just stopped and for us that is frustrating. You kind of get as the years go by, more and more frustrated here. I am starting to get really frustrated” (T4, FI, 2006, p. 3).

Introducing the teachers

Of the 14 staff members interviewed, seven were teachers based at the College on a full-time basis, while two staff members worked on a part-time basis. It appeared from what was said in their interviews, educators who elected to work at the College seemed to share certain qualities that ranged from a humanitarian desire to work with others less providential, or to possess a desire to learn from other cultural groups. For all the variations in their reasons, there was an underpinning element; they all seemingly shared a strong sense of collegial respect founded on a social justice perspective of equity and integrity. There also appeared to be a certain personality type that managed to co-exist harmoniously with the student body, just as there seemed to be a personality type that was not as effectual as an educator.

Physical Education Teacher and former American College basketball player Natalie Hendricks appeared to believe that teaching at the College was a fantastic experience but difficult and complex due to the nature of the student groups coming from diverse community and language backgrounds, “I think it is hard for every teacher. I don’t think it matters whether you are Aboriginal, or not. The kids are like, “does this person really care about me, and do they have my best interest at heart or are they just floating past?” Like everyone else in the school, I had to get to know my students, and I didn’t get that automatic let in just because I was a Black Fella, you know. They made me work just as hard (Natalie laughs), and I thought it would have been easier for me because I am Aboriginal, and it just wasn’t” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 3).

Researcher’s commentary

Of the staff interviewed, all agreed that there was a definite personality type who appeared to work better than others with the students. This personality type was someone who was well organised but flexible, rigorous but not autocratic. All agreed that a sense of humour was obligatory.

As well, staff talked about the importance of setting up boundaries for the students who seemed to comply to them without much fuss, after the students had tested them out a few times. Like most things, they said as soon as the students saw the logic in the rule or the equity of it, they just accepted it.

Maude Kingston seemed to agree with Natalie, having had extensive teaching experience in the Kimberley where she had taught both, as a classroom teacher and as a visiting consultant, for 13 years. She said, “you have to be organized, but you have to be flexible. I think a sense of humour goes a long way and you have to stay calm. You cannot let frustration and anger or any of those sorts of emotions come into play” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 7). Maude elaborated that in her experience she had observed that many teachers found working in Aboriginal schools isolating and difficult, “there are still too many of us who belong to the mainstream culture, who are completely oblivious to the complexities of belonging to a minority group of any kind or of knowing the feeling of being poor” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 8). Maude apparently believed that the teachers who seemed to do well at the College were, “those teachers who have had some sort of exposure to other cultures and other ways of thinking. I think it’s very hard to understand, unless you somehow get a little bit

close to that or spend some time there, there are huge amounts of judgments that we don't realize and that's a symptom of any mainstream majority culture" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 8). She said there were times when she had heard certain teachers speak or treat students disrespectfully and then go on to complain to the Assistant Principal when the students reacted with swearing or violence, "teachers need to respect the kids, I listen to Jane, the way she speaks to the kids, to Angelica, the way she speaks to the kids, it's like they are speaking to another adult, with respect" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 8). She added that most of the students were treated as adults in their own communities, "they have been participating in certain adult lifestyles, good and bad (both Maude and Helen laugh) for a long time" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 8) and teachers had to realise this.

While Jane Melville explained that she had never travelled to remote communities to teach, she had worked with several of the College students at her previous all girl Catholic boarding school which she had just transferred to the College from. While her husband had questioned her decision to leave a "safe" school to teach at the College, she dismissed his concern for her and his stereotype of the nature of the students at the College, "I think the impression is that there are lots of violence and fights, swearing and abuse and trashing classrooms (Jane laughs) that sort of behaviour, and it's not like that at all. You have to see it to believe it for yourself. I know there have been a few bad scary stories over the years but no more than any other school. I haven't seen anything myself. It reinforces my theory if you treat people with respect they treat you with respect. I think people are always much nicer if you are nice to them. (Jane laughs) Why make your life harder than it needs to be?" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 14). Jane explained, "I just didn't have that vibe at all. I loved the atmosphere in the school. The kids are always lovely, and I just couldn't wait to start here and I have been here ever since, which is nearly three years now" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 2). While Jane believed that there was a period of adjustment in regard to her teaching style, she seemed to feel that being consistent in her mode and democratic with the students worked most effectively, "I try to keep the classes fairly informal as well. I have set routines but I don't come down on kids like a tonne of bricks, if someone wants to go to the toilet or get a drink, I say wait until the other kid comes back before you go, so you are meeting them half way with the more sort of painful things then you don't get that animosity. If I just said, "yeah that's ok,

that's ok" then the kid would walk over me but if I say, "you can go when so and so comes back", he knows I am still monitoring what's going on (Jane laughs). So they still have a bit of respect for you that way" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 14).

From my site observations it appeared Jane was well respected by staff and students alike, from both her friendly and sincere interactions around the campus to the generous ambiance of her classroom, "you have to tread delicately. You can't be too aggressive. You can't be too submissive. You have to know the right time to back off but you have to know when to be friendly, but not too friendly. They do exhaust me (Jane laughs). I don't know how I used to teach 40 kids in my class (Jane laughs) I mean five kids here are like 20 in a normal class (Jane laughs) and I don't think the outside world appreciates the demand of it" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 4).

Researcher's commentary

Over my twenty six years of working in various schools within Aboriginal settings, I observed many new non-Indigenous staff arrive and quickly unpack their White Fella ways onto their students. Often these teachers spent hours on the weekend setting up their classrooms as they remembered them from their childhood, to finally open the doors Monday morning to welcome the children. Within minutes the room would be chaotic and the teacher would be stunned to watch something so well organised become so unruly, so quickly.

Those teachers who stayed on "got it" that they couldn't just come in and change this world. Instead they stopped trying to convert it and rather embraced it, learning to become a part of it.

Sam Baker was one of these teachers. After working as a teacher in Japan in what he referred to as a very structured and rigid system, where students were expected to conform to the expectations of Japanese society to do well in school, he had returned to the College. He explained, "I find having worked here for a while now, when I am at work it's like I am more part of Indigenous culture than anything else. The kids are strong with the way they are and their nature, their natural energy with each other, just sort of overflows and you end up almost becoming a part of that rather than the other way around" (T5, FI, 2006, p. 3). Sam reiterated that the pace of life at the College was very special, "informality is a part of the life here, the schooling life, and the kids like that. But it is important to have boundaries and to

enforce the boundaries. These boundaries have got nothing to do with cultural sensitivities or anything like that, just that all kids need them. A lot of the kids actually really like the boundaries and one of the things that I've noticed the kids here say that they think that the College is too slack. I'm not a Skinner-type teacher by any imagination, I'm fairly relaxed, but boundaries are important and I think it is more about the way you deal with enforcing the boundaries with the kids that matters" (T5, FI, 2006, p. 4). Sam explained from his personal experience and observations at the College most behavioural problems with students tended to come from teachers trying to be too didactic and autocratic he said, "I try very hard. I don't raise my voice: I never get angry with the kids. I just try to explain what the boundaries are and if they step over then what the consequences are. It's important to carry that through but I think it's the way you do it that's important to the kids. Not to threaten them, not to make them feel stupid or belittled them but just clearly let them know what they have done, what the consequences are and why" (T5, FI, 2006, p. 4.).

Researcher's commentary

Likewise, teachers who appeared to be autocratic and unjustly severe, or who often resorted to sarcasm, were categorized by the staff interviewed as not being suitable to work with the College students. In fact all the staff interviewed went so far to say that type of teacher was not suitable to work with *any* student, regardless of racial background.

Maude Kingston, who worked with all teachers at the College, commented that some teachers had great difficulty managing their classes, "teachers cannot have a draconian style, the policeman style. It doesn't work. I think it is incumbent on us to go the extra mile to almost prove to the kids that we do care. These kids come to school with a whole lot of learnt behaviours, attitudes and impressions, of teachers, of life, of white society" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 8). Maude suggested that classroom management strategies and culturally appropriate communication styles needed to be a part of the ongoing College staff professional development, "we actually need to prove to the kids that we might be a bit different, that we are not all like that, and that takes time. We need people who are prepared to put the time in to develop the relationship, to make it genuine for them and that can be really hard. Sometimes I think well how many of us have they seen in their lives, a hundred and one teachers

have come through their doors, sometimes I get the feeling that they are sitting back thinking, “C’mon then, come in sucker, or what’s your game gonna be?”

(T10, FI, 2007, p. 8).

Researcher’s commentary

Listening to the students yarn about their experiences made me conscious of their level of maturity. It occurred to me that these kids had left their country, left their parents, and walked front on into a not necessarily cooperative or accommodating prevailing white society. All of a sudden, the rules of engagement fault if these students do not manage to get to class on time or perhaps overreact because they are hungry or homesick, I feel inclined to think... so be it.

At times it embarrassed me to watch a non-Indigenous teacher pedantically pick on a student if they accidentally wore a beanie or sunglasses into the classroom. So they were slow to take them off, no reason to publically ridicule them and have the student in detention.

Some days I felt ashamed being a “White Fella”.

Jane Melville seemingly concurred with me and said that she had witnessed scenarios where some staff members did not manage situations very well, to the point that she had been embarrassed by their behaviour, “I see the people here who try to be too autocratic, and they have hard times of it. They don’t appear to enjoy their careers very much. I just don’t see why anyone would want to be like that” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 14). In her open and democratic manner she commented, “if someone talks to you like a piece of dirt, of course you are going to retaliate or not have any respect or time for them. Would you treat other people the way you wouldn’t want to be treated yourself, or stand over someone and intimate them?” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 14).

Researcher’s commentary

During my time of immersion at the College I was constantly in awe of some members of staff who continued to positively motivate students, follow up on tasks, take time to listen to concerns, stay late to help organise activities for the next day or get to the College early in the morning to have programs set up ready for the students. It is hard work and I wondered how long they could keep up such dedication.

While many teachers at the College qualified to be recognised for their professional diligence, Sam Baker agreed that the work that was needed, and often behind the scenes to get students through, was exhausting, “you know it’s funny, Helen, because people often say working at the College must be really rewarding, that it must be fantastic, and it is... but it’s tough. It’s a tough slog, and it’s not easy (pause) - it’s a difficult job...it’s not easy” (T5, FI, 2006, p.7). Sam recounted the story about a visiting relief teacher who had apparently spent his entire teaching career in one school for thirty five years. He had turned up at the College to do a stint of relief work and on the first morning, came into the staffroom for morning tea totally startled by what he had just experienced. Sam said he just sat there; he seemed to be in a state of shock. Sam suggested how different and difficult teaching at the College was to other schools, “it’s really interesting and really stimulating, and there are never two days that are the same. It’s always lots of fun on lots of different levels. But it’s not easy. And it is rewarding, well maybe intrinsically but not extrinsically. Anyway I think I would be truly bored working in a place like our brother school down the road. (Sam laughs) I would find that really sanitised” (T5, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Maude Kingston acknowledged and confirmed the comments made by Sam and Jane, “teachers are often in survival mode, sometimes just getting through a particular lesson or a particular class which happens to have some difficult kids or a difficult topic or a difficult subject, especially when they are working with kids with significant difficulties in literacy” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 2). In her support role Maude assisted teachers to be more reflective in their practice, however she complained, “but they can’t do that when they are just overwhelmed everyday with just the hard slog of it, just getting through the day is often all the energy they have got left” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Having the staff identify what they considered as appropriate skills, suitable attitudes and personality types within their own profession, students also provided their justification about who they deemed to be effective or ineffective educators.

Students' impressions of College teachers

In answering the question “What is your impression of and how would you describe your relationship with the teachers at the College?” all nine students interviewed referred specifically to their female and homeroom teachers Jane Melville, Japonica Mulder, Natalie Hendricks and Angelica de Soul. It appeared that the female students tended to engage positively more often in class with female teachers than with male teachers. Although having said that, all students commented that being Aboriginal in an Aboriginal College allowed them to acquire more support from all of their teachers than what they would have experienced in a non-Aboriginal school.

Akita Capote, a Year 12 student from the Kimberley, reported she was prepared to leave her family and travel to the College because she felt, “in other schools say that have Aboriginal kids there, they don't always have the opportunity of getting help so it's great being here because every student here is Aboriginal and you get the extra support” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 1). She believed that in the two years that she had attended the College she had improved both socially and academically. Akita said that at her old school she used to get distracted and fight and the teachers didn't want to help her, but now at the College, “some teachers push you to help you to reach your goal of graduating so it's good that they push you through your life and work. They keep asking, “have you done your work? Are you up to date with all your work, and do you need any help?” and I like that” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Primrose Ménage, also in Year 12, and from the Kimberley, seemed to agree with Akita. She told me that in the two years she had been attending the College she had developed good relationships with some of the teachers, “the teachers here they know more about your culture and they have stronger bonds with you than in my old school. In my old school I couldn't talk to anyone about my problems but here you have got most of these teachers will listen to you, and they will take what you have to say and they believe in you more” (S6, FI, 2007, p. 3). She talked about how their belief in her made her want to do well and that even her family thought that she changed for the better.

Julia Yagan, in her role as a senior student and vice captain of the basketball team, explained to me that, “at times, some kids at school have their own little attitude but the teachers they leave you for a while so that you handle the problem in your own way, you know. Like the student might just go off and do whatever, might take a bit time off like when it gets too much and then later comes back and do their work at their own pace” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 2). She seemed to believe, “it’s a cultural thing, I reckon, because I don’t really see much Wadjula getting up, but with the Blackies, when it gets too hard for them I know that they just won’t do it. If they have had enough, they will probably say, “enough is enough” and if you push them too hard, they just won’t do it” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 12). Julia strongly asserted that many of the College teachers recognised this characteristic and gave the students a “bit of a break” so that they could have a rest or get a drink of water, and return in their own time to take up where they left off, if the teacher had any chance to have the students complete the task successfully.

Metropolitan student, Mardi Karina, also in Year 12, who had recently transferred from a large Southern metropolitan school to the College, commented on the difference that she had noted in the attitudes amongst some of the College teachers. She talked about how she felt shy coming in as a new student but was comforted by the way the College staff were more inclusive, “I didn’t really like my teachers at my old school, and I heard that the College was a really good school. I was like the only Aboriginal student in my class because I was doing a VET program and often they would just like leave me out or sometimes wouldn’t help me” (S7, FI, 2007, p. 1). Mardi commented that she had really liked English and Physical Education and was prepared to work hard, however in her other subjects she often felt isolated and inferior, “like sometimes they just stood up and explained what we had to do but I was not sure because they explained it in like different terms that I didn’t understand instead of explaining it in ways I do understand. It was shame. But at the College it’s different; if you don’t understand because there are heaps of black kids at this school it is easier to ask the teacher if I don’t understand (S7, FI, 2007, p. 2).

While students and staff at the College generally appeared to have an egalitarian harmonious relationship, with exception to the occasional heated outburst

by an offended student, there were a number of issues pertaining to student behaviour that seemed to cause some staff considerable angst.

Teachers' impressions of students' attendance and attitudes

For decades the delivery of education in Aboriginal communities has been plagued by the ongoing issue of lack of regularity in student attendance and an indifference towards setting attainable and sustainable goals towards planning for a future. In Chapter 2, I referred to *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People* in Western Australia in 2001 and 2002, that reported that of Indigenous young people aged 12-17 years:

35.4 per cent smoked daily for at least a month at some point in their lives with females more likely to have smoked (40.1 per cent) than males (30.7 per cent) and that 27.2 per cent drank alcohol of which 45.6 per cent drank to excess to the point of vomiting and that there was little difference in alcohol drinking patterns between males and females aged 12-16 years, but at 17 years of age, a higher proportion of males were drinking alcohol (61.0 per cent) compared to females (43.2 per cent) and those living in the Perth metropolitan area were more likely to drink in excess than those in areas of isolation (Zubrick et al., 2005, p. 8).

Given this reality, the task at hand for educators to engage and teach students becomes profoundly problematic, exacerbated by differing cultural beliefs and values of those often held by students to those held by their educators. Firstly, in terms of the students general attitude to school, staff made the following comments; Maude Kingston spoke about the urgency for meshing the students' world with the world of the teachers and seemed to believe strongly that, "we are still very disconnected from these kids worlds, their whole world view, everything they bring with them is very, very different to what we think, maybe they should, or maybe they have, or we can't even begin to imagine sometimes where they are coming from. So how can we connect with them and build on?" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 6).

School Psychologist, Bridget McMulkin, worked closely with the students and was consistently seen roving the corridors following up on students' appointments or arranging transportation to get to them on time. Her concern was palpable, "these kids come with serious problems, and they have got serious "attitude" towards

school. In many cases it is because it's failed them over and over and over again. Often they come into this school with a great deal of anger, and their anger is misdirected, often at the people who are trying to help them. They are angry about how they are treated in society, but they are also angry about the lack of opportunity. As a school we are trying to master that but I feel we don't really address these problems sufficiently" (T8, FI, 2007, p. 7). Bridget appeared to believe that students needed to recognise that the College offered them a chance to make a difference in the direction of where their lives could possibly lead, saying that, "we need to question the student, put a mirror up to them and say, "what is going to be different in this school?" Really challenge them to what was going to be different here in this school. Tell them, "you have come here of your own free will. What is going to be different here? What is your attitude right now? Have you got fire in your belly to actually do well?" (T8, FI, 2007, p. 8). Bridget quoted various case studies of students at risk behaviour and the dire consequences that often become of it. She asserted that without professional intervention many of the current students would not make it to middle age.

Bridget appeared to believe that the College had to establish as part of the enrolling practices, an agreement with students in terms of addressing their attitudes and behaviour, "addressing them and say right this is going to be different, we are not tolerating you to be less than you can possibly be, we are giving you support but we want you to get as good as you can possibly get at everything, not just kicking the footy around or playing basketball, we want you to try and put in an effort" (T8, FI, 2007, p. 8). In her twenty five years professional experience as a teacher as well as working at the College for the past two years as the school psychologist, Bridget reported to feel that "generally people don't understand the psychology of it because you can really psyche someone. So much so that they really think that they are going out to achieve themselves. Then we have to support that challenge, make sure that support is going to be there. You have given them permission to go in a new direction (T8, FI, 2007, p. 8).

Researcher's commentary

From what I gleaned listening again to Bridget's interview, she referred to the increasingly amenable communication that was just starting to occur which allowed her to work closely with Justine, Dean and Ted in an effort to establish more comprehensive enrolling procedures that addressed matters like goal setting tasks, contractual agreements and negotiated competences with the students.

Bridget believed this would lessen the vast gap that existed when it came to establishing what the College's expectations were for the students.

The second significant issue that staff referred to was irregular student attendance patterns. Staff discussed how students needed to understand that when they enrolled at the College, they could not come and go at whim but rather needed to enter into some sort of contractual agreement with the College and the Academy.

Jane Melville talked about the frustration she and many other teachers experienced from spending hours setting up activities only to have a quarter of the students never arrive. She talked about the repercussion of absenteeism in terms of diminishing the amount of time the teachers had with the students to get them through the program, "the pressure comes from the attendance issue, to get through the course if kids are constantly away or only attended part of the term. There is a huge amount of pressure, and you haven't got the time to spend on doing creative and fun classes. It can be very disheartening spending a lot of time planning something really good and only have two kids show up on the day and I have had that myself and it does get you in the gut after a while" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 13).

Likewise Taj Hay, Natalie Hendrick and Year Co-ordinator Japonica Mulder all concurred explaining how frustrated they felt about the "revolving door" of students coming and going and how disheartening it was to spend time planning events only to have to cancel venues, buses, notifying personnel involved in projects, because the class was away. Jane reiterated that, "I would like to see kids only come here if they want to be here and if they are interested, somewhere they want to come back to, where they want to be on time, where they want to be there on the first day of term and not straggle in three or four weeks later. All it takes is one bad experience for a kid to be turned off school for two or three weeks and not come

back again and you are back where you started, and it's very easy for the rot to set in" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 11). She commented that it wasn't just the staff in the school that was affected by truancy, but other employees adjunct to the program, like tutors. She had worked with Bridget and Maude to get tutors in to assist the students, "there is the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) program and the tutors come in and work with the kids individually. One of my friends was tutoring three of the Year 12 kids but I said, "I would never ask someone I know to do that again" because she was so inconvenienced by the haphazard timetable and routine. Someone goes home and does not tell anyone or just nicks off. I mean unless you guard the gate and lock the rooms, if they don't want to be there, (Jane laughs) they will find a way out" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 6).

Researcher's commentary

The sense of exasperation and frustration that resulted from setting up innovative, inter-agency multifaceted programs only to have students' truancy causing resources to be wasted or cancelled has been a long term recurring criticism by many educators involved in Aboriginal educational programs.

Often truancy was a result of a legitimate reason such as needing to attend a funeral or respond to a family crisis, however many staff members lamented that it didn't help them feel motivated to commit to doing the class all over again when the students finally turned up.

Staff interviewed said that teaching at the College would be superlative if they knew they were going to get the same students every day of every week of every term of each year. If that occurred they suggested, the results would be astounding.

Subsequently the next theme which emerged was generated by the discussion of students' attitudes and attendance patterns and how both staff and students revealed what they thought were the expectations of the College.

Interpretations of the College expectations for the future among the staff

It became apparent that some students and staff had differing points of view regarding their perceptions and expectations about what the College could provide for them. While some students had an enhanced sense of the opportunities that could possibly present themselves for positive future prospects, there was a cohort within

the general student population who had nominal levels of motivation. As a result of this malaise, students' attitudes often seemed reflected in their low expectations about the probability of achieving future goals or establishing strategies to favourably change non-desirable behaviours.

Natalie Hendricks was quick to discuss this issue in her interview, since to her as a young Nyungar woman having experienced and succeeded a mainstream primary and secondary education, going on to achieve a scholarship to travel abroad; to return with a degree, accomplishment in life was a reality. Subsequently the students' low expectations of themselves concerned her greatly, "there is one thing that I have noticed while I have been at the College is that the students have very low expectations. I had a conversation with a couple of the Year 12's and they responded in a very serious fashion saying that they are just going to go onto Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) when they go back to their community, and they say, "what are we going to do, Miss, we can't do anything else?". They just don't expect that they will be capable of anything else" (T3, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Japonica Mulder, in her role as Year Coordinator and as a class room teacher, also witnessed a general despondency amongst the students about what they could go on to achieve, "for a lot of these kids it is very important to make them realise that what they are actually doing is taking an active role in their own lives; they are not doing this because they have to be at school, although they will tell you that they are, that they have to be here because it is the law. I say, "no, no you are doing this for you; it's for your future, it's for your children. It is getting them to see that's it actually them taking control of their own lives and not having other influences take control for them" (T9, FI, 2007, p. 2). Japonica went on to say that when she visits some of her past students in prisons around the state she often meets up with College students visiting family, "I have met in many incidences some of my students visiting there as well, so they know some of them, that what I am saying about the life of crime will drag them down is true" (T9, FI, 2007, p. 3). Her gravest concern was, "when I hear of some of our kids from here going into Juvenile Justice Centres, I feel sad because that is the beginning of the end. From then on they will meet the wrong sort of people who try and convince them that it is the easy way, and clearly it is not" (T9, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Angelica De Soul also raised the matter of expectations in her interview, she complained that the students, “come and go as they please, and they don’t account for anything, not for possessions, not for behaviour, not anything. I think that leadership needs to be transformed because I hear the Indigenous call for higher standards of behaviour but I don’t know if the non-Indigenous staff actually hear it and respect it enough. What are my expectations here? Would I allow my child to do this? Why am I allowing this child? Would I want my child in this school? And I bet none of them would say, “yes”, try them” (T12, FI, 2007, p. 9). Angelica had recently resigned her long term permanent position at an inner city Catholic school to take on a temporary position at the College. She had been inspired by the concept of the Aboriginal Academy and was hoping to research and explore the feasibility of starting an Aviation Academy as part of the College program. She was quick to declare that while she had not been at the school for long, she was not without expectations, “I see kids who are totally lost. They are bored out of their brain, and they are telling me very clearly that this school has standards far below others. They are not stupid. Our expectations of them make them look like that their standards are far too low. To me, there is this very strategic movement, and I should be able to see from Term One to Term Two a clear change and I haven’t. It would mean a change of expectations, that these are not Indigenous kids; these are *kids* who have high potential” (T12, FI, 2007, p. 11).

Nonetheless the majority of staff did genuinely feel that the Girls’ Academy was working on enhancing the girls’ expectations within the Yorgas Program. It was their goal the girls would take personal responsibility for how they wanted their lives to play out and over time improve and sustain higher standards of personal expectations. Having previous successful members from the Girls’ Academy now employed as role models and mentors to emulate, was one way the program was able to endorse this objective.

Teachers’ impressions of educational paradigms

Of the fourteen staff interviewed, all recognised and spoke of the unique “organic-ness” and specialness of the Indigenous student population. They talked of how the bureaucratic structure and administration of practices and procedures seemed to sit like oil on top of the fluidity of Indigeneity, “interminably separate”. They spoke of

needing to negotiate with Aboriginal peoples' communities and parents, an alternative to the existing educational paradigm, to consider a different approach, one that was more culturally inclusive, fostering the restoration of subjugated Aboriginal epistemologies. It seemed the longer teachers had worked in the school, the more they felt that they needed to talk about the irrelevance and the peripheral nature of the present mainstream curriculum and system of delivery. Their concern, based on years of observing the student population continue to discard mainstream education, was that many of them were becoming at risk of not completing their secondary education.

Again it was Maude Kingston who spoke at length about the establishment of the educational organisation at the College, questioning the legitimacy of the program, "the beast of the secondary structure has become a given. We don't question it and that's what I think we have to encourage teachers to do, to go, "well hang on a minute" like the rules we were talking about previously. We have to remember why we put them in place, why the grid is structured like that, or why the timetable is like that. Does it have to be? You can always change anything; it's just a matter of thinking about it and working it out" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 3). Maude seemed to acknowledge the complexities of trying to establish a place of learning, and urged that it was incumbent upon the management and staff to continue to seek alternate ways to engage students. One such way she suggested was valuing and endorsing the fledgling Yorgas Program by having it fully integrated into the school program, "I think we have to dig deeper and unpack stuff, which is that reflective practice that people have to be encouraged to do, otherwise the answers aren't easy. You know in Aboriginal Education, if we all knew the answers then they would all be learning, and people like you and I wouldn't have a job, and there would be no reason for you investigating what you are investigating because kids would be successful, so there obviously is no easy answer" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 4). Maude, like Jane Melville, Sam Baker, Taj Hay and Natalie Hendricks agreed that working in the College was a distinct privilege, and the opportunity to work with the students to assist them into the next phase of their lives seemed incomparable to anything that they had done before. However, they concurred that more than often, students had been engaged in non-genuine educational experiences. Maude suggested that, "it's the kids that make this place different, the kids, their language, the way that they

communicate. In actual fact we perhaps don't address that specialness of them. Like a school that might have 10% Indigenous, they would be meeting specifically that 10%, they would have quite specialised, quite interesting, quite creative ways of addressing the needs of their Indigenous cohort whereas we, because they are all Indigenous, somehow think just by design, then the curriculum or what we are doing, is special as well" (T10, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Researcher's commentary

I could sense there was widespread support especially amongst the staff that had been at the College for several years as to what Maude Kingston gave the impression to be advocating. It seemed that Maude's view appeared firmly reinforced by Program Manager Cocious Lido who as an Indigenous elder, grandmother and university graduate, had only just survived the mainstream system of education herself. She told me about how she was personally targeted in the 70's; because she came from a single parent Aboriginal family she was categorised as unintelligent and placed out the back in the remedial class. Her memory of school was trying to learn things that made no sense, taught in a manner that was disparate and menacing.

Cocious was adamant that in her role as Program Manager, she would do everything in her power to establish the Yorgas program that afforded these young black women at the College the firm belief in themselves that they could both learn and succeed.

A part from Justine Hope, Cocious Lido was often the first face the girls would see in the morning when they arrived at the Academy, and often the last face to see when they left in the afternoon. It was Cocious who insisted that the Academy room would resemble a safe place for the girls to come, where there was always a hot cup of tea or something to eat. It was Cocious who had established the special water feature in the room that the girls could turn on if they were experiencing homesickness or sadness on hearing bad news from family. This signalled to the other girls that there was a sister amongst them needing compassion and understanding. Cocious spoke at length about the way Aboriginal peoples and families establish places and spaces of learning, "in this Indigenous environment, this is an Indigenous school and certainly we have Indigenous ways of doing things. We have cultural beliefs and cultural things that we have to do and they should be brought forward, and if you are an non-Indigenous person and you come to work in

our school, and you don't want to abide by them, well that's ok but maybe this isn't the right place for you" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 9).

Cocious, in her role as Program Manager, worked directly with the College staff to ascertain what learning outcomes the students needed to achieve. This interface allowed her to observe the educational operations closely, resulting in her coming to hold certain views, "there is a combination of things even down to the way the actual teacher is teaching. An Indigenous teacher would do it differently to a non-Indigenous. I would certainly be looking at a whole range of things, looking at the administration structures, even down to the types of people and staff employed, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. I would certainly be looking at curriculum and teaching staff and ask are they suitable? It is quite ok, I think, if you can't cut it in these types of schools, then maybe you need to go to another school, and that's ok" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 8).

Like Maude Kingston, Cocious was also concerned about the timetable and how the school day was structured at the College, "I think the way secondary structures are designed or delivered, an hour seems not enough. Math for instance could be run from nine o'clock through till twelve o'clock so that the kids really get it. Little pockets of information that kind of goes in one ear and out the next maybe. Whereas if a task is given a considerable amount of time, other than an hour, where three periods becomes one, there is a chance for lots of wonderful learning in lots of different ways, you could really get the knowledge across to students" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 10). Cocious referred to how she remembered what it felt like to be a student learning new things, and how much time she needed to comprehend information, "when I studied my Adult Education Degree through Sydney University one of our lectures in one unit ran over a morning and an afternoon - it was kind of three periods in one. Certainly by the second part after morning tea before lunch most times the penny had dropped, and I got it, or it would drop after lunch in the afternoon" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 10). She commented that she listened to the students come into the Academy room to do their homework and complain how they did not understand what they were expected to have learnt, she said, "for me, I think, if I was a kid here, I would be a bit dazzled too" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 10). Cocious viewed the school day as six lots of one hour sessions of separate pockets of information that

appeared to lack significance or application. One example of this separate pocket of information theory was the whole school reading program *Direct Instruction*. The SRA reading program *Direct Instruction* is an American program which uses American content language to develop scenarios and stories. As a consequence often the American terminology did not translate into Standard Australian English or Aboriginal English contexts. It is prescriptive and predictable in that the students will arrive in class, get their workbook out, sit down and listen to the teacher read out precisely what is written from the text. This is important, the teacher reads out the story without deviation, word for word and then asks the guide questions in their correct sequence.

Researcher's commentary

Maybe it was because everyone in the school did *Direct Instruction* at the same time on the same day provided the students with some sort of security or relaxation, I am not sure, but the students seemed to tolerate the program.

I found this exceptionally interesting because unlike all their other subjects where they were constantly challenging what was the point of doing, with *Direct Instruction* they just quietly got on with it.

I wondered since story telling is an integral part of Aboriginal society and that after years and years of sitting around camp fires, sharing yarns of malignant spirits and illicit love or how certain topographic features came about, it made sense that as soon as someone started to tell a story there would be a settling down to hear more.

Dean Whitley and Jane Melville were instrumental in establishing the reading program due to the students' poor literacy levels. He explained, "*Direct Instruction* by SRA takes kids who have very limited early childhood standards of literacy through to a secondary standard of literacy. So far this year I think about a third of the kids have actually moved out of the program, they have actually got to the standard that we needed to get them to through the program" (T7, FI, 2006, p. 1). When I inquired about the relevance of the American content material he said that *Direct Instruction* had its positives and its negatives, but overall the success of the program was indicative by the students' competency in reading and comprehension. "It's a very dry sort of course. It's a set lesson, and there is a script that the teachers need to follow for each lesson. It is very important that they follow it the way it is

written, they are not supposed to deviate from it. The kids are actually quite good at it, it's very much based on a routine, the kids come in straight away, sit down and get on with it, and that's why it is successful because it is done everyday. The kids know what is expected of them, they are straight into it; there is a lot of rote learning, a lot of sounding the words, and a lot of reading short passages. I think part of it is because the kids are actually able to read the work that is in front of them, they can actually do what is asked of them" (T7, FI, 2006, p. 2).

Researcher's commentary

Since the instigation of the Girls' Academy, regular daily attendance also accounted for some of the girls doing so well in *Direct Instruction*. It allowed them to work collaboratively on the same text, completing the same questions, encouraging them to share their responses on a topic that they received daily instalments of and were becoming increasingly familiar with. I believed Dean to be right when he said it gave them the confidence to push on because they actually knew how the program worked. They knew if they missed something the first time the repetitious design of program would allow them to catch up or get it the next time around. There was no provision for being ashamed in having to ask the teacher for help in front of all the other students. I just balked at its disconnection in terms of its relevance to the lives of the students and wondered if there was an Australian equivalent that used Australian stories. What about using the students' stories?

Bridget McMulkin believed that the program was satisfactory, up to a point, but it still had serious flaws, especially for students who were illiterate. She affirmed, "the biggest thing what it doesn't do is pick up the bottom 10% of the kids who literally are even below the phonics stage. It doesn't pick them up and they have been flying under the radar. It is the excellent teaching of, in particular Japonica, Jane, Natalie and Angelica - they have saved the day and worked really well with these kids and moved them along. They credit the system rather than the teachers, but I know that it is teachers who should be credited because they really have done the job" (T8, FI, 2007, p. 4).

While certain teachers continued to challenge their pedagogical practises and source ways to enhance the learning experience for their students, students were also advocating for a closer investigation of what could be considered to make school more relevant.

Students' impressions of the relevance of mainstream education

All nine students interviewed expressed that the current mainstream curriculum and their present studies lacked Indigenous perspectives. While none actually offered me specifics, other than wanting more Aboriginal “stuff” they said the College, whilst being recognised by the wider community as being Indigenous, was not really Indigenous at all. They suggested that the program of study was textbook focussed and as a result complex and often boring. They reported to feel that the content was frequently irrelevant and outside of their lived and personal experiences. They raised the issue that there was widespread concern that classes were regularly disrupted by peers, predominantly males and commented that by the time the class had been forcibly settled down, there was no real time to learn, as it was time to pack up and move to the next class. This led to their next concern; they stated that they did not necessarily like moving around at the change of periods as it presented them with the opportunity to “nick off”. As well, changing classes every forty-five minutes didn't allow for them time to get into the task and they all felt that they needed time to think about what they were doing.

Researcher's commentary

Listening to the girls converse about the way they were presently being taught, the one word that kept coming up was “boring”. They believed the main reason for their classes were so boring was because some of the teachers would refer them to a text and then get them to find the information. They said often there would be no further discussion or clarification on the subject matter. The girls wanted to have the opportunity to yarn about the topic and share ideas about how they felt or how the text influenced their attitudes and opinions.

They were also aware that the Girls' Academy Program Manager in conjunction with other College staff, were working on a program that incorporated the Western Australia Curriculum Council requirements but also Aboriginal material and content. They had been asked to participate in its creation and to suggest what they would like to learn and when they would like to learn it. The genesis of the Yorgas Program was developing concomitantly as the girls conversations were taking place.

Metropolitan Year 12 student Kia Collins was very clear in her interview about wanting to improve the level of engagement within her studies. The Rising Star student had several suggestions and insisted that she wanted to, “make school more

interesting not just book work all the time (Kia laughs). Take the students on excursions on the subjects that we will be doing and talk about it. You want the learning to be active and involved with students participating, you want to get involved and then you will probably learn more” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 3). Her concern was that the College program didn’t offer ways that best suited the manner in which the students wanted to learn, “the College is not really different I think it’s just a school that is doing the same thing that every other schools does. It is just that there are all Blacks here (Kia laughs) - that’s about it” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 8). Her concern that while she recognised that the College was predominately a mainstream school, she noted Aboriginal social interaction behaviour was different from non-Aboriginal ways of interacting, “I thought I could sit down in class and actually read my texts but there is always someone in class distracting you so there is never probably enough time to get your work done” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Julia Yagan concurred with Kia about wanting her course to be more interactive and engaging, even though she was aware that the subjects she had chosen could possibly be difficult, “we got the TEE course outline, and I thought of all the work, we just had all bookwork. Last year when I first started my TEE studies I had Political and Legal Studies, History, English and Human Biology but I dropped Human Biology because I just didn’t really like the teachers’ style, it was just bookwork again” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 2). Julia said that she did not feel confident to rely on her ability to interpret the text and wanted to have more discussion in class to check to see if what she was thinking and writing was appropriate. Otherwise she said, “we are just guessing it from the book and it is our own thoughts. If we get told that it is right then that’s ok, we will probably keep it in our heads. What’s the point doing the bookwork and just hoping that you got it right. You could be studying the wrong things. I wouldn’t do like some teachers do, just throw a book in front of you and make you answer the questions” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 5).

Researcher's commentary

The students said that not only did some of the teachers talk for too long and got boring, but the reading took too long and got boring too. They preferred to have hands-on classes and several referred to Science and Home Economics as their favourite classes because they actually got to actively participate and do something, than passively sit in their chair wishing for the bell to go. They all agreed that was often when teasing started and students became disruptive.

Ophelia Currawong, a Year 10 student from the Kimberley, was concerned about not being able to keep up or understand what she had to do when the teachers talked in English for too long, “it is hard for me when teachers write on the board too much and talk too much. It is like full of Aboriginal kids but they are not doing stuff the Aboriginal way. When I first came I thought they would do more Aboriginal stuff” (S2, FI, 2007, p. 8). Ophelia had referred to having Aboriginal Languages and Cultural days where elders came into the school or the class went on excursions out in to the bush for lessons. She said that she would have liked to have had more lessons especially as part of her language and science classes down by the river that flowed past the College and its classrooms.

Primrose Ménage agreed with Ophelia that often the teachers talked for far too long, “it’s gay, you sit down, you listen to the teacher and learn stuff that you already know and it’s boring” (S6, FI, 2007, p. 1).

“Yeah like they will like talk for like twenty minutes of the lesson and we will have to do theory or whatever for fifteen to twenty minutes and then that’s it. There is not enough time to learn, cause when we get into the work it’s time to pack up again” complained Cajun Namma, a Year 11 student from the metropolitan area. Cajun who had been at the College for three years, had developed a strong relationship with her homeroom and English teacher and was quick to emphasise that some teachers were an exception to the rule, “last year, Japonica my English teacher, was a good teacher. She used to sit and talk you through, and she would put it into other words to help. Now some of the Year 11 teachers they just like straight out will tell you but not show you all the stuff like instructions or anything to help you through” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 2). Cajun felt that she would like to see a greater emphasis on bringing in more Aboriginal viewpoints into the curriculum and increase

Aboriginal community involvement in the school program on a more regular basis, “we don’t get taught like Aboriginal way but we get taught in different way to Aboriginal way. I would like to see like National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) days once a term or something twice a week” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 11).

Researcher’s commentary

This led to the observation that the students seemed more motivated and prepared to commit to the task at hand when they were working on something that interested them. For example, as the girls started to implement the Yorgas Program learning had new and complex elements for them. Their attendance improved and their resilience to stay on task and not quit seemed to build.

I wondered, was it more engaging because it was designed and driven by Indigenous educators? Was it appealing because it was presented in a relaxed style through dialogue and collaboration and “big mobs” of humour?

These questions became the basis of the subsequent emerging theme, did learning occur when it was more authentic and faithful to the student’s preferred ways of thinking?

Staff and students’ recognition of culturally-specific ways of thinking and learning

After being immersed in the College community for almost a year, several staff began making a point when we were sitting in the staff room to discuss their pedagogical practice and perspectives, referring to their interpretation of ontology, hermeneutics and epistemology. One of the regular topics they talked about was the importance of learning as much as possible from the students and the value that came from having a general awareness of cross cultural knowledge. Staff recognised that there were certain cultural distinctions, divergent features that they needed to accommodate when working with Indigenous students. They also recognised that what was appropriate for one student was not necessarily appropriate for another, depending on many variables which included the country and language groups the student descended from.

Staff

Jane Melville was one member of staff in particular who wanted to elaborate on recognising culture-specific student behaviours, that were different from her previous experience in the classroom, “I have learned how to understand the body language a lot better and the little, silent messages, the cues and the non-verbal cues that they give you when you are doing the right thing or not doing the right thing” (T6, FI, 2007, p. 7). She offered the example of working with two students from Fitzroy Crossing and Nookenhah who arrived at the College and were too shy to talk to her, “they didn’t say a lot but sometimes what they didn’t say was worth more than what they did say. That was good for me to know I was on the right track. (Jane laughs) They would make just a little noise sometimes or a little sort of movement of the head and it was like their body language of approval. I liked their sense of humour; the kids have got a great sense of humour” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 8). She said that she had learnt to adapt her teaching to include strategies that accommodate the cultural differences displayed by her students’ behaviour, especially to make the students feel more at ease, “strategywise I have learned what I can push and what I can’t push, more so with the girls, like when you can prompt someone to speak in public and when you should know it’s not going to happen, and don’t even try in the first place because it’s just going to make it uncomfortable for everyone” (T6, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Researcher’s commentary

In my experience this action of pushing a student to speak in class was a real concern and often resulted in the demise of many teachers new to working with Aboriginal students. Natalie said that she had been educated in a white school and was the only Aboriginal student who attended. She had learnt the rules of the dominant society and its system and competently mastered them. Now as an educator she was cognisant that she was teaching in a way that she had been taught and the College students responded to her just as they did to any white teacher. It repelled her to sense this and she consciously changed her way.

Natalie Hendricks said arriving at the College as a visiting sports star giving talks to students about motivation and what it meant to be an elite sportswoman was very different to standing in front of a class of adolescent girls, teaching complex academic subjects that were frequently disconnected to what really interested them,

“I tried to do that whole teaching thing of, ok this is what I want you to do, and I want you to do it by this time, and I want it done perfectly and they would look at me like - she’s crazy” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 3). Natalie concurred with Jane about recognising how far a student could be pushed, “you can’t do that at the College; the kids just close up their books and basically say, can I say what I want? “Kiss my arse - you’re not going to tell me what to do!” We were both Black Fellas but we couldn’t get by in the classroom together” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 4). Natalie, like Jane and Maude agreed that relating to the students on a more personal rather than a teacher/student professional level, promoted a favourable atmosphere that was more conducive to learning. Natalie explained, “I had to make some serious adjustments. I relaxed in everything in terms of body language with the kids, verbal language that I used more along the lines of, “hey kid how are you doing today?” instead of, “come in and sit down”, I just changed my whole approach” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 3). She said that she had learnt a lot of important lessons working with the students especially about valuing their way of operating, “I got that from Year 11 girls Primrose, Akita and Cajun. They do an incredible amount of work in class, so when they have done everything, we sit back and have a yarn for about half an hour. I ask, “what’s up?” and “what’s happened on the weekend?” and “what’s going on with this?” so we know each other very well. I don’t just ask the girls questions, they know a lot about me and my life. Now they don’t give me any grief, they are just like, “yeah, yeah ok” and whatever I ask them to do, they just do it” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 4).

Researcher’s commentary

For non-Indigenous teachers, who were not familiar with Aboriginal ways of doing things like taking time out to yarn, arriving at the College without a school bag or calling staff by their first name, seemed incongruent at the time. Many commented that after they had been at the College for a while, it engendered a greater sense of justness and then later blurred into details of insignificance. Some staff wondered why they hadn’t experienced this way of doing things before; it all seemed so pragmatic and natural.

Jane Melville commented that as a part of her professional style establishing relationships with the students was paramount. She was happy to change her approach if the setting required it, “it was weird at first. I couldn’t get used of things like the kids not carrying files around. Also calling teachers by their first name was

something I hadn't experienced before. They weren't bad things; they were just different things that I was happy to adapt to" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 3).

Taj Hay also spoke of the importance of establishing relationships with the students. Taj organised the Outdoor Education unit and spent considerable amounts of his own time setting up the program to make it enjoyable and challenging. He stated, "something you learn from day one here, and the kids see it, if you get out there and start playing basketball or if you get out in the yard and have a yarn with them, just have a talk and show some interest, they will end up doing the right thing for you. I think that's a pretty much a given, you have to develop relationships in order for them to connect with you and they will then show some respect and actually want to learn from you" (T4, FI, 2006, p. 8). Like Natalie, Taj talked about the importance of establishing strategies that enabled him to get work out of the students when they were in the classroom. "When we go out on an excursion they behave perfectly but when we are in the classroom and they know that they have to do written work, they just don't want to do it and you just have to try and find ways to get around it" (T4, FI, 2006, p. 8). He referred to one of his strategies as being organised and stressed it was the key to getting the students to work, because if they suspected that he was disorganised they would be "absolute rat-bags and they will be on top of me" but he said, "if you go in there and say ok this is what we are doing to do today and this is how we are going to achieve it, they will be fine and you won't have any dramas" (T3, FI, 2006, p. 9). Having said that, he still acknowledged, "it's hard. I try to make it as practical as I can. I would rather it be practical than if I can incorporate doing some kind of written work like whether they do the feedback session after it or I say ok you have done the practical now write your notes down or whatever. So you say remember we are going to do a practical today then we are setting up a theory lesson for tomorrow. (Taj laughs) Bribery? No!" (T3, FI, 2006, p. 8).

Justine Hope noted that the teachers who both invested time establishing relationships with the students and had a "wicked" sense of humour always seemed to manage behavioural issues in their classes better than those teachers who placed no value on these traits. She acknowledged that it was not easy for the non-Aboriginal staff because some of the student could be quite difficult. She said

Aboriginal people speak and find humour in different things to non-Aboriginal people, “I think that the relationship I have with the girls is something that is unique, especially the way we speak to each other. They can speak to me about all sorts of stuff and we have a good old laugh. I think that’s what I try to teach them that being Aboriginal in a school environment is to be yourself. We have a different sense of humour with the Indigenous staff here. We can laugh and yarn about stuff the way that Indigenous people do. We might find something funny and laugh about it but the non-Indigenous staff can’t see what’s so funny and all Indigenous people share this” (T1, FI, 2006, p. 5).

Researcher’s commentary

The students were quick to make reference to staff’s teaching styles especially those who helped them navigate their way through the bureaucratic system of procedures and protocols. Several students talked about the need to rest a while and not be pushed to always complete their work. They said school was also about yarning, working in small groups and sharing the learning, not necessarily leading it or owning it.

Students

When sharing their thoughts in the interview, students noted that school worked best for them when certain traits were present in their educational program. They spoke of these qualities that assisted them with their learning as being complimentary to how they learnt at home. Though students represented home behaviours that varied from one regional location to the other, there existed common elements such as their unhurried blurred sense of time, their tendency for socialising whilst existing very much in the present, with an overarching communal rationality for considering others.

Julia Yagan referred to how in her previous school in the Wheat Belt, the teacher would not tolerate students getting up or requesting to go for a drink or have a rest from their studies, “when I was in my old school all the Wadjula kids would sit down in the class, and I don’t know but it’s like we just need a bit of a break sometimes. I reckon if you push a kid too hard like they will say no one is telling me what to do and I’m not going to do it. But if you give them a little bit of work and say ok you can have a break, if you want a break just go and get a drink or something

then come back and start again. Yeah, it would...it is just much easier and if statistics show that it helps memory to have breaks then why not do it. It is like our way. I just take more notice to Aboriginal ways to learn” (S1, FI, 2006, p.12).

Kate Diamond, who had been at the College for three years had observed many teachers come and go along with their myriad of styles and manners. She said a part from liking Jane’s approach because she was fun, she much preferred Natalie’s style as a teacher, “I think being Aboriginal and young, Natalie knows what us young Aboriginal kids go through and how hard it is for us so that’s why all the kids always look to her. Natalie used to give kids the options like, if they didn’t want to do it then she wouldn’t really worry about them. But the ones that did, then she would pay attention to us more” (S9, FI, 2007, p. 4). Kate said she liked the way that Natalie accepted just how things were and got on with the kids who actually wanted to learn electing not to waste class time trying to control or reign in the distracters. She said Natalie tended to ignore the students until they eventually became jaded because they were not receiving any attention and finally joined the class activity.

Mardi Karina, who had transferred from a large metropolitan school, liked the way Natalie immediately included her into the school program. She said she was grateful for this inclusion to blend in with all the other students as in her previous school she had been the only Aboriginal student and had felt uncomfortably noticeable. She said even here, “I am shy and Natalie would come up to me and talk to me when other students were not around. Also she let me do an oral presentation just in front of her. That is something that all Aboriginal students are scared of doing - oral presentations in front of everyone” (S7, FI, 2007, p. 3).

Cajun Namma seemed clear on why she preferred to attend the College and be a part of the Yorgas Program. She felt more confident working in small groups and could manage to stay on and graduate as long as she was around other Aboriginal people, “maybe Aboriginal people know me so they know what knowledge I need to get. They are building on my world that I already know. Maybe I just understand Aboriginal people or they give more information or whatever” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 1).

Julia Yagan, her cousin, also preferred to work in small groups and explained how it felt easier when they did their TEE to learn as a group, “there were only four of us and we really knew each other really well and we could yarn and share the answers, if you have too many people in the class, like I don’t know, you get shame” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 6). More importunately she said having the Yorgas Program was the single reason for turning up, “it was good to be a part of something other than just school work, and that was probably one of the reasons I went to school” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 13).

Students’ ways of learning and teachers who consciously developed students’ schematic thought processes

The nine students interviewed talked about certain teachers who worked on engaging them by talking to them and listening to their stories in an effort to learn who the student was, where they were from and what sorts of things interested them. The students then described how the teachers used this collection of information about the student’s personal socio-cultural background and previous experiences as a spring board to try to ascertain what knowledge the student might possess. The students were cognisant that the teachers were consciously looking to fishhook from their cognitive schematic framework in an endeavour to develop their understanding further.

Julia Yagan explained how she preferred sharing and talking about a topic first when they initially started to learn about it and said several teachers including Jane, Japonica, Angelica and Natalie did it this way, “they will say what experience have you, like what things have you experienced so that you can relate to this, and I will think and I will tell them. They will then use that and add on to it with what they are trying to teach” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 9). Julia said that she enjoyed sharing ideas and listening to what other students thought, “we do it all as a group and just brainstorm. We put all the ideas up on the whiteboard and then write them all down. I reckon sharing is better because sometimes I feel that my answer is wrong. Jane says there is no wrong answer really, it’s whatever you think or what you feel it is, like what you see or read, whatever, that’s just the way it is” (S1, FI, 2006, p.4). Julia referred to the History class excursion to the Holocaust Centre and how it helped her to understand and link Aboriginal history to what had occurred in other parts of the

world, and she said she could empathise with other groups who were victims of atrocity.

Kia Collins also explained that she seemed to learn more when she had the opportunity to add new knowledge to her existing understanding of subjects by having a more hands on experience and excursions was one way this helped, “some classes I like more because some of the teachers actually talk to you and they actually explain it more and tell you what you are learning. They make it more interesting (Kia laughs) and take you on excursions” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 3). She said she would prefer “to get involved” rather than sitting down and reading a book. Being the youngest of triplets, I wondered if she was just used to having so much physical activity going on around her.

Researcher’s commentary

According to comments from both teachers and students, middle school appeared to promote a sense of locus, provided valuable concentrated periods of time to establish positive staff/student relationships, offered an opportunity to present the curriculum as an integrated progression of work that could be developed over a longer period and engendered a sense of community and familiarity in the students hectic lives.

It seemed that the students missed all this when they ventured out and became a part of the senior structure.

Ophelia Currawong complained that now as a senior student she did not like moving around to different class rooms, and would have preferred to stay with her home teacher Japonica. She said, “I liked being in Japonica’s class. We had lots of fun and she helped me with my work” (S2, FI, 2007, p. 7). She went on to elaborate that she was used to this way because at her previous school, “we had language class or different language groups, like I speak Mangala, our language, well I have two language groups Mangala and Walmajarri and we would join together. Then after that we would have sport against each other’s houses or language groups” (S2, FI, 2007, p. 7).

Cajun Namma, agreed with Ophelia, she also found having one teacher in middle school for all her subjects very accommodating and liked the idea of having

all her work books in the same room, “Japonica would like sit with you and talk it through and she would explain it again to you and ask if we understood her. That’s why I liked middle school better, having just one teacher because you didn’t have to move around the school and go to class to different teachers. Moving around and having different teachers is a (pause) disruption” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Researcher’s commentary

Apart from indicating a preference to working in small groups, taking time to rest to reflect on their learning, having the same teacher and classroom for the duration of the year, another commentary that kept surfacing in the student interviews was a particular preference for certain teachers and their teaching styles.

The choice seemed unanimous; teachers who demonstrated first what they wanted or brought the class into a group huddle and made time to talk about what they required seemed to achieve more than teachers who bellowed out the instructions to the masses and then publically asked the students if they had any questions about the task.

Akita Capote said she liked it when teachers applied a variety of strategies to convey new information, “I like for teachers to demonstrate it first and then talk about it slowly and if we get it good but keep asking us do we understand it. If we don’t get it just keep talking about it, bringing in other ideas to help us understand, even write it on a piece of paper or on the computer, draw pictures or something to help us understand” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Cajun Namma appeared to agree with Akita in heralding the integrity of some of the teachers, “like Japonica will sit down and she will read through what I did and then she will give me feedback on it. Instead of criticising what I have done she will lift it and say this is a really good story, you should take it to get published and that sort of thing. Natalie does the same, she gives you more ideas. Japonica knows what we have done and where we are from and she will try to make connections so that we are interested” (S3, FI, 2007, p. 5).

Primrose Ménage seemed to endorse Akita and Cajun’s comments and said not only did she need a practical approach to learning new information but she liked it when the teacher treated her respectfully, “I like it to be demonstrated and then you

get to do it because if someone keeps on telling it you get bored and then forget what you have to do. For example the way Natalie teaches you, she doesn't teach you like she is looking down at you, she teaches you as you are both on the same page. Like her and Japonica have that same thing, that they can learn off you as well and you can learn off them, vice versa kind of thing. Other teachers here do the work and get it over and done with" (S6, FI, 2007, p. 1). Primrose confided that she had experienced some problems and needed to go home to the Kimberley, but instead of quitting altogether she had returned because of the support she had received from the College staff, "if a teacher knows what you are like outside of her class, she can put that into the way she teaches you, like she can talk to you different, she doesn't have to look down at you, she can help you and then you both proceed from that" (S6, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Researcher's commentary

The profound words of Primrose stated like it seemed so obvious, "...she can put that into the way she teaches you" and "...then you can proceed from that".

However when the teacher spoke a "different" language and applied a different set of cultural mores to that of the student, the scope for misunderstanding and error appeared greatly exacerbated.

Styles of questioning using Standard Australian English

Seven of the nine students interviewed mentioned difficulties they experienced when listening to non-Indigenous teachers giving instruction or asking questions. They commented on Standard Australian English being difficult to understand when the teacher used polysyllabic words that they were not familiar with, did not accompany the request with signage or neglected to provide assisting contextual clues. A frequent comment was that the questions were often too long and by the time the teacher had stopped talking the student had lost the gist of what the question was asking. As well, students said they were not always comfortable with being singled out to answer the teacher's probes or questions and preferred to refrain from participating. This deflection was in no way intended to be an act of insolence nor disrespect.

As reported in Chapter 2, as an educator my first responsibility was to observe with proper humility and open mindedness how Indigenous students learn. Holdaway (1979) claimed the challenge would be to replicate healthy learning conditions and modify our teaching to support these conditions, rather than to allow the institutional convenience of schools to impose their own conditions as “a disproportionate share of the failure to transmit the skills of literacy falls on children from cultural backgrounds at variance with the culture of those who have traditionally influenced the language of schooling” (Holdaway, 1979, p. 17). The spoken dialects favoured by schools he asserted approximates most closely to the dialect of books.

Julia Yagan reported that the most difficult part of being a Year 12 student doing TEE English was that often she did not understand the language that was used throughout the course, “some of the terminology we don’t really know what some of the words are. They use different, higher words like when we are just talkin’ around. We just talk in everyday language and sometime we aren’t ready for the class, and when they ask questions it’s kind of like from the books, and like the books are probably White Fella books too” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 10). She said in her role as a senior student she was often called upon to speak publicly and welcome visiting guests, and she tried to modify her Aboriginal English to Standard Australian English to match the setting, “when you go out like out of your home like there is that many different people and different cultures you have to talk in English to everyone because you don’t know if they know anything. But at home we just talk anyhow and we just talk in “language” and we just understand each other. You can shorten sentences here and there and give little sign languages and stuff like across the room, when you are in the lounge room sitting at home and then when you come out you have to talk fully to everyone and answer their questions” (S1, FI, 2006, p. 10).

Primrose Ménage, affectionately known as the “Principal”, who often was seen wandering the corridors reprimanding junior students or greeting dignitaries, when she had only been excused from class to get a drink of water, claimed, “when I first came here I didn’t really talk Australian Standard English. I talked slang and I still do sometimes but that is when I am with friends and stuff. In the two years I have

been here I have changed a lot apparently, my family keep saying to me, good changes mostly, like my English has got better (S6, FI, 2007, p. 2).

Researcher's commentary

While I hung out with the students in the common room I was cognisant of not asking the girls too many questions or using big words in the questions for fear that I would discourage them from wanting to talk to me.

Some days I felt that I would nearly burst withholding my inquisitiveness. It was a difficult thing to do when you come from a culture that uses questioning as a strategy to source information.

Akita Capote agreed that the most annoying thing about the teachers and the visiting guests at the College was their ability to ask so many questions, “it can get frustrating when they keep asking you the questions, but then again they just want to help you and support you with whatever you want to achieve in your life. It would be that same as the way I would be taught at home” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 3) she conceded.

Neroli Anathi, who like her cousin Mardi Karina, transferred from the larger metropolitan school with noticed how different students at her previous school interacted and communicated in class, “yes, I think white people ask questions different from Aboriginal people. (Neroli pauses to think for some time) Aboriginal students are too shy to ask questions in front of people, unlike non-Indigenous people they just straight up ask what they got to say, they are not shame of other white people” (S8, FI, 2007, p. 3). She commented that she felt comfortable asking questions at the College, with the exception of when there were boys in the class. Before moving on she commented that she felt that generally teachers, “don’t help because they get in my way because they keep asking me questions” (S8, FI, 2007, p. 3).

Mardi Karina reinforced what Neroli was saying about their previous school that, “teachers just stand up and explain what we have to do but you are not sure because they explain it in different terms that I don’t understand, instead of explaining it in ways I do understand it” (S7, FI, 2007, p. 2). She said this was one

of the negative aspects of her previous school which contributed to her parents agreeing to send her to the College.

Just as some students seemingly found the style of questioning by non-Aboriginal teachers problematic, so too did the staff experience disequilibrium when they talked about the cultural complexities they encountered teaching at the College.

Cultural complexities encountered by staff at the College

By all accounts, teaching and living in any cross cultural settings appears to be extremely complicated. Often the locales represent sites of great complexities as unpredictable events unfold or erupt recurrently. In many Indigenous communities the events of the previous night frequently determine what's going to occur the next day and often students are exposed to a range of trials and tribulations even before they get to school. If they manage to get to school, teachers have to be mindful of what complex issues they might arrive with. There is an ever growing inventory of complicity which ranges from hunger, tiredness, depression, disappointment, frustration, homesickness, to a dirty uniform and a hangover. Such situations also occurred at the College.

Hostel accommodation

While dialogue continued amongst staff to reflect on alternative models to make the educational program more relevant to the learners, the most urgent and ongoing concern that staff wanted firm decision making on was that of hostel accommodation. It had been clearly identified and was widely known that the students were forced to live in substandard inadequate conditions. While the physical derelict state of the building and surrounds of the College itself could not be denied, Edgar, Idle and Wade Architects *Introspection and Investigation Report* (2007) provided recommendations in their strategic plan report to restore the College, bringing it up to acceptable operating standards with a specific recommendation that residential facilities must be built on-site to overcome the dismal conditions of current student accommodation.

School Psychologist Bridget McMulkin, who worked closely with the students, referred to the following document *Aboriginal College Learning for Life Strategic*

Plan 2005-2008 drawn up by the previous Indigenous Principal and staff. She guided me to the section titled *Key Result Area 5 Sustainability New Initiates 5.1 Hostel Accommodation 5.1.1*, “as an urgent measure, resolve the crisis in the hostel accommodation and staffing working with the CEO and other agencies at a high political level” (2004, p. 18). Bridget believed that Ted Cooder, the current Principal did not necessarily see the need to source alternate hostel arrangements as a matter of urgency. Her concern was so great that she felt that there needed to be a ministerial inquiry into the services provided for Aboriginal student accommodation, “the biggest thing that has gone wrong is hostelling for Aboriginal kids coming from communities. The hostel situation is dire, absolutely dire. That young lady you saw when you came in, if we could get her into a hostel. (Bridget sighs) She is in danger. She is at-risk” (T8, FI, 2007, p. 12). Bridget explained that in their current state moving students who were at risk from their home setting was not possible, as placing them into the hostels was almost as bad. She complained, “the hostel we have in Fremantle is in the wrong place. It’s between a railway station, twenty meters from the back door and on the other side, from a pub. You couldn’t have picked a worse place to put a group of young Indigenous men. They have major problems of young girls trying to get into the hostel, all they have to do is just get off the train, and there they are” (T8, FI, 2007, p. 12). She claimed that she would not let her daughter attend the College if she was going to be housed in what the students had to endure, “there is overcrowding, inadequate training of the staff and a lack of support staff and there is almost no support from the people who actually operate these hostels. They don’t have enough supervisors to take the students to different venues. There isn’t anyone with a professional background in Youth Recreation to organise a timetable of events” (T8, FI, 2007, p. 12). Bridget lamented with insufficient weekend activities to attract them to stay, the students left the hostel to visit their relatives, “many visit family and get blind drunk while they are there. They might only be fifteen or sixteen years old but that is the tradition of their families, then they come back to the hostel very much worse for wear” (T8, FI, 2007, p.12).

Maude Kingston who knew many of the students and their families from having lived for over a decade in the Kimberley, and whose now adolescent children were attending the College and boarding, shared Bridget’s concern. Maude

concurred that, “the accommodation and the services are sub-standard due to funding, not due to the fault of the people trying to run them. It is unfortunate and it makes life really difficult. You know these kids are missing home and the things that make them happy they just haven’t got. It’s bloody hot or it’s cold or they haven’t got enough stuff that makes them feel comfortable and they are coming to school, you see them getting down and down and down and it’s hard” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 12).

Researcher’s commentary

From the moment I arrived to commence my “internship” as a researcher in the College it was clear that the issue of the hostels was a real concern for many staff but especially Bridget, Maude, Taj, Japonica and Natalie. It seemed that the teachers who worked closely with the students at the hostel were empathic to their plight and raised the issue of the inadequate accommodation consistently because they could plainly see the substandard conditions the students were living in.

Bridget mentioned that Dean had declined to use the previous strategic planning document and that Ted also seemed reticent to use it as a strategic map to help guide him in his new position as Principal. This issue has since been taken up by the architecture group Edgar, Idle and Wade who have conducted extensive reconnaissance that has led to recommendations advocating for on-site hostels to be built.

On Wednesday 9th May 2007 students refused to go to class instead congregating on the front lawn of the College under the Norfolk pine tree. The students declared that they were on strike and were demanding better conditions at the hostels.

I thought it was very momentous to see a group of young people organise themselves to coordinate a strike. I remember wondering if this revolutionary insurgent behaviour originated from watching their elders in the documentary *How the West was Lost*.

Maude Kingston, along with many of the College staff, said she empathised with the students and respected their orderly and respectful way they voiced their opinion about the unsatisfactory conditions they had been enduring but, “I keep reminding myself that I am just “helping out”. I, along with many other people here, are trying to do what we can to make it better. I am not running the place. I am not in control, so there are things that will frustrate me and there are things that I can’t change. It is like that Alcoholic Anonymous thing you know (both Maude and Helen

laugh) there are things beyond my control and I just have to have the wisdom to know which fights to fight” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 12).

Teachers’ working conditions

Maude Kingston, Taj Hay, Sam Baker, Bridget McMulkin, Natalie Hendricks, Jane Melville and Angelica de Soul shared their reservations about the contribution the Football Academy seemed to make in the school and were reticent about the Girls’ Academy following the same approach. They believed that the day-to-day business of educating was done on the school site by the teachers and wider staff members, often working in surroundings that were frequently under-resourced. Maude claimed, “I reflect on these additional structures, that go into support and they talk about sport and education or rather education and sport. Education is important and the only reason they fund these sporting groups is because they are seen to enhance educational outcomes. It is a lot of money to go into those things to provide engagement to get kids’ bums on seats, to give that little bit of extra incentive, yet there’s not much for the teachers and the often gruelling day to day operations of the classrooms” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 14).

Taj Hay, Natalie Hendricks and Maude referred to the well established Physical Education and Outdoor Education program at the College yet Maude believed, “the connection between them and Academy is fairly tenuous. It’s not overt. They help out a bit. They have a conversation every now and then. It sits separate to the curriculum and the day to day learning experience so how can it be working optimally when it’s continuing to operate in separateness” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 14).

Jane Melville and Maude commented that often the teachers were left with a disrupted program as students were taken from classes at short notice. Jane said, “the main struggle I have here is the time management issue, trying to cope with the constant interruption with all the different activities the kids are involved in” (T6, FI, 2007, p. 10) Maude commented when it comes to the students’ education it seems, “all the great bits, the Academy says “oh, we will do that” and what the teachers and the day-to-day school staff are left with is the job to teach Maths and the boring bits, which is exactly how the kids see it” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 14). Maude

stated stoically, “whenever I feel like I am not getting anywhere or feel a bit knocked down with what’s happening, I think, well, success is possible and it is important and it is necessary. Failure is *not* an option: it has to be done” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 12).

Researcher’s commentary

Maude Kingston’s teaching contract was not renewed at the end of 2008 as funding for the Retention and Participation Support Program was not approved. The axing of the program was without notice. Notified informally at the end of year Christmas lunch that her position was no longer required, Maude said she had stood in the staffroom astonished, both by the news and how the news was delivered. It was apparent from the projects achieved that this supplementary program ought to have continued to be a part of the College professional development resources.

In summing up, this “world” that represented the Aboriginal College, its staff and its students, provided the impetus for investigating this site. What I found was a College that seemed to be trying desperately to cope with its unique Indigenous student population and their unique ways of being, while trying to prepare them to become contributing and well adjusted members of a wider dominant society. It seemed that previous paradigms were no longer sustainable. Physical and psychological influences that appeared to have impacted on the leadership of the College, the educators who elected to teach there, the students who came to attend there, the attitudes and expectations of both, the staff and the students, the paradigms of teaching and instruction approaches that seemed incongruent to Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing, demanded that College management instigate an other way. This other way, it seemed, was the emergence of the sporting academy which offered engagement and relevance. Through the creation of the Yorgas Program, the Girls’ Academy achieved observable outcomes.

Chapter summary

Chapter 7 provided a general overview of the study and explained the College practices, processes and procedures, analysed data collected from both, staff and students, in terms of the number of participants, demographical background information and ethical considerations. The second section of the chapter portrayed how staff and students interpreted their place and contribution to the life and culture to co-exist in the educational setting within the College.

Chapter 8 expands upon the Girls' Academy Yorgas Program. It presents the events and issues that came into play as it evolved from an inadequately funded local pilot program into a nationally funded, widely recognised program that gave the participants a sporting chance to achieve success in their lives.

Chapter 8 – The Girls' Academy and the Yorgas Program

While chapter 7 presented an overview of the socio- cultural milieu in which the study took place, the purpose of Chapter 8 is to document what transpired over the course after the Yorgas Program had been operational for some time. The chapter briefly examines the transformations which included; level of parental involvement, the influence of role models and mentors, the observable changes that occurred in the girls' social, physical and academic behaviours, the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy upon the girls, their decision to quit or not to quit and the empowerment of young Indigenous women.

Establishing the Girls' Academy goals

The Girls' Academy was initiated with a specific goal, established on a model different to that of the Football Academy. The validation for establishing the program was to focus on further studies and/or workplace readiness.

Dean Whitley commented that compared to the previous years there were significant changes in terms of the Year 10 program, “it was good in terms that they are now in the education suite so that they now attach basketball to educational outcomes. The girls are doing a VET course in *Work Place Readiness*. They are doing structured workplace learning through this program and they can see a link between what they do in the sport and what happens at school. That's happening in Year 10 and it is going to be extended into Year 11 and 12 to a Certificate II” (T7, FI, 2006, p 7). Dean was pleased how well the girls were responding to the VET program, “that's where it really differs from the Football Academy. The Football Program hasn't done much about linking it to the educational program outside of Physical Education” (T7, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Likewise Coach Reed Graceland was cognisant that funding would only be attracted and continued if there were visual improvements in the girls' attendance and behaviour, “I think even if you look at just the number of girls graduating this year from the College. This year it will be eleven graduating out of the high school. This is the first group of girls I've had the whole time from Year 10 onwards. This is a small school but the number of girls that graduated last year was three. Was three!

So the girls' enrolments at College have gone up more and more each year for the last three years. On the enrolment form it asks, "why did you come to the College?" and a lot of the girls are saying for the basketball program. So just the fact that we have the girls engaged and are retaining more girls at the school, and they are coming to school is a major feat. And for these girls to be coming 80% of the time is also something that is definitely a higher percentage. So it's a 300% increase in girls graduating that the sporting program can take a bit of credit for" (T2, FI, 2006, p.8).

Justine Hope supported Reed saying that the increase was due in part to the establishment of firm guidelines that were followed up on and endorsed, "it is the girls' responsibility to stay on task to do what they need to do in classes to be able to be a part of whatever is happening with the basketball program. It may be that the girls go on a trip or camping soon or have a day-out-of school to go and play in a carnival. They always know in the back of their minds that there is something down the track that's going to be planned and if they want to be a part of the Yorgas Program, they have to perform in class" (T1, FI, 2006, p. 17).

Cocious Lido reinforced both the liaison officer and Head Coach when she said, "we certainly spell that out to the girls on a regular basis that they need to be here. It is not all about playing in the A team, so to speak, but it is also about combining their school work and their performance in the classroom and their participation within the classroom" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 2). Cocious confirmed at that stage 35 girls were enrolled, however for all sorts of reasons not all girls attended regularly. She claimed, "probably out of that 35, well actually we have 57 enrolments from the beginning of the year but I have brought it down to 35, and of that 35 that do attend regularly, I would say there is anywhere from 20 to 25 that would float in on a regular basis 15, 20, 25 but it just varies. It is not too bad but there is certainly room for improvement" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 1).

Researcher's commentary

The energy and commitment of the Academy staff and development officers in setting up a program that engendered a chance for students to experience success cannot be underestimated. Likewise the surrounding support structures, the checking up and following up to share concerns with the girls was as equally important as having a safe place for them to hang out.

Knowing that there was always someone in the room to listen, to guide, to prepare and share food and time with, made a significance difference in stabilising the girls. Many were homesick and missed their communities and the reliance on having someone dependable to share their concerns with, like Cocious Lido or Justine Hope was heartening.

Establishing support structures within the Girls' Academy proved to be essential in the lives of the girls who could not always rely on conventional sources of support.

Parental involvement in the Girls' Academy

Of the nine students interviewed four came from the Kimberley region, two from the Central Wheat Belt and three came from the metropolitan area mainly Fremantle and Kwinana. It was uncommon for parents of students outside the metropolitan area to travel to Perth. Likewise, of the total student population, the majority of metropolitan students' parents were seldom seen at the College with exception to the Graduation Ceremony or for an irregular well publicised event. Parents were seldom seen calling in or attending sporting carnivals or visiting for affirmative reasons. The only time they tended to come to the College was when there was some problem with their child.

Coach Reed Graceland recognised that the girls' support structures were minimal and that strategies were needed to be established to ensure the retention of girls thus the success of the program, "they don't have a lot of support, they don't have Mum dropping them off and Dad picking them up. They have to catch this bus to Oats Street, that bus to the city, this bus to that place and it's raining and you get home three hours later or so. I want to see anybody of any race succeed in that sort of environment" (T2, FI, 2006, p. 9).

Teaching staff also acknowledged the additional support that was needed to be injected into the program often after school and early evenings as parents were not

on hand to pick up the students. Maude Kingston said, “I was coming up the driveway the other day thinking why don’t we ever see parents and families in this school?” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 11) Sam Baker suggested that perhaps one of the many reasons was that, “we really don’t get much of a snap shot of what their community or what their life is like from anyone else but themselves. The only information I really get is from the kids, and it takes a while for it to come out. It is from them telling me stories about where they are from, what their life is like and what they get up to at home, which is usually fairly shocking for me - is when I find out. The school itself doesn’t - there are big confidentially issues. I wish we knew more about the kids. I think it is really valuable information. I think it helps you understand. It helps you deal with situations better if you know more about the kids but the schools policy is we only know, if we really need to know. I think the school really needs closer bonds with parents but it seems to be difficult to establish” (Y5, FI, 2006, p.6).

For Cocious Lido this was an issue that she took personal responsibility for, as she insisted on improving the channels of communication, “we have support and contact with parents, but not on a regular basis. The times that we do speak to parents is probably always at a bad time which is unfortunate. It is important for us to be heard and be seen out in the communities and the communities to be welcomed into our Academy. It is something that we have already spoken about and we will certainly have Girls’ Academy Open Days. We had a Reflection Morning Tea that launched our Academy. There is good community support out there and next year we would like to welcome more community events into our Academy program” (T13, FI, 2007, p. 6).

Researcher’s commentary

Students also raised the subject about the level of parental involvement and the general consensus was that the girls would have preferred their parents to have had greater involvement in the school. I noticed at each Graduation Ceremony when parents did arrive, they really seemed to soak up the specialness of the day, and what this event meant in their children’s lives. I truly felt given half the chance, parents would visit the College regularly.

Several of the students, without prompting, spoke about their longing to have more parental involvement in their school life. It was encouraging to hear the girls talk about how important it was to them to have their parents see their achievements.

Year 11 student Cajun Namma said, “I would like to see more parents here at the College and they can try to encourage their kids to come to school” (S, FI, 2007, p.11). Year 12 student Mardi Karina was the only exception to the rule, “my mum has been with me through every school and she has always been supporting me in-and-out-of-school, and Auntie Justine has been a big help here” (S7, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Living away from family and communities, who would normally be responsible for encouraging appropriate values and beliefs, highlighted for strategies in the Yorgas Program to generate and maintain positive role models for the girls.

Role models and mentoring influences

A significant focus of the Girls’ Academy Program was to establish strong role models and mentors for the students. Under the auspices of Role Models of WA Sporting Academy, mentors were established using prominent Indigenous personnel. Mentors visited the College regularly and talked to the students about the realities that came with pursuing their careers while ensuring they also merged their talent with pursuing further education. The 2007 Young Australian of the Year Ms Tania Major, who was inaugurated as Patron of the Girls’ Academy, was one such role model.

In her role as School Psychologist Bridget McMulkin facilitated many workshops focussed on improving self esteem and the importance of appropriate models to emulate, “I am not the first person to say this but if you educate a mother you educate a family. Unless we actually educate these young women, bring them up to the next level, the highest level they can possibly go, we are not helping the next generation. These girls are going to be the next generation of mums and by and large, Indigenous women raise the family by themselves or grandmothers raise the family by themselves” (T8, FI, 2007, p. 5).

Cocious Lido and Bridget set up and facilitated workshops and invited visiting speakers who talked about the responsibility of taking advantage of opportunities to establish positive behaviours. Cocious said, “we ask them why they aren’t attending. Is there something that I can do? We have checks that we go through with the girls, drawing up contracts. We get them to take the initiative and be more responsible in

terms of what they want to do too, whether or not they want to be here. There are certain ways an Indigenous person can mentor our kids. I can’t explain it but it is just something we do it a certain way, it may not be talking; it may just be being there” (T13, FI, 2007, p. 8).

Researcher’s commentary

Having knowledgeable staff with worldly experience in Justine, Bridget and Cocious was powerfully instrumental in building up the girls’ sense of self esteem, self confidence and self efficacy. These three women orchestrated the day-to-day smooth operations of the Girls’ Academy and were constantly alert to any changes in the girls’ behaviour, attitude or disposition.

They were there to listen, to encourage and subtly effect change that stimulated a greater sense of purpose for individual girls, who began to see some value in attending school more regularly.

Likewise, younger members of staff also succeeded in provoking students to recognise their achievements and keep interested in their future plans.

Natalie Hendricks said the one of the main reasons she succeeded in achieving her goal in life was due to the support others gave her in terms of encouragement and sponsorship. She recounted that she felt incumbent to repay some of this good will back. “I provide a lot of encouragement, positive reinforcement and celebrate when the girls have done something well, not necessarily when they have done something huge, but just a small success. I know that it helped with the Year 11 girls, we have sort of celebrated every time I tell them how brilliant they are when they do something. I don’t think that they hear that enough. I think they get very uncomfortable when they did hear it (Natalie laughs) so I just keep telling them, telling them, telling them until they start to believe it eventually. It takes a lot more than that though” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 7). Natalie talked about using visualisation as a strategy to instigate positive self belief. She said by explaining to the girls how visualisation worked they could start working on affirming constructive changes in their habits and behaviours. “I tell them you can increase your self confidence, by being given a chance where you might be challenged and then when you succeed at the challenge, it makes you feel great. So that became sort of the philosophy I applied, not grand, but hopefully it will have an effect on someone...some (Natalie gestures with her index finger) one” (T3, FI, 2006, p. 8).

PE Teacher Taj Hay said he took advantage of the opportunity to impart positive affirming ideas to the students, “if I am talking and the kids bring up an issue, it could be irrelevant to what we are doing, but if they bring up an issue say about something that has gone on or something that is bothering them or whatever, I will just scrap what I am talking about and start talking about what they are talking. It’s obviously something that they want to know about, so we engage the whole class and we have a really good discussion” (T4, FI, 2006, p. 9).

Establishing a place within the College for the girls, encouraging them to continue with their studies and to defer life choices such as using a variety of illicit substances or becoming sexually active with the elevated likelihood of becoming pregnant, was not enough to hold the girls at the College. Something else was needed to engage them sufficiently to change their specific behaviour.

What it means to be a part of the Girls' Academy

When each student was interviewed the question that provoked the longest response was what it meant to them to be a part of the Yorgas Program. Eight out of nine girls spoke of the privilege it was for them to participate in the Yorgas program. They talked at length how the program enabled them to feel engaged in their learning working closely with the Indigenous development officers as well as College teachers. They claimed that for the first time they looked forward to going to school and being a part of something active and challenging. They enjoyed the collectiveness of being seen as a group and having improved resources such as the refurnished common room, respectable uniforms, decent sports shoes, regular food, and companionship of the development officers, their own bus, excursions which included interstate and international travel.

The themes that arose ranged from:

1. having a place in the College and
2. a space of their own,
3. having lots of support from the Academy staff,
4. having something special to look forward to,
5. that was challenging and fun.

Researcher's commentary

In 2007 the Girls' Academy was a dynamic place to be. There was a large cohort of Year 12 girls and the desire to compete to make the A Team was strong. Younger girls looked up to older girls and remote regional girls mingled with local urban girls. There was a strong sense of synergy and sisterhood. It was an exciting time and privilege to be documenting their journey.

One of their first comments was in relation to having a place in the College and a room of their own. Year 12 Akita Capote referred to it as, “a good opportunity for girls, especially girls because they say that the College is just a school for boys only for football but then we say we have got a Girls' Academy for basketball and netball so it's a whole different you know. It has just made the school change because we are getting more girls and the development officers are supporting us and rewarding us to get into activities before and after school. The room is a whole lot bigger and we have got our own kitchen. It is homier and roomier and more comfortable because like last year we had a small room with seats but now it is all different. Now we have a big TV and DVD and all the girls get along there. They just come in and have a chat and just chill out” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 3).

Akita was also grateful for the extra staffing support that came with the additional funding, “the ladies in the room help me through everything. They help me with family problems, school problems and cultural problems. They just hold my hand and just walk me through the light, and I am so happy to be here. I am glad that I came to this school because I never had no opportunity back in Broome because I used to fight and all that in school. When I came here I was a quiet girl as you can tell and now being here it has changed my life because when I went back to Broome I was talking, and I didn't have no shame, no shyness, no nothing and all my friends just looked at me and said you have got more confidence in yourself now and I believe in myself now because they have helped me through everything” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 3).

Another reason the girls enjoyed the program was because there was a lot of support and greater assistance from the Academy staff. Year 12 student Primrose Ménage lamented, “it is good but it sucks that it is getting up just as I am leaving. It is good and it sets an example for the following young Aboriginal ladies who want to

come to the College and represent themselves and their families down here. Because I am a long, long way from home and the Girls’ Academy is where I can go sit down and reflect on what I have been doing, how my family is back home, and if anything is going on back home I can talk to staff in the Girls’ Academy and they will be on the same level as me and support me with everything that I need” (S6, FI, 2007, p. 3).

Metropolitan Year 12 student Neroli Anathi agreed with regional and remote student Primrose Ménage by stating that, “I feel very good and confident at this school with the Aboriginal girls’ program because they sit there and help you after school if you need help with your work, like they have tutors to help you get through your work; they have computers if you need it after school, during recess and lunch” (S8, FI, 2007, p. 4). Neroli also enjoyed the opportunity to get away from other noisy students in the courtyard and annoying boys and escape to the girls’ room, “you can sit back and watch TV or listen to music and most people if they don’t have like lunch or anything there is food provided there. That makes a difference” (S8, FI, 2007, p. 4). She spoke about getting access to the resources in the room and the enjoyable educational experience that was on offer, on condition she attended class, “I think that is pretty fair that girls have to attend classes to get a game because most girls that come to school they do the right thing by going to class on time and doing their work, wearing the school uniform and participating in all activities. Other girls they just come to school and don’t participate in activities that are provided during the time of classes. And other girls don’t come to school hardly and just come for basketball or think that they can just come and play the game but there are a certain criteria that you have got to follow before you get to do that” (S8, FI, 2007, p. 5).

A further reason the girls enjoyed the program was that it offered them an alternative to coming to school for conventional classroom delivery of “talk and chalk”. Year 11 student Cajun Namma enjoyed coming up through the levels following her sister and cousins, “well I am a part of the girls’ community and the Academy so I’m a part of something at the school. If the Academy wasn’t here I would probably still be but (long pause) I just like being a part of the Academy (Cajun laughed) just be here and with all the girls and for my education. I just like to be around all the girls, playing basketball and all the things that come with that” (S3,

FI, 2007, p. 7). Cajun's view was shared by many girls including Ophelia Currawong, a Year 10 student who claimed outright, "I wouldn't be here if the Girls' Academy wasn't here (Ophelia laughed) I would have went to another school or something like that" (S2, FI, 2007, p. 6).

Mardi Karina agreed with Ophelia and Cajun and enthusiastically commented, "I reckon it is wicked (Mardi laughed) because it is a lot of fun and because it's basketball and that is my favourite sport. Actually I want to go to America next year or sometime to do basketball there, and I want basketball to be part of my future so it was good to have this program at school. Going to America is something I have always wanted because I probably started playing basketball when I was about six or seven" (S7, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Although self motivated and disciplined, Year 12 student Kate Diamond explained to me that she had needed a reason to continue to attend school. "It was good and it gave me something to look forward to every day. I just felt like I was doing something else besides work just at school like some of the other girls didn't do nothing, sport or anything and it made me feel like I was doing something more. When we were playing there was enough competition, and we were good. I think we could have been better if we had enough training. Just getting all the girls to play together was a problem because some of the girls would turn up and then they wouldn't so we wouldn't know. That's where I reckon we went wrong. And the other thing, yes, fitness was definitely one of them, and I reckon like making a program like Healthy Eating and that and just getting fit" (S9, FI, 2007, p. 6). Kate felt the rule of regular attendance to confirm a place in the team needed attention, "I think they should have pushed the rule of if you are not completing your school work then you shouldn't be able to play. Like even at times I thought I shouldn't be playing because I wasn't up to date with all my work. I felt that it wasn't fair because we had other girls on the bench that should have played" (S9, FI, 2007, p. 7).

In Year 11 Kia Collins appeared committed and passionate about basketball and worked hard in her studies however by Year 12 Kia Collins seemed ambivalent. Each game she played she started in the first five and seriously expected to. She knew she was the College top player and did not think about taking the place of

another student who may have attended more regularly than she did. Likewise she said she did not particularly care about being in the Academy, she felt she had other options available to her, “being a part of the Girls’ Academy doesn’t really encourage me to stay, well (Kia paused) sort of, but not really. If the Girls’ Academy wasn’t here I don’t think I would be. But, yeah I don’t know I might have been, I have really come to do my work and stuff and to graduate. That’s about it. The Girls’ Academy is nothing different. It’s just the same as other schools but people are starting to notice us girls in the Girls’ Academy instead of just the boys all the time because the boys get everything. Now other peoples outside of the school are beginning to notice us” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 6). With exception to Kia Collin’s remark, the Academy appeared to provide a place for the girls to be a part of something unique. They were able to travel to places that they would never have been able to before and participate in activities that included conducting oral and cultural presentations to visiting dignitaries and government officials. Their story was featured in local magazines and television programs and the girls appeared in local newspapers regularly. There was an element of kudos that came with their new status that they enjoyed however all this did not stop them experiencing the odd bout of doubt.

To quit or to stay: flight or fight

Of the nine students interviewed seven had at some stage during the year experienced thoughts of quitting the College, the Yorgas Program and going home. Of these nine students, eight students graduated, one quit, one missed her flight and did not return to the College. The students commented that their rationale for not quitting was often because it would have let down the Academy, their parents and some members of staff. The first part of this section tells of the girls who did quit and then returned to the Girls’ Academy and Yorgas Program.

The returners

Year 12 student Primrose Ménage talked to me about when she went home to the Kimberley it was often difficult to come back and although she had always managed to in the past she suggested that others frequently found it problematic, “Ophelia actually missed her flight and then the next flight she had to pay for but she wasn’t

getting any money and her parents weren't getting any money. The Academy could have helped her like they helped me kind of thing because she has got a great future in basketball and a great future in school like Ophelia is very smart for herself" (S6, FI, 2007, p. 6). She elaborated, for me "I am grateful that I did come back I mean this place is wicked because you make great friendships here" (S6, FI, 2007, p. 6).

Neroli Anathi transferred to the College in Year 12 from a mainstream secondary school in Fremantle saying she did not like the way she was being treated by the teachers at her old school. Neroli repeated several that she was glad that she had given herself a second chance by transferring to the College when her cousin did. She suggested, "I thought the College was going to be boring like my old school and so I quit, I was at home and it felt like I wasn't doing much and I was missing out on socialising at school and communicating and stuff. At home just sitting around, sleepin', hardly nothing to do, it is boring. I came back to the Girl's Academy because they help you here. Like Reed Graceland and his workers help me get through school with sport and stuff" (S8, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Alternatively there were girls who found it difficult staying at school, but reflected on what they would do if they did leave. The thought of going back to unemployment and uncertainty in their communities provoked them to reconsider quitting.

Year 12 student Dux of the College Julia Yagan admitted that she was often tempted to leave the city and go back to her Wheat Belt community and her family especially when her cousin quit and went home, but reconsidered quitting the College and stayed, "umm (pause) you look in to what it could be in the end. When Pam quit (Julia laughed) I wasn't going to come here anymore and I was narr I don't want to go here by myself. I was like no I don't want to go back and then I was like...I really have to. I have always wanted to be a journalist from about Year 6 or something and I was thinking if I don't do it I will never know what it could be, so I just stayed here" (S1, FI, 2006, p. 13).

Akita Capote from the Kimberley talked about missing her family especially her younger toddler cousins and often felt homesick when she talked to them on the

telephone and heard them laughing or crying. She acknowledged, “ I did think about quitting (paused) yeah (paused) once but then again just thinking of going back home you know to lot of family problems, friend problems, but when you come here it is a whole different environment. Like you meet new students, new teachers and you have a lot of fun and just chill at the school and do your work. You miss the students here, the teachers they don't want you to go, they want you to finish school and graduate and the hostel parents just want you to achieve something” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 3). For Akita the College seemed to provide a level of support to keep her motivated to go on with her studies once she graduated Year 12.

Also from the Kimberley Kate Diamond suggested that while she liked the relaxed lifestyle in Broome she did not mind the rules and regulations of the College. She was happy to work hard at her studies and be conscientious in her civic duties as Head Girl at the College. Further since the Basketball Academy had been in place she suggested that attending school regularly for the purpose to get more court time had made a difference to her studies, “yes. I was thinking just a little while more, not going to go throw away my education just because I don't want to go to school. And I have done all the hard part already I just have to stay for a little while longer. Plus I had like the Basketball Academy and that which I really liked and friends and I just didn't want to let anybody down” (S9, FI, 2007, p. 6). Kate had been one of the original members of the Girls' Academy and had done everything she possibly could to attract kudos and acclaim to the team and Coach Graceland.

There was also a selection of girls who wanted to stay on at the College, determined to finish their studies because they wanted to please their parents. After having a difficult time at her mainstream school in Fremantle, metropolitan-based student Mardi Karina said she thought constantly of quitting and would have done if she had not had the support of her family. She recognised that if she quit she would let them down, especially her father who was proud that Mardi was going to be the first child in the family to complete Year 12, “sometimes yeah like last year when I was struggling I just wanted to leave it all because it was hard. Well if I go for an interview or something or go and get a job they said it was best if I finished school but I wanted to do it anyway. Because I would be the first in my family to complete

Year 12 and my Dad was really happy about that. So that as well was why I wanted to finish” (S7, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Ophelia Currawong from the Kimberley said that her family were proud of her and encouraged her to overcome her homesickness and stay on at the College. Ophelia admitted that when fellow Kimberley student Kate Diamond graduated Year 12 and returned home she had missed her very much and had felt lonely at the College without her, but decided to stay on and keep working, “well I can't leave my school work and my basketball team. Everyone has left me and I am by myself and I am still here. My grandmothers on both my mum and dad's side wanted me to come down and finish my schooling off” (S2, FI, 2007, p. 4). Ophelia said that the teachers, especially Japonica had helped her take her mind off missing her family and friends.

Kia Collins appeared cognisant that she was missing more classes and games and that her behaviour and attitude had changed from the previous year. She was not sure if she cared enough to make an effort to improve upon it. However with support from her sister, who worked at the school, and Justine Hope, Kia understood many staff were there to help her through, “yes now and then I do think about quitting. I stay mostly for my Mum. I just want to graduate school that's what I think I want to finish school before I quit. She just wants me to graduate too so I will just stay in school” (S4, FI, 2007, p. 5). Due to private and personal circumstances that led to a lack of regular attendance, both Kia and Ophelia failed to complete secondary school assessments and did not graduate in 2007.

Researcher's commentary

Having significant support from role models and mentors as well as tutors and development officers still could not provide the scaffolding some students needed to get to school, get their work done, participate in the Yorgas Program and successfully complete their Secondary School Certificate.

For some it appeared to be linked somehow with general adolescent angst and liminal spaces of shifting subjectivity resulting from budding sexual/societal awareness of opportunities and possibilities. For others it seemed to be linked with the natural demands of traditional community life where adolescent girls began to be absorbed in to the social structures and the time-honoured role of motherhood.

Girls’ Academy Program Manager Cocious Lido shook her head and shrugged her shoulders, “quitting is the girls’ choice and you do get to a stage where you can’t keep compromising because there are other girls who are here too, who are screaming out for some sort of assistance and who are getting up through thick and thin and getting to school. There comes a point where you have to say “barlese” I have done this and I have done that. We have tried to negotiate a number of things but it is just not happening. I think it is ok too to say if you want to go well that is your choice and obviously you are not ready and you don’t want to do this and that you need time away. Hopefully they will come back. But it is always a hard call, when is enough, enough?” (T13, FI, 2007, p. 7) Cocious said, “we talk about supporting our girls and, yes, we do and that is a key part of why we are here and what we do. But it is supporting them in a way too to be more responsible for themselves and their actions and what they chose to do and what they want to do. So it is about giving them those tools to be more proactive and make choices and we all hope they will make some positive choices” (T13, FI, 2007, p. 8).

Once the girls reportedly decided that they would stay and work within the parameters of the Yorgas Program things took a turn for the better. Over the course of the time I had been documenting the students, changes began to occur within the girls social, physical and academic behaviours and for all accounts the changes were both affirmative and discernible.

Observable changes in the girls’ behaviour

From the period that the Girls’ Academy formed and the subsequent years that followed the staff population remained constant at the College. This was unlike previously when large numbers of staff left at the end of the academic year. Now, most of the staff had been at the College for up to two to three years and planned on staying longer. This long term involvement with the students enabled the staff to confidently comment on the changes, most commonly improvements, which they had observed in the girls’ social, physical and academic behaviour.

Jane Melville now in her third year at the College commented, “I have had my Year 12’s some of them since Year 10 like Kate Diamond, and Julia Yagan came along in Year 11. When Julia first started she had a potential attitude, she could

either go one way or the other. Over time I think she relaxed a bit when she realized that no one was out to prove anything to anyone and she just became a part of the group. Particularly this year she has just blossomed, she thinks like a woman not like a little girl. She is an intelligent, mature, incredible student. Probably considering some of the obstacles that she has had to face in her life, either directly or indirectly, given what I have seen in her writing, particularly in Literature she has such a profound grasp of social issues in the world. It's quite inspirational to know her. And I wouldn't be the only teacher to say that" (T6, FI, 2006, p. 6).

Jane's observations were reinforced by Physical Education teacher Natalie Hendricks, "they're more accountable, for example, Coach Graceland had been making sure that the girls were attending class and if they hadn't they couldn't play or go to Sydney and I really liked that about it because girls were beginning to come a little bit more regularly. I have noticed a difference in terms of the way that they are on the court. They don't sub themselves on anymore and just walk off the court when they feel like it. They are a lot more responsible when it comes to things like that and I was hoping that those things would carry over into other areas of their lives including school" (T3, FI, 2006, p. 6).

After two years as Head Coach, Reed Graceland recounted the changes that he had witnessed over this time in the girls behaviour, "what I have observed is a group of girls that when I first came, didn't believe much what I said to them because they were used to people making promises but not keeping them. So there was not a whole lot of eye contact with me, which is a cultural thing as well, one that I totally understand, but in saying that there is a lot of eye contact now. This room that we're sitting in is like the safe place for the girls whether the girls are in the basketball program or just at school. I've noted a general closeness amongst the girls. They have something that they have ownership of so there is more pride amongst them. Their overall appearance and how they look after themselves was something that Justine and I talk to them about as well how they present themselves. Also the overall way they present themselves, their overall general appearance. I've seen a rise in hygiene and that sort of thing, those sorts of things that I guess has to be mentioned that has picked up" (T2, FI, 2006, p.4). Likewise the girls suggested that when they received their new basketball uniforms and new basketball shoes they felt

special and wanted to look good. With Grooming and Deportment incorporated in to the Yorgas Program encouraged them to think about and improve their personal hygiene and presentation. The discussion of the observable changes in the students' specific beliefs and patterns of behaviour became the next evolving theme.

Staff's beliefs in students – A self fulfilling prophecy of potential

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, many staff working at the College came to their work place with a strong sense of social integrity and an attitude that embodied genuine human concern to improve the conditions of others. Inevitably over time, the teachers talked about how they had developed strong relationships with many of the students and wanted them to experience personal prosperity and success in their adult lives. By guiding and mentoring the students, the staff expressed their encouragement consciously and unconsciously, in word, grimace and gesture, sustaining student's positive behaviours and diminishing undesirable ones.

Sam Baker spent much time talking about the importance of establishing in the students elements of resilience and respect by treating them with respect, "I try to treat the kids as young adults, the students as young adults and treat them with respect. I am conscious of the fact that for a lot of the kids, the schooling experiences they have had have not necessarily been good and a lot of them by the time they get to us in Year 11 and 12 they are over school. They have had a long history of not enjoying it, and not succeeding at it, so I think a lot them come here kind of wary" (T5, FI, 2006, p. 5). He suggested that a significant part of his daily program was to ensure that his class represented a place where the students would want to come to, "I try to make them feel comfortable and relaxed, I don't challenge them with things that obviously they can't do. There is no point in making a kid feel stupid for something they can't do, it will only reinforce the negative experience for them, so I set achievable tasks. Positive reinforcement is really important" (T5, FI, 2006, p. 5). Sam suggested the next thing he did after he got the students comfortable was to ensure that he pitched his expectations high to meet the standards he knew the students were capable of reaching, "I find... I actually wrote this down, many of the kids have this belief they are dumb. They will call themselves "dumb Black Fellas", they will say, "ah, we are just dumb Black Fellas" and they don't recognize that through (Sam paused) through their own ethic towards school, their

own school culture which is high truancy and changing schools often, and within their own community there is a fairly low value on education, low opinion of school life or what it can give you or what you can get from it, so I think all of those things contribute over time” (T5, FI, 2006, p. 5). Sam seemed confident that he had gradually improved the way students viewed themselves and credited it as a result of getting to know the students personally after having stayed teaching at the College for several years.

Taj Hay worked with Sam and collaborated to establish positive behaviour with the students. He used the following example to talk about the importance of the self-fulfilling prophecy. He said about two weeks ago, he stopped the lesson and said, “ok, we are not going to do Outdoor Education. We are doing to think about what you are going to do when you get out of here. You’re Year 11 now and next year you will be Year 12 and you have to think about if you are on the path to graduate and if not what do you want to do”. We had a discussion and you get the ones who say they want to go on to Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) or work for unemployment benefits, which angers me actually when they say that, and we basically just had a discussion and I said, “what are you going to do after that because CDEP only goes for one year so it is not something that you can be on forever?” Then they started talking about drinking. They said, “yeah, I’m going to drink when I finish school”. I said, “ok just say you drank for a year then you finally stop, and woke up to yourself, then what are you going to do?” (T4, FI, 2006, p. 9).

As well Taj was concerned that the Football Academy seemed to be giving the students a false sense of hope, “the students have this notion they think sport can take them places but for the majority of them it won’t and that’s something that’s got to change, that attitude. I mean football is an avenue and should be an avenue for them to get their education but right now it has been put up there like football can get you a job, football can get you a car, can get you a house. How many of these kids go from here to AFL? And that’s something I tell them actually that over the last ten years there has been only five AFL players have come out of the College compared to how many students have gone through” (T4, FI, 2006, p. 9). Taj appeared apprehensive that the students were not establishing long term goals they would

afford them a plan should their first preference of playing sport at elite levels not materialise, “a lot of kids, whom we lose along the way, it’s quite sad to see go because after here, where else is there for them to go, and the majority of them end up in jail or either getting a girl pregnant and have a family which is ok if they want to do that. But they are so young. You think what a waste, kind of thing. They could have done something else before they settled down and that’s my thing, I suppose, encouraging them to respect themselves and also realize how important education is. But first the students have to get out of the habit of “shame”. They really need to build the courage and confidence to do things and when they do, I have no doubt they will shine!” (T4, FI, 2006, p. 9).

Researcher’s commentary

From my observations I could see that many of the College staff invested heavily in their students’ wellbeing. They appeared to take the time to spend working with students on the weekend, during the week nights and this allowed a special relationship to build.

Helped by their long term service in the school, the staff knew much background information about the students that allowed them to guide and motivate them to aspire to achieve things that they may not have been able to manage on their own.

Two of the key staff members responsible for engendering positive thinking strategies for students were Bridget McMulkin and Maude Kingston. Bridget stated, “if we are sincere about changing Indigenous perceptions of themselves, it happens from the inside out. “Hey how good are they? They are the oldest living culture in this world, if they can just see this. I say to the kids when they come in, “we call each other by our first names why do you think that is so?” I say, “we are all equal”. This is an Edmund Rice Catholic school and he believed everybody was equal and deserved the same opportunities. It’s almost apologetic. We know you are a down-trodden person because you are Indigenous. That’s a self fulfilling prophecy if ever I heard one. Those of the things that worry me that we are not bringing “being Aboriginal as being Great” really into focus. It’s the old cap in hand, going forward where anything that goes wrong in spite of the fact it might be us that mucked it up, “oh it’s because we are Indigenous”. You say, “no, it is not. It is because *we* didn’t bloody well do right in the first place” (T8, FI, 2007, p. 13).

Maude Kingston concurred with, Bridget, Br. Levi, Japonica, Jane, Sam, Taj, Justine, Cocious and Natalie when she suggested, “I think of the girls, they are young, black, women in Australia. They probably belong to one of the most marginalised groups in Australia. They might not succeed and so we are incumbent to give them all what we can for them to succeed. And it is possible it’s very, very possible for every single one of them” (T10, FI, 2007, p. 13).

Students’ beliefs in the self fulfilling prophecy of shame

The act of self-effacement or shame has the capacity to effectively deny all Australian Aboriginal peoples their rightful place in any given setting, and as a consequence the likelihood of self efficacy is thwarted. To encourage the girls to have a belief in their ability to accomplish a goal, or change a specific behaviour or to have the confidence to overcome a complication was reduced by their apparent choice not to play a part or participate in events and activities. It appeared the sense of shame was inherent in all girls in varying degrees but as they proceeded through the Yorgas Program it also appeared to diminish to a degree.

Ophelia Currawong from the Kimberley suggested, “sometimes I get shame” to which I asked her, “what is shame”? Ophelia tossed her head back and laughed out loud, “I don’t know what it is” she said impishly. When I persisted asking, “is shame a part of your personality?” she replied confidently, “yep”. I pushed on and asked, “well where did you get it from?” she looked at me incredulously and replied with a submissive sigh, “must be back at home” (S2, FI, 2007, p. 5).

Akita Capote student agreed with Ophelia that she too had brought shame with her from home but had become cognisant of shame’s capacity to get in the way of what she wanted to achieve, she said, “when I went back home to Broome I was talking and I didn’t have no shame, no shyness, no nothing and all my friends just looked at me and said you have got more confidence in yourself now and I do believe in myself now” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Mardi Karina said in her previous school she had allowed shame to prevent her from participating even though she knew she was good at things, “like in Year 8 I failed probably the whole year of Physical Education because I was too shame

because I was the only Aboriginal girl among all the Wadjella's and I was really shame and I didn't want to do no sport. Even though I would think in my head I knew and would say, "I could do that or I can do that" as I am good at most of my sport but, just too shame" (S7, FI, 2007, p. 5). She then clarified how she was feeling in her current setting at the College as a member of the Yorgas Program and being involved in the program led by Natalie, "I guess Senior Women's Basketball League (SBL) has probably changed my shameness because when I first went to try out I was very shame because there was heaps of girls there and now I am in the starting five for nearly every week in Natalie's team. So that helped heaps because I was shame, but I had to get over it and get on with the game" (S7, FI, 2007, p. 5). Mardi gained full time employment where it was reported she confidently communicates with a range of customers.

Researcher's commentary

While none of the girls would explain where shame came from, all of them had a genuine understanding of how it was capable of reducing their choices hence firmly disenfranchising them. Even 2006 Dux of the College Julia Yagan recognised that she had to stop depriving herself of potential opportunities by disallowing this sense of shame. Kate Diamond Head Girl 2006 made a similar comment, as did Mardi Karina, who now plays SBL and fulfilled her childhood goal to travel to the United States of America to play basketball.

Julia Yagan spoke about the influence shame appeared to have had on her family and friends. She reasoned that she had not felt entirely infused by it but rather experienced it only in new situations or in settings where she was unsure of herself. When I asked her, "do you think shame stops a lot of Aboriginal people from learning?" she replied, "yeah, like everyone feels shame" (Julia laughed). When I asked Julia, "where is shame from?" her response was similar to Ophelia's open mouth loud laugh, she replied disbelievingly, "what?" as if she had not heard the question correctly. I asked, "where's shame from and how did it come to be such a big part of your life?" Julia replied in an earnest tone, "I think people are just like shame because like if they say the wrong thing everyone will laugh at them or whatever". I asked her, "Julia how come you're not out there saying shame?" she answered quickly, "well I am shame". I persisted and pressed on asking, "but you seem to put it aside?", "yeah I know, yeah I know, like no one else will get up and do

stuff you know so I just do it, just do it, like just to show the other kids it's not shame but I feel that it is shame but I try not to show it" (S1, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Julia explained that every year she knew no one else would do any of the organising beside Kate Diamond so she resigned herself to the fact it was going to be her job to delegate and get others involved. She supported this by saying, "I managed to get Madie to do a Reading at the Mass. I said, "Madie you should do it, like it's only going to be the school". She said, "the school!" I said, "it's only every one we hang around with and its only little Year 10's and 11's" and she said, "well ok but don't laugh". I said, "we not going to laugh at you we wouldn't want to be laughed at" so she got up and read on the day" (S1, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Julia appeared indifferent with her ability to motivate others to occasionally overcome their shame and said, "most of the girls I hang around with they say shame all the time and if you do something good like in your work, people go like "you brainy" or say like "you flash" cause you know just how to do it, you know. Like Jilli, like in Math's if she gets the answer right they say "ah you flash" and she gets all shame and doesn't answer another question. I used to be like that or kinda still am today cause you know how I got the Dux Award (I smiled at her and replied, "yes I did know that") (Julia laughed) narr but shame. And at my old school even the Wadjella's had respect for me and one of the quotes that the teachers did at our graduation ceremony was "whenever Julia said, "jump," they would say "how high?" (S1, FI, 2006, p. 8).

Julia elaborated on how events throughout the Yorgas Program had offered the opportunity for the girls to be involved in activities that many of them never thought they would ever do such as; accompanying Coach Reed Graceland to the VIP lounge of significant events or travelling to Sydney and the United States of America. She suggested, "if shame is going to stop you like the people won't see the real you, you won't have a voice, you won't talk. How can you get anywhere 'cause you have to go and talk to everyone, all the jobs now involves people kind of thing and you have to talk. You gotta get over it. I said to Julia, "famous last words "gotta get over it" I am going to hold you to that". I leaned forward into the microphone mimicking

Julia's voice and said slowly "Julia says you gotta get over it unna" (Julia laughed) (S1, FI, 2006, p. 13).

A part from Julia Yagan, Kate Diamond was the only other student during the period of my immersion that had not hesitated to assist staff and consistently showed initiative to get things done. Kate appeared blasé, "I always knew that me and Julia would be the only ones that go on to work or something. It's about commitment (laughed) I used to be committed to the Basketball Academy so and that is how I am to work I think. Just knowing that I have to be something not just sitting at home, do nothing. I like to do things on my own and not rely on anyone else. I don't want to have my mum in my ear all the time telling me to get a job. As soon as I finished school I looked for a job. It's going to happen or it had to happen anyway so you might as well start early and I couldn't just sit at home and do nothing and just rely on other people to give me money, it is just not the sort of person I am" (S9, FI, 2007, p. 8). Kate had gained full time employment at the Medical Centre in Broome as soon as she had returned home. Not long after she was encouraged to take on a position with higher duties, more responsibilities and the option to continue with formal studies at university.

Researcher's commentary

Over the duration of their time at the College the transformation in attitude and outlook in some of the girls had been significant. I believed for many it had changed their lives. The Yorgas Program appeared to meet their unfolding needs and it was interesting for me to see how admirably the elders guided the young girls towards making some life affirming decisions about how they could then go on and live their lives once they graduated from the College.

The final theme examined where the Yorgas "go from here" and what have they done since they graduated or left the College and the Girls' Academy program.

Empowering young women: where to from here?

Over the course of the year the girls were invited to actively participate in a range of corporate breakfasts, the Rotary International Conference, country clinics and school visits, Freehills Mentoring and Leadership Programs, workshops, lunches to list a few. In December the girls travelled to the United States of America and toured

California, Texas and Oklahoma and during this tour they continued to develop their playing, leadership and communicative skills presenting their stories to a range of American audiences.

Liaison officer Justine Hope reiterated that in her role as senior elder at the College she felt beholden to inculcate in the girls a strong sense of self resiliency and efficacy, and disclosed ways how personal development was infused into the Yorgas Program, “to me, empowering our young women is something I think that we at the College have the ability to do because of our unique situation of our school. I know every single girl that’s in this room will go back to whichever country town or whichever community that they come from will have some sort of impact in those areas. I think getting them those skills while there’re here, breaking some of those cycles will benefit them in the long run. The empowerment of our girls is something that’s so powerful to us. We have a female group of teaching staff that are really keen to provide the girls as much ammunition as they possibly can take away with them. To be able to go back to their hometown and communities and say, “this is what I’ve learnt. This is what I want to see for the next generation of kids that are coming through. The vicious cycle of things that mainly our Indigenous kids are facing-domestic violence, alcohol, substance abuse, sexual violence and all sort so things like that I really feel that educators in our schools are especially in this school. We have the opportunity to empower ourselves, to have a voice in breaking that cycle and to giving women the resources to go back and deliver this message. Giving them the status of a role model that goes back into their remote communities that the younger kids can look at, appreciate, beautiful young Indigenous girl walking around the community who hold up their heads and say I’ve just come back from the city and I’ve been to school, I’ve got my graduation and some girls will go onto university” (T1, FI, 2006, p. 7).

Coach Reed Graceland endorsed Justine’s optimism for the girls’ future and commented retrospectively that the Yorgas Program had been a monumental influence in their lives and future choices. “I would like to think that the girls have more self-confidence. I like to think that the girls appreciate what they put into something they get out of because they have probably put more into this Academy than they have anything in their lives. And they have actually got quite a bit out of

this. They finished third in the state this year. They won the private school competition. But in the whole state every high school in the state of WA we finished third. I think they understand that they are just as capable as any other person and that's something that I hope they will carry over all the attributes they have learned in our Academy into their lives. And that's been the whole message all along" (S2, FI, 2006, p. 8).

The Girls' Academy – where are they now?

I trailed the nine girls for two years observing them develop into confident young women well equipped to face their uncertain futures. Likewise I observed the conceptual seed of the Girls' Academy bloom and flourish into a nationally recognised program. The story of the program's success is pictorially documented upon the walls of the Girls' Academy, gilder-framed photographs of smiling, excited young women, images ranging from playing basketball in flash uniforms in large Sydney stadiums to happily pitching snowballs at one another in the United States of America. Walking through the silent College corridors after the last of the girls had left to go back to their home for Christmas, I was reminded of a tyre company advertisement on television that says, "if the tyres save just one life, then it's a good year!". That's how I felt about the Yorgas Program.

The students

Kate Diamond graduated Year 12 in 2006. Kate was employed as soon as she returned home to the Kimberley, learning how to do bookkeeping. She said she didn't like it at first because she was only a trainee but now she had moved up and was doing a different job. The manager had asked her if she wanted to become the trainee for the accounts and she said she was thinking, "oh, I hated maths" and I don't like anything to do with numbers but it is not really anything like that. You have a calculator anyway! It is really interesting and I like everything about it so I wouldn't mind doing accounting at uni even. I am coming down from Broome to Perth to live in 2009" (S9, FI, 2007, p. 9).

Julia Yagan graduated Year 12 in 2006. Julia enrolled to study Journalism at Curtin University in 2008. Julia said that the Aboriginal Bridging Course at Curtin University was too easy and she was really keen to get into mainstream studies. I

wondered if she had sat her exams how she could have gone straight in with the Special Tertiary Admissions Test. Julia is currently a tutor at the College and is also a mentor in the Girls' Academy.

Akita Capote graduated Year 12 in 2006. She said, “they keep asking me what I am going to do with my future life. I tell them that I am doing Child Care for half a year and the other half I am moving to Sydney for a dance program and if I get famous I will come back to this school and recognize all the people who supported me and all that. Angelica helped me know about the Dance Company at ECU but then one of the girls that used to come here, Matilda Seine, she told me that there is a dance company in Sydney and she met that person and she told them about me and who I was and how I loved to dance and how I wanted to get the opportunity to become a professional dancer so I am going to take that up and move to Sydney. I just want (Angelica laughed) to have a future for me instead of sitting around doing nothing like drinking, smoking. I don't want none of that, I don't want that in my life. I want to get my life sorted out before I can go partying and all of that” (S5, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Primrose Ménage graduated Year 12 in 2006. She said, “I have got a job and everything lined up but I want to take a year off. I am going to be studying, going to the uni at Broome and do the teaching degree. I want to do it but like I just want to work in an office somewhere like a simple easy job but everyone says go for teaching. I don't know I guess teaching is alright. So I will go home to TAFE or I might come back down here or go to Sydney with Akita. I don't really know yet I haven't really thought of that. Spend time with my family. Get back into the routine of kicking back looking after my little nephews and nieces” (S6, FI, 2007, p. 4).

Mardi Karina graduated Year 12 in 2007. She was employed in Customer Services with Australia Post but now works in a local pharmacy.

Neroli Anathi graduated Year 12 in 2007. Her 2008/9 activities were not known.

Kia Collins did not graduate in 2007. She stopped attending school in Term 4 and did not complete all her assessments.

Cajun Namma graduated Year 12 in 2008. She travelled to the United States to play basketball and conducted speaking presentations.

Ophelia Currawong returned to her community in the Kimberley and did not return to the College to complete her studies.

Researcher's commentary

When I first interviewed Ophelia I asked her about what she would like to do when she graduated. Her intent was, "Well really when I grow up I would like to be a nurse or a health worker or something like that back in my community" (S2, FI, 2007, p. 8). I felt sad and wondered if Ophelia had not had the opportunity to return due to a lack of funds. She seemed to me to be the one girl who really appeared to have a plan to go on with her studies and return to her community to be as helpful as possible.

The staff

Principal Ted Cooder remained in this position for 2009. Reed Graceland continued in his position as Chief Executive Officer Role Models WA and Head Coach of the Girls' Academy. Aboriginal liaison officer Justine Hope continued in her position now into her 19th year at the College. Physical Education Teacher Natalie Hendricks resigned her position with the Catholic Education Office to take up the role of Coordinator of the Girls' Academy in 2008. Natalie remained in this position in 2009. Physical Education Teacher Taj Hay took Leave without Pay for twelve months in 2007 to travel overseas and returned to the College in 2008 and is now employed at the College on a part time basis. English Teacher Sam Baker remained at the College. Head Librarian Jane Melville remained at the College. Assistant Principal Dean Whitley transferred to another CBC Secondary Aboriginal College in the country as Principal in 2008 and remains in the position for 2009. School Psychologist Bridget McMulkin was replaced by the substantive member of staff returning from her Maternity Leave in 2008. She returned to her hometown in 2008/9. Year Coordinator Japonica Mulder transferred to the same CBC Secondary College as Dean Whitley and remains there for 2009. Br. Levi Nummas Driving Instructor and Mentor remained in this position at the College for 2009. Retention

and Participation Support Teacher Maude Kingston did not have her contract renewed to teach at the College in 2009. Beliefs and Values Teacher Angelica De Soul did not have her contract renewed to teach at the College in 2009. Girls' Academy Program Manager Cocious Lido did not have her contract renewed in 2009. Girls' Academy Program Director, Mentor and Role Model, Gerry Player, passed away on the 21st September 2008. Saddened by the loss, the Girls' Academy Aspiring Role Model Award has been named in his honour.

The Yorgas Program

The Yorgas Program continued to be developed by Program Manager Natalie Hendricks. Two development officers assisted with the daily implementation of the program with the wider College staff. Visiting expert and specialists worked in conjunction with the Academy staff to incorporate an integrated approach. A further explanation of the Yorgas Program will be provided in Chapter 9.

Chapter summary

Chapter 8 provided the opportunity to gaze deeply at the words and actions of the participants and then sort them into emerging themes. The data in terms of the number of participants, demographical background information and ethical considerations represented the milieu in which the Girls' Academy was embedded and examined the impact of such a program on both the staff and student participants.

Chapter 9 provides a description of events as I ask myself the question what did I set out to do and did I manage to achieve it. It will report on the current status of the Girls' Academy and document what the future holds for the program. I will suggest recommendations since there are certain things that I have not managed to pursue during this study.

Chapter 9 – A Place to Begin – From Little Things Big Things Grow (Kelly & Carmody, 1991)

The purpose of this chapter is to pull together the loose ends and tuck away the last of the unfastened threads that in the fullness of time have been embroidered carefully into a yarn, into the telling of the story, about a program that over the course of its life provided inspiration for a group of at risk adolescent Aboriginal girls. As well I turn my attention to how I evolved as a researcher, how I made sense of the multiple and competing discourses I experienced, reflecting upon my own subjectivity to write about the reflexivity of the research processes, and how the experience of trailing these students changed and shaped me. Richardson (2000) refers to this as understanding ourselves reflexively so that writing is a method of inquiry, “not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project but a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 923).

The chapter is structured as a summary; I re-visit the research questions and discuss the findings in light of the current literature. Also as a result of detailing the Girls’ Academy and the Yorgas Program, what it achieved and where it hopes to grow from here, I re-visit Djarragun College, the secondary Aboriginal school which I referred to in Chapter 4, also a recipient of the Sporting Chance grant. I suggest this with the view that should the Girls’ Academy attract future on-going funding, this could possibly be a College to emulate, as it is further along in its emergent, culturally-engaging educational program, boarding and sporting facilities. Furthermore I explore developments at the national level to raise consciousness and to provide organisations with strategies to understand the processes that lead to actioning cultural competency and its attendant pathway towards a place to begin indigenising the curriculum.

Returning to the research questions

Revisiting Research Question 1 in which I asked about how my upbringing and my experiences have influenced and shaped my professional, pedagogical and research practise, I am surprised to find myself in a sombre mood, writing the final chapter with a heavy heart. Up until now writing this dissertation had been doused with brightness, as positions and opinions were revealed, smouldering disclosures bared

and it seemed that I wrote new things daily about the extraordinary opportunity it was to “hang out” with the girls and track their lives. Now in back-tracking to glean the research questions from the study I find myself re-reading their words which instantaneously generates vivid images of our first meeting on that cold day in July and their nonchalant disregard for me to images on retreat where we all swam in the sea, by the reef, where I draped long strands of kelp over my head and danced the hula while Justine and Natalie impersonated sirens. Or the day before the 2007 graduation, watching the girls who had become names not just faces, personalities not just participants, rehearsing in their garb as I balanced precariously on a 10 foot ladder to hang stars from the hall ceiling, one for each girl, so proud of each of them, so wanting for their lives to be inclusive in the wealth of human endeavour and creativity, so much I wanted to say, to praise them for their resilience. I was happy. It occurred to me that I hadn’t been happy for some time and I was glad that I was glad again... memory embedded, lived, shared. I understood why I had wanted to write this thesis, to continue to pursue the urgency to insist Aboriginal girls must not be left out, marginalised and rendered invisible.

Ruth Behar (2003) talked about struggling to express who she had become while undertaking her PhD journey and how her work was a struggle to teach other women to make the changes, to liberate learning into what it is. I knew based on my own life experience that these Year 12 girls, “swanning around in their gowns” below me, would be leaving the college filled with aspiration and possibility, but would walk straight into a world of suspicion and uncertainty. I wanted this thesis to be one of their reasons for not quitting, I wanted to will upon them that they had been instrumental in the success of the Yorgas Program, that they had influenced the younger girls coming up to consciously commit to staying at school, proud to be black, strong and deadly.

Reflecting back I thought by completing a PhD and providing firm evidence demonstrating great injustices that blight the chance for success in Aboriginal education in Australia, that my research would somehow be added to the profound body of knowledge that already existed and all of this would ignite sweeping reform. But as the years have passed so has my naivety. I am too tired to willow my words, exhausted from the endless search for seeking new ways of knowing; my scholarly

endeavour has taught me one significant lesson, I know enough to know that I know very little, ironically similar to the Greek Athenian philosopher Socrates, who insisted, “I know that I know nothing”. I am worn down by all of this, sick of the continuous lack of money being a student and studying brings with it, scrimping and saving to feed my kids, the ongoing homesickness, moving house five times in as many years, the ambiguity of the research sites, and the angst of being the confused researcher.

There were several times when I wanted to quit. I knew I had the passion but not the academic knowledge and I knew that I didn't know how to write like the academic texts I was reading. Finally I heeded to Naomi Littlebear's warning, "...complacency is a far more dangerous attitude than outrage" (Littlebear, 1977, p. 36), so the fuel that fed the last of the remaining coals in my fire, was to imagine that I was writing to all the women of the world, calling on them to help me get through this adversity, without faulting, so that these young outspoken responsible girls at school could get their yarn told in the form of this dissertation. This was my inimitable pledge to Jara Amarda, to Jean Illingworth, to Justine Hope, to Cocious Lido, to all those mothers and aunties who have continued to struggle for culturally-sensitive educational pathways for Aboriginal girls. Here it is, this is the girls' story, and as well here is my story – intricately and deeply interwoven, the intertwining of voices.

As I mentioned in the chapter 3 being the youngest of eleven siblings often left me feeling that through some sort of ontological osmosis I had managed to absorb some of their collective knowledges and experiences. The way I seemed to gain this was through watching them, listening to them, mimicking them. Likewise knowing there would always be a pair of eyes watching me, gave me the ability to take risks and challenge myself to do tasks often outside my ability range. By the time I got to primary school I remember thinking why my six year old peers didn't appear to know anything, only to appreciate that a house with four adult brothers and six sisters, ranging in ages by fifteen years, was quite dissimilar to most homes. The various timetables and personal rhythms of the thirteen habitants, and more if we had boarders at the time, meant people were coming and going day and night. For us little ones there was no set bath time or bedtime, it was all about self-regulation and

dinnertime was when Mum finally got back from the horse stables. Us three little ones ran our own baths which entailed filling a plastic dish of boiling water from the copper, passing it up and through an open window into the bathroom, it was all about independence and self-reliance.

Consequently when I graduated and first commenced teaching Aboriginal children in Arnhem Land I saw these similar traits again. Malin, Campbell & Agius (1996) in their Adelaide-based ethnographic study examining the implications of different ways of child rearing for children as they adapt to life in classrooms demonstrate in their paper *Raising Children in the Nunga Way* that Aboriginal child raising practices, while they do vary across Australia, are apparently different from Goonya (non-Aboriginal) ways. The article draws from a larger comparative study from two Nunga and two Goonya families and suggests that Aboriginal children are expected to be more independent, self-regulating and self-reliant. Parents tend to use non-intervention strategies, employ selective attention and model apparent equality through mutual respect guiding the children to be “...nurturant, self-sufficient and resourceful” (Malin, Campbell, & Aius, 1996, p. 47). Furthermore the authors suggest the Adelaide study shares similar values and practices with cultures of two Arnhem Land communities as described by Hamilton (1981) and Harris (1984).

I believe that my pedagogical practices strongly influenced by my own childhood experiences which retrospectively appeared to compliment the way many of the students I was teaching appeared to be raised. By recognising this early, as well as listening to my mentors Aunty Jedda and Aunty Constance, I was able to incorporate the student’s innate socio-cultural ways to accommodate their learning, rather than see them as ratty little anarchists who kept messing up my well organised classroom.

The remaining five research questions representing the ethnographic component of this study include the breadth of the views generated from the 24 key respondents at the Aboriginal College. Research Question 2 asked what an effective learning context for Aboriginal secondary girls might look like, and how this context might impact on their ability to learn. Participants’ responses were unanimous on the matter: (1) the students need a place of learning that is homey and safe, (2) decent

food, (3) non-threatening staff, firmly established within the collectiveness of just girls and women, (4) improved resources, (5) respectful superb uniforms, (6) relevant and engaging learning designed around preferred ways of learning; in a relaxed humorous atmosphere, (7) a variation of kinaesthetically, cognitively, visually and auditory engaging tasks, (8) opportunity to share knowledge by working in small groups, (9) learn at a pace conducive to biorhythms and seasons with incorporated permitted “time out” when the need arises. A setting such as this would greatly accommodate the girls desire to engage in learning, establish regular attendance enabling long term retention deferring other less beneficial life choices.

The Research Question 3 follows on from the previous question by asking how the Aboriginal College was accommodating and encouraging Aboriginal learning through its learning environment and pedagogical practices. According to all respondents this was achieved by establishing the Yorgas Program which immediately changed the tenor of the learning environment. Prior to this the school curriculum had been presented in a manner that represented the mainstream Anglo-Celtic didactical teaching style most commonly experienced in the majority of schools delivering WACE outcomes.

These days on entering the Girls’ Academy the visitor is met by physical and visual evidence of the Yorgas Program. One example is the documentation exhibiting the specific goals and expected codes of behaviour. Large, colourful and obvious attendance records show individual students attendance patterns with the goal to stay in the top 80%. Shelves of files containing Girls’ Academy Journals, built-up dossiers of their completed professional development activities, work experience programs, updated Resumes, completed Vocational Education and Training certificates, drafts of future Action Plans focussed on setting short and long term goals, identifying and preparing personal inventories, indicate a real optimism for things to come. Documentation in their dossier included Western Australian Curriculum Council Endorsed Generic Programs.

Also exhibited on the walls of the Girls’ Academy is compelling visual evidence of long term planning and photographic displays of past activities including their trip to the United States of America. Photographs of the girls wearing snow

jackets, boots and beanies, excited laughing faces as they soaked up the intriguing unorthodox experience of coldness, starkly contrasted to the places they call home. Pictures of the girls addressing large audiences or individually speaking to strangers are astounding and by and large ordinarily uncommon in the girls' normal daily experiences. Large colourful photographs feature the girls playing basketball dressed in 'state of the art' uniforms, wearing expensive insignia designed sports shoes. Not only do they look professional, they present the image of successful young women, who appear to know exactly how they want their adult life to play out. These photographic expositions seem to assist the younger and newer students to feel that they too can achieve the Academy's chartered goals, and be rewarded by their active participation as young, outspoken, responsible girls at school.

Other components of the Yorgas Program include advocating a holistic approach to wellbeing included the focus on and the provision of healthy and nutritious food. This is evidenced by way of the Breakfast Program as well as regular workshops in preparing meals using the Traffic Light System, to encourage students to use the five food groups when preparing food. The girls also have access to a visiting Doctor twice a week, reinforcing the ethos of maintaining healthy wellbeing in an integrated approach addressing their physical, mental, social, personal and emotional needs. Similarly, this allows for the appropriate monitoring and managing of any sporting injuries they may have incurred.

When asked more specifically how the Aboriginal College promoted Aboriginal learning through the sports program, respondents seemed to agree that this occurred primarily through establishing Aboriginal places and spaces of learning. Co-coordinated by Aboriginal staff, the program created new relationships in terms of negotiated competency with shared intellectual control with students designed to increase experiential opportunities that generated creative and challenging activities providing a diverse range of ways to experience success. This was achievable since Aboriginal staff had active meaningful roles and were in positions that allowed them clearly to be the drivers in the establishment of the program.

Since its inception the program has shifted significantly, transforming from a specific Basketball Academy to a fully inclusive Girls' Academy. While still headed up by Role Models WA and the Girls' Academy Advisory Committee, the real conduit for this transformation to occur was the conception of the Yorgas Program, and the employment of developmental officers who guided the program at a grass roots level into effect. As the Girls' Academy Program Manager highlighted in Chapter 8, "the Development Officers have put more culturally appropriate and specific Indigenous activities and events that we can actually administer and we have access to our funding to enhance the school program that is currently on offer now and there is certainly a lot more leeway for us to develop and design it" (T13, FI, 2007, p. 2). Linking the academic Aboriginal College program and the Girls' Academy program has been significantly strengthened as well with the appointment of Physical Education Teacher Natalie Hendricks to the role of coordinator of the Girls' Academy. Her professional experience, both nationally and internationally in education, has resulted in the promotion of specific pedagogical strategies and practises.

As a result of the Yorgas Program there appears to be a greater focus on increasing the levels of interaction and communication with both the wider Aboriginal College teaching staff, and the parents of the students who attend the Girls' Academy. This apparent improvement and augmentation of these crucial relationships could be due to the current Coordinator having been previously involved in the Aboriginal College academic program, working closely with individual teachers and getting to know the students personally. Broader community involvement and media exposure detailing what the Academy is doing has also helped improve the Girls' Academy profile. For example, Academy Program Manager Cocious Lido initiated the introduction of an integrated secondary school basketball carnival known as the Yorgas Basketball Classic, now held each year at Belmont Senior High School and has attracted large numbers of teams nominating to participate. Outside of this event the girls continue to actively partake in both private and public secondary school events and have their own bus, sporting the Girls' Academy logo, to reliably transport them to their various commitments.

Research Question 5 inquired into how teachers at the Aboriginal College experienced their teaching milieu in conjunction with the Girls' Academy program. The participants suggested this was achieved by mostly taking active roles in supporting initiatives driven by the Aboriginal staff. These included such things as incorporating into the academic program activities to strengthen social and cultural requirements. Of the fourteen staff interviewed all strongly advocated for the College management to acknowledge the specialness of the student cohort and celebrate their Indigeneity. The longer the staff had taught at the College the greater their concern regarding the irrelevance and the peripheral nature the mainstream curriculum and systems of delivery presented. The advent of the Yorgas Program encouraged teachers to pragmatically meet the students' divergent needs and foster ways of best accommodating previously subjugated epistemologies.

Research Question 6 investigated how students at the Aboriginal College experienced their learning environments and how did they see themselves in the future. From the teachers' perspective, students demonstrated their desire to stay on at school by their improved pattern of attendance, increased levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, noted improvement in; resiliency especially to study commitments, improved general behaviour, consistency in presenting in full school uniform, improved personal hygiene, increased retention rates and drastically increased numbers of Year 12 graduates leading to an increased number of girls moving into full time traineeships and/or further education. The most notable observation was the reduction in the rates of pregnancy. For the first time in the life of girls being at the College, no child left school to have a child. From the students' perspective having the Yorgas Program provided them with improved resources by way of their own room, a bus, impressive uniforms and extra Aboriginal staff to assist them with their academic and sporting needs, extra tutors to assist in the classroom and after school home work classes, extra excursions and engaging activities such as a basketball tour of the United States of America. These experiences resulted in an observable improvement in attitude and behaviour as the girls engaged in activities more willingly, their desire and ability to communicate with a wide range of people deepened, they began to set goals and apply themselves to finalising their studies or applying for jobs, also electing to defer risk-taking behaviour that tended to lead to alcohol and drug abuse. Believing in their own abilities they instigated their own

liberation by applying self regulation, and incrementally transformed their previous belief in the self fulfilling prophecy of shame.

According to the College Registrar enrolments in the program continue to increase and the number of girls attending regularly appears to have stabilised. Having said that there continues to be predictable seasonal patterns of absenteeism pending on community and cultural activities occurring in the homelands. Statistical evidence reveals that by enlarge the majority of students return as soon as it is culturally appropriate to do so. As a result the number of girls graduating from Year 12 has continued to increase, as has the number of graduates moving in to full time employment.

Recent changes and challenges for the Yorgas Program and the Girls' Academy

While there have been some obvious additions into the program the most significant departure has been withdrawing the opportunity for the students to study Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) subjects. Many girls attended the Aboriginal College with the intention to study subjects that would provide academic pathways to further studies. The withdrawal of the TEE subjects will prevent access via direct entry to university. This means girls will have to do a bridging course or attend a specific college that prepares students to sit a special tertiary test which is an extra six to twelve months of study. While such decisions taken by the Aboriginal College executive are determined on an array of factors, the impact of this decision could have real potential to negatively affect the Yorgas Program.

A further factor that challenges the Girls' Academy enrolment statistics is the lack of suitable and conveniently located boarding facilities for regional and remote students. Girls currently boarding still need to travel long distances to access the Aboriginal College and many of the boarding facilities have substandard and unsuitable amenities. Edgar, Idle and Wade Architects in their 2007 report urged that once Christian Brothers handed over the Aboriginal College site to the Nyungar traditional land owners, the construction of boarding facilities was critical, for both the attraction and retention of not only regional and remote students, but for at risk students from metropolitan areas. At this stage according to the Aboriginal College

Campus Coordinator, “the handover is still a year away due to issues arising from complications of establishing boundaries. The boarding facility more than likely will not happen until the handover goes ahead” (C. Lawton, personal communication, June 30, 2009). Having said that, he confirmed that future initiatives continue to undergo further planning and that these additions while having wide reaching consequences for all students, will impact significantly on the Girls’ Academy. In 2010 land clearing commenced at the Aboriginal College for the construction of boarding facilities. Consequently it could be said that the Girls’ Academy and the Yorgas Program are fully operational and now responsibly preparing for the 2011 *Sporting Chance* funding review, that will once again determine if the Yorgas Program has a future.

Giroux (1989) claims in Chapter 4, when the hegemonic discourses that make up the official curriculum of a school has been examined from the perspective of the marginalised and silenced, only then can pedagogy *for* difference emerge. Pedagogy not *for* difference can no longer be a predetermined methodology for teaching students who represent the marginalised and the silenced. As Brady (1994) urges, “...non-Aboriginal Australians need to come to terms with this aspect of our culture and ourselves, that our sense of who we are in relation to the Aborigines is the key myth - to use Levi-Strauss’s term - of our culture” (Brady, 1994, p. 30) . She suggests that the dominant culture of the non-Aboriginal orbits the Others world as though it can function without inclusion, and perhaps conveniently forgets that it was they, the non-Aboriginal who imposed themselves upon the original Other. Brady insists, “racial indifference and Jan Mohamed’s Manichean allegory of colonisation is alive and well, where the polemic opposites remain polarised, white is to black as good is to evil” (Brady, 1994, p. 30) . Whether non-Aboriginal Australian society consciously admits to it or not, Brady argues, post and neo colonising culture inscribes inferiority and distortion and denies the lived experiences and the vital conscious realities of the Other.

According to Bakhtin, for example, it is impossible to conceive our being or even to imagine ourselves to ourselves, much less to others, except through relations which link us to the other. Our culture needs to be decentred verbally and ideologically if we are to break out of the enclosure of our self-sufficiency and become conscious of ourselves in relation to other cultures and languages and thus other ways of being human (Brady, 1994, p. 31).

In an attempt to become more human, one must become more informed. Bhabha (1986) asks, “how can the human world live its difference? How can a human being live Other-wise?” (Bhabha cited in Fanon, 1986, p. xxv)

Meeting the needs of Indigenous learners and communities

Since more and more research supports the salient features of Indigenous epistemologies, schools and their curriculums need to become more inclusive and accommodating working closely with teachers and community members who are cognisant to the epistemologies Aboriginal students bring with them to their learning, and respect them as strengths.

Implications of Aboriginal English for education

Research conducted by Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, & Collard (2004) presents profound educational implications for constructing a curriculum framework which includes Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal vernacular speaking educators to monitor if the students are learning because they can actually identify with what the teacher is saying. Such exchanges produce observable results when the students in a non-threatening environment work with the teaching staff that not only speak the same language but actually apply a similar cultural schema.

Malcolm and Sharifian (2001) in their conference paper *Aspects of Aboriginal English Oral Narrative: An application of cultural schema theory* assert that recurrent patterns and clues in discourse tell us about the speakers underlying cognitive structures and processes that feed and are fed by cultural systems. They believe that Cultural Schema Theory provides an interface where the interplay of language, culture and cognition can be observed. As a consequence humans learn social scripts and conventions by participating in dynamic interactions. The interface or communicative tool allows potential misunderstandings to be correctly interpreted since they share the fundamental meanings, is language. When members of the same community interact, widely shared representations in a community are more likely to be used in message construction and message comprehension. Subsequently language is continuously changing and evolving and while conventional symbols and codes that are consistently repeated, in turn become embedded in, and belong to a culture, so do newly established shared representations. In order to belong

individuals adopt and exhibit the narratives that surround them. The groups narrative organise the thought of its members, specifying the categories of their perceptions especially perceptions regarding persons and all these elements exist in a web or schema of related concepts.

Consequently there are far reaching implications narrative differences have on pedagogical practices and further research has shown that cultural schemas may not only reflect experience, but also include cultural specific ways of organizing thought, text and language. For example:

Sharifian (2002b) working with Western Australian primary school students, used a list of everyday words such as ‘family’, ‘home’, ‘fun’, ‘people’, and ‘story’ to get responses from Aboriginal children. He found that the children’s responses frequently showed the culture-specific obligations and responsibilities associate with kinship among Aboriginal people demonstration evidence of the schema triggered by these words (Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, & Collard, 2004, p. 9).

This socio-historical link can also apply to the way students greet each other or interact using their relational name as opposed to their personal name, since their conversation will be established on the basis of how they are related to each other. Likewise the time frame in which the conversation occurs will not be judged by non-Indigenous time frames of chronology through hours and days, but rather via the contextual clues embedded in the telling for example, “a long time after that big rain came and broke the bridge, your grandmother...”. By doing it this way, communication is continuous and generally directed to the group rather than to the individual and as a consequence the non-dyadic or communal patterns of discourse is the sharing of knowledge since, “most of the time everyone knows what others are doing...” (Sansom, 1980, p. 103). Customarily Aboriginal culture is therefore a ‘high-context’ culture and consequently different assumptions are made as to the amount of information a verbal or written message carries. Maley (1980) claims much information in such societies may be implicit and may be transmitted as ambiguous and fragmentary clues.

Sharifian, Rochecouste, Malcolm, Konigsberg, and Collard, (2004) in their publication *Improving Understanding of Aboriginal Literacy: Factors in Text Comprehension* agree based on the outcomes of their research and write that little is

known about exactly how much is understood when speakers of Standard Australian English (SAE) listen to speakers of Aboriginal English (AE). The focus of their research identifies ways in which non Aboriginal people drew on their own experiential knowledge when they did not have the necessary cultural knowledge to understand a set of Aboriginal texts. For example:

Stories in SAE tend to exhibit explicit connectives and the linear sequencing of events whereas in Aboriginal English narratives ellipsis (leaving out repeated words or phrases) is frequent to avoid redundancy and the need for the sequential ordering of events is not as necessary because the Aboriginal listeners tend to draw on their shared conceptual knowledge or cultural schema of how such events are likely to occur in their experience (Sharifian et al., 2004, p. 5).

Pawley (1991) applies a similar study in the New Guinea Highlands and claims that, “there is difficulty in directly translating the two languages as they have developed different conceptual formulas, different ways of talking about their worlds” (as cited in Sharifian et al., 2004, p. 7). Therefore the capacity for translation relies extensively on the ability to possess the requisite cultural schema and the ability to match conceptual formulas of the languages. Sharifian (2001) calls this “minimal discourse” and attributes this feature of AE to a cognitive tendency that he terms “minimal verbal processing”, “in minimal verbal processing certain memory ‘nodes’ that are activated in the mind of the speaker are not processed for verbal production. This tendency may be attributed to the assumption of shared schemas between the interlocutors” (Sharifian, 2001, p. 16).

He takes this claim further saying Aboriginal English (AE) speaker may not rely very much on the typically Anglo-Celtic manner of using chronological sequencing of the events in their narratives. Instead in AE narratives, elements may be ordered according to their importance among the schemas in the mind of the speaker. For example, categories of ‘tense’ are not distinguishable in the Indigenous worldview of the Dreaming, just as culture specific obligations and rich personal knowledge of the responsibilities associated with kinship, are seldom developed in Anglo-Celtic literal discourse forms. Since AE discourse does not always conform to SAE and as a result, “non-Aboriginal listeners can have difficulty maintaining the thread of a narrative which may be quite clear to an Aboriginal listener” (Sharifian et al., 2004, p. 7) while these anomalies are, “...resulting from linking via mental

representations of how things occur in a particular society (conceptual schema) rather than by particular words in the text” (Sharifian et al., 2004, p. 7). Sharifian believes that:

In Aboriginal English discourse, sometimes referential devices such as demonstratives reveal no ‘anaphoric’ or ‘cataphoric’ referencing functions. It seems that these devices retrieve their antecedents from schemas activated or images evoked – depending on canonical the situation is - in the mind of the speaker, rather than the discourse preceding or following their reference (i.e. Linguistic context) (Sharifian, 2001, p. 129).

For Indigenous learners it appears that group processes and interpersonal interactions, both formal and informal, are critical to the satisfaction that is derived when learning hence learning becomes not merely for the acquisition of information. I return to the writings of Shore (1988) whom I referred to in Chapter 2 and her claim how Indigenous identity as a personal and social context is shaped by historical influences. Social and group processes and family pressures can determine the range of options Indigenous students perceive available to them, consequently this influences how students articulate their educational needs. Further, Shore reinforces this view by asserting, “... if we perceive literacy to be a function of language and our language as a means of defining our reality then, as a consequence of this, culture and the way we perceive culture will shape our perception of the literacy process and its purpose” (Shore, 1988, p. 9). Much literature specifically about “practice” in Aboriginal education focuses on questions related to culture and culture appropriateness. Boughton & Durnam (1997) suggest Aboriginal people have their own specific “learning styles” or preferred ways of learning; that personal relationships are crucial; and that people have very different attitudes to knowledge and its transfer from non-Aboriginal styles of educational philosophy. Equally Ah Chee, Beetson and Boughton (1997) in their paper *Indigenous Peoples’ Education Rights in Australia* presented to the Indigenous Rights, Political Theory and the Reshaping of Institutions Conference advocate:

Educators have long been aware that culture and identity are central to learning. To deny someone’s identity is to deny them their right to learn from within their own experience, their own culture, their right to read the world, from within one’s own framework, rather than one imposed from the outside” <http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au>.

Similarly Partington (1998) claims education is the principal border along which the Indigenous culture and the dominant culture meet and it is marked by rejection and oppression. It should be possible for Indigenous students to participate and succeed in education at the same time retain their own culture and language rather than having to adopt the values and pursue characteristics of the dominant society. In better understanding how students transfer new knowledge into their existing cultural framework or ways of knowing, can provide educators the opportunity to specifically create a milieu that is conducive to learning. Currently the education and training model seems to neither have a propensity to be adapted to, nor encourages accommodating Indigenous students' socio-cultural backgrounds. When students are encouraged to see their own world through their belief system that underlies that world or that their prior knowledge is sanctioned in the milieu of mutual respect, a greater awareness for self-improvement suddenly becomes possible.

Feminist Indigenous epistemologies of resistance

Epistemologies of resistance frame the real prescience of this inquiry seeking culturally-sensitive educational pathways for girls and the desire to expose the ubiquitous inequitable indifference that has been historically perpetrated on many Indigenous parents when they voiced how they wanted their children taught, but were systematically silenced. On this dark wretched journey to source evidence to substantiate to the offending recalcitrant authorities of their great injustices particularly in terms of the education of Indigenous girls, has serendipitously lead to me the resplendent w[ritings] of Indigenous women. The following statement attributed to Lily Walker, an Australian Aboriginal woman leader who declared, “if you are here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let's begin” (as cited in McMeniman, 1999). This journey by women towards collaborative emancipation has been constantly sabotaged by larger ideological global struggles, between capitalism and socialism and equally destructive have been the oppressive regimes of imperialism, elitism, racism and sexism. Already political, dissenting Indigenous women recognise the ‘sheep in wolves’ clothing’ of multinational capitalism and they have learnt its sly approach as it insidiously morphs into popular cultural forms, to lure their young impressionable Indigenous peoples into its destructive lair to de-

indigenize them. Now it appears that the mothers are fighting back and communities of consciousness are reclaiming the uniqueness's about their Indigenous way of life and how vital it is to their survival as a peoples'.

As a consequent there has been an emergence of Indigenous voice flowing into Indigenous writings and pedagogies which are, “informed, in varying and contested ways, by decolonizing, revolutionary, and socialist feminisms. Such feminisms, in turn, address issue of social justice, equal rights, and nationalisms, of “every racial, ethnic, gender, sex, class, religion, or loyalist type” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 7)” (Denzin, 2005, p. 943). These influences have evolved into a call for the creation of a transborder participatory democracy encompassed within a people-centred global society, “underlying each indigenist formation is a commitment to moral praxis, to issue of self determination, empowerment, healing, community solidarity, respect for the earth, and respect for elders” (Denzin, 2005, p. 943). The contribution of women to ensure these issues stay centre stage has been significant as has the prolific production of documentation to ensure that the memory of the destruction is not able to be whitewashed. As with significant others (Moraga, 1993; Morales, 1993; hooks, 2000; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1997; Randall, 1993; Lorde, 1983; Hong Kingston, 1977) this too has been the work of Gloria Anzaldúa.

Anzaldúa makes it clear from the start that racism is not necessarily a white phenomenon and casting stones is not the solution, but rather asks, “how many times before the cock crows do we deny ourselves, shake off our dreams, and trample them into the sand?” (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 207). She writes how exhausting it was to break free of her Chicano culture and all of its suffocating cultural bias and how much easier it was to simply repeat the inherited patterns of fear and attitudes of submissiveness and compliance. Writing her narrative to share with other subjugated women became a hugely cathartic experience, her words like gunpowder, only needed the smallest provocation to ignite her rage, “slowly I unbowed my head, refused my estate and began to challenge the way things were. But it has taken over thirty years to unlearn the belief instilled in me that white is better than brown-something that people of color will *never* unlearn” (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 202).

While her inner strengths may have allowed her to deal with the plethora of prejudices and though they “may have raked my skin like spurs” what Anzaldúa refused to surrender, was the potential loss of her language. She could see that the relentless destructive presence of transnational capitalism with its asymmetrical power relations and its silencing institutions was a subversive strategy towards sabotaging her very cultural existence by repressing her voice, and then speaking for her. Feminism may have made some enhancements as the liberating ideology for many white Anglo-Celtic women, however for many black women, “Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimised by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually-women who are powerless to change their condition of life” (hooks, 2000, p. 1). The central tenet of modern feminism established on the mantra “all women are oppressed” neglected to see in the midst of forging a common bond of sisterhood solidarity, was that in reality, while all women are oppressed, some are oppressed more than others. Regardless of how empathetic white women seemed to be according to hooks (2000) their perspective remained one dimensional and the black women’s cause could be heard only if their statements echoed the sentiments of the dominant discourse.

What I mind is the pseudo-liberal ones who suffer from the white woman’s burden. Like the monkey in the Sufi story, who upon seeing a fish in the water rushes to rescue it from drowning by carrying it up into the branches of a tree. She attempts to talk for us-what a presumption! This act is a rape of our tongue and our acquiescence is a complicity to that rape. We women of color have to stop being modern medusas-throats cut, silenced into a mere hissing (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 206).

What Anzaldúa has done is lead a revolution of women writers to fuse their personal every day experiences with the social realities of their unique lives. She has lead by example, raising her voice to dare others to follow. Employing interpretive strategies women perform culture as they write it, writing deeply personal narratives that fit in all their needs, all their dialects and all their languages that embraces all their oral traditions and lived histories, powerfully validating their existence as valuable human beings. The genies’ out of the bottle, resistance writing has spawned resistance pedagogy, submerged subaltern parents have emerged to lead their children towards a way of learning and living that venerates their epistemologies. Their provocation has contributed to a broader awareness critical for evolving and establishing the

value of ideas that are embedded in the conviction that education has to be deeply rooted in the respect for people and their relationships with their community, culture and each other. Further, to advocate that education is a public asset not a private investment (Giroux, 1992), and that through education people can transform their existence by gaining a deeper sense of consciousness, or by gaining, “alternate ways of knowing that synthesize reflection with action to create subversive knowledge systems that challenge the status quo” (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 5). This resonates with Gramsci’s call to broaden the notion of education by seeing all of society as a vast school since, “any pedagogy that acts in the service of only one outcome generally constitutes a form of terrorism” (Giroux, 1992, p. 288), and until we work towards this end, as black lesbian mother warrior poet Audre Lorde so glibly attests, “...the masters tools will never dismantle the master’s house”.

An Australian context

An example of establishing a place and space of learning conducive to Indigenous epistemologies, led by parents and visionary Principal who advocated resistance pedagogy, coupled with the desire to create a concomitant context where the human world and the “Other” appear to live its difference, is the Aboriginal secondary school of Djarragun College in Far North Queensland.

Accommodating a curriculum for difference at Djarragun College

Once a secondary Aboriginal school run by the Assembly of God Church, the College lead by a non-teacher Principal allegedly elected his non-teaching family into key positions within the school. Also allegedly, midst huge corruption, the family purportedly siphoned off school monies to supposedly pay for holidays on their school-funded 56’ ocean going yacht. Closed and re-opened under the auspices of the Anglican Church, the current Principal of Djarragun College asserts “some of the classrooms were just dark holes, no light, no air conditioning, no resources; they claimed that there were 180 students enrolled but only 66 turned up. Kids would come to school drunk, dealing drugs” (J. Illingworth, personal communication, June 15, 2005). When asked about the amenities her reply was, “the office was a caravan out on the road. It was a heavy rainy season; it was a swamp, a sea of mud. It was as if I had just walked into a lunatic asylum” (J. Illingworth, personal communication,

June 15, 2005). When asked why someone would bother to repair such a school, her response was:

I draw on my experiences from Africa where education is so highly valued and prized by Africans. You never walk into a dysfunctional school. For me it was a new phenomenon to find such things, and to find teachers who were not motivated and kids who were so disrespectful of the education being offered. I had to sack a whole lot of people to start with, which was awful and I made lots of enemies, got called that “South African witch”. I felt like saying “excuse me Zimbabwean!”

I just kept chipping away at the edges and my Board told me to employ some people I knew I could trust and rely on. And then the first thing we focussed on was behaviour, then numeracy and literacy, then putting support in place asking students what *they* needed and wanted and then acting on it. We then put in a strong pastoral care program, again by listening to the students like the boarders. We just had a hand full of boarders in those days and they complained about the food. We asked what kind of food they wanted to eat and immediately we put that food into place. We kept working step by step *always* coming back to the needs of the kids (J. Illingworth, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Reconciliation leads to reformation

The key to Djarragun College’s success is clearly documented. The growth in enrolments is a direct link to the faith of the parents in the school. Parental involvement in the College is vastly significant and visible and the Parental Advisory Group is active and emancipatory. Most notably each member of the College staff has been specially selected. Both parents and staff are provided continuous professional development and are savvy with the programs operating within the College. The Djarragun College zero tolerance on bullying is based on Freerk Ykema’s Rock and Water Program. This psycho-physical program includes physical exercise, non-intrusive self-defence, role-play and debriefs, strategies to assist students to learn to manage their emotions when dealing with anger and aggression. Linked to teaching the Rock and Water Program is a Values Education Program which teaches the students about the virtues of kindness, generosity, courage and respect. Whilst the origins come from the Baha’i Faith, the program does not have a religious focus.

The College also has developed multiple literacies in response to the levels where the students are operating from. One of the main strategies used is the United

Kingdom phonics based program known as Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS). The school introduced Years 13, 14 and 15 for graduates who did not find employment and wanted to continue with more training. Djarragun College has established traineeships and school base apprenticeships currently boasting their own hair dressing salon, coffee shop, motor mechanics workshop, attracting fee paying clients. Recently the multinational communications company CISCO Systems, in partnership with Telstra, donated and installed over a million dollars of communications hardware in its information technology network with wireless points throughout the campus. Djarragun College now has over 600 primary and secondary students enrolled, with over 100 boarders.

Dare to dream

If given similar support, the Aboriginal College and the Yorgas Program could very well emulate Djarragun College as documented by the 7:30 Report on ABC television <http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2009/04/28/2555264.htm> Djarragun College activated Indigeneity, through a intuitive eclectic collection of influences, parental views, animistic and mythopoetic practises and other social liberationist principles, specifically in an effort to bring into being young citizens able to be more sustainable, able to ignite a transformation in their *own* human psyche, “black fella, white fella, yella fella, any fella, doesn’t matter what ya colour, as long as you a true fella” (Warumpi Band, 1985) their message to the wider community; if it happened in this place, it can happen in *any* place.

Implementing cultural competency

So how in post-modern discourse do we become conscious of ourselves in relation to other cultures and languages and thus other ways of being (Bhabha 1994), in a post-colonial and post-racist context, what is dispensed and what is replaced?

Fanon (1967) writes, “any unilateral liberation is incomplete, and the gravest mistake would be to believe their automatic interdependence” (p. 13). He believes hegemonic powers are deconstructed and rebuilt on systems of meaning and language that develops our relationship with the biological and socio-historical conditions. These are the conditions he claims that make us human.

In Fanon's work sociogeny becomes more than simply a science of Man. It becomes a science for humanity. Analysis is correlative here to restoration. Sociogeny is a kind of pedagogy, the role of which is not to "educate" in the traditional way, but to enable Blacks to liberate themselves by acting against the structures that oppress them and deny their ontological weight (Maldonado-Torres, 2005, p. 158).

To gain this ontological weight is possible but perhaps only comprehensively in a new world of a new age. Fatnowna and Pickett (2002) suggest, "psychologists of broader vision see humanity as going from an age of anxiety (Horney) and power needs (Adler) to redevelop a sense of meaning (Frankl) and of human, environmental and ultimate relationship beyond the material (Assagioli) (as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2002, p. 222). They believe this integrative and transformative phase is in all areas of knowledge, in all aspects of life, playing itself out locally, at all levels due to the diversity of peoples and circumstances.

For this reason, culture-based programmes have been developed that endeavour to build up a body of indigenous Australian knowledge and professional practice... These programs also develop secondary working partnerships with relevant non-indigenous knowledge and practices, so that, overall, the information and skills base of participants reflects community needs and aspirations in an ongoing dynamic way (as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2002, p. 223).

Consequently this challenge provides non-Aboriginal people the opportunity to see how often and inappropriate conventional processes and principles of education can be, and what needs to be done to navigate these different knowledge systems successfully for cultural maintenance and development, so to dynamically inform each other. Underpinning this partnership approach has been the work influenced by health services in the United Kingdom and more specifically in the United States of America, where the focus has been on establishing a model to engender greater understanding of the "Other". This change in focus originated from the abysmal mortality rates after misdiagnosing when dealing with trauma and urgency, communication-in-crisis situations stimulated the need to attempt to improve and understand the clients using the health service system. The term Cultural Competency (CC) first began to appear in American health literature in the late 1980's with the notion of CC training be developed for all staff in health and related services to better serve culturally diverse patients and their families.

A cultural competency model for Australian Aboriginal Education

While the notion of cultural competency is currently under construction a frequently cited definition describes it as:

... ‘a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations’ (Cross, Bazron, Dennis & Isaacs, 1989 or 1999, cited for example by Campinha-Bacote, Yehle, & Langenkamp, 1996; King, Sims, & Osher, n.d.; National Association of Social Workers. National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity, 2001; The Lewin Group Inc., 2001). The process of becoming culturally competent is developmental in that practitioners, organisations and systems advance from *cultural destructiveness* toward *cultural proficiency* (Grote, 2008, p. 5).

Based on the work of Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989) nine principles governed the development of culturally competent programs as well as guiding values and principles for language access. Briefly these nine principles included elements of cultural respect, holistic approaches, inclusion of health, integral community control, focus on working together, local decision making, promoting good health, building health services and communities and accountability for health outcomes. The definition and conceptual framework included that:

Cultural competence requires organizations:

have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviours, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally

have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve

incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities (adapted from Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989).

Ideally programs included multicultural and multilingual staff. The application of this framework resulted in organisations able to respond effectively in a manner

acceptable to the unique cultural and linguistic needs of their clients. This opened the channel for greater communication therefore allowing clients to provide valuable information, possibly resulting in more accurate diagnosis hence life saving decisions being made. As Fatnowna and Pickett (2002) urge:

The transformation needs to be driven from all quarters so that students graduate into a situation where work is already being done with their organisations and colleagues, with policy and practices, and with cultural awareness and participation. This will mean that the ground is already prepared for the new practitioners, and support and participation mechanisms for them are in place (as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2002, p. 230).

The benefits of implementing cultural competence programs into organisational procedures and policies are many and profoundly diverse, ranging from improvements in infant mortality rates, student completion and graduation rates to lower incarceration, domestic violence and substance abuse rates. However there is still the danger that the multiple actualities of CC policy, although couched in classic social justice language, do not necessarily guarantee inclusion unless there is a ground swell of support at all level. This must become the new charter, a change in consciousness to instigate widespread Australian societal transformation, towards greater integrity and egalitarian ideals with equal access to all services, for all people, in a manner appropriate to their ways of being.

Cultural competency and its application to education

The requirement for students to graduate with Cultural Competence, prepared for clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is essential. Curtin University in conjunction with the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Allowance National Priority (Reserve) Fund grant, case managed under the auspices of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, established in 1995 an Aboriginal Curriculum Project with the key objective that all Curtin University undergraduate students, would have the opportunity to access to some degree Aboriginal Studies. This venture became the precursor to the current project now known as *Indigenising the Curriculum*, using the Cultural Competency model articulated in its vision through the 2008 Reconciliation Action Plan, endorsed by the Indigenous Governance Policy. The Action Plan recommended the establishment of genuine intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue between Aboriginal Studies and other

disciplines, committed to offering interdisciplinary first year foundation units for the benefit of Indigenous and non Indigenous students alike. Other Western Australian universities are expected to follow Curtin University's lead.

Concurrent to this, Universities Australia, the peak body representing 38 Australian universities in partnership with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council and the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations are currently undertaking a project to promote Indigenous cultural competency in Australian universities. This heralds the initiation of eventual widespread implementation from a trans-cultural or comparative viewpoint with a focus on Aboriginal people's emic perspectives. The consequence of this action could possibly be the most significant, even life saving, decision the Universities of Australia have embarked upon and I expect a significant flow-on effect to the primary and secondary education systems in Australia.

Suggestions for future research

On the basis of the research that I have conducted over the course of my PhD study there appears to be a significant number of areas that could gain from further exploration. In particular I feel these areas could include:

1. Incentives for improved Aboriginal Teacher Education programs and courses of study

Aboriginal students appear to have a greater propensity to learn when taught by teachers who apply the same world view and embed the conceptual knowledge in the appropriate context. Encouraging more Aboriginal people to apply to study in the Bachelor of Education program assisted by the provision of scholarships would be significantly beneficial.

2. Pragmatic understanding of Aboriginal Education for non-Indigenous educators

It appears many pre-service teachers frequently report that they feel insufficiently equipped or prepared to undertake the pedagogical requirements and skills needed to

operate effectively in a classroom with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Ensuring these units are presented in the first year of their education degree could possibly reduce this anxiety and better prepare graduating teachers.

3. Establishment of needs and logistical skills for neophyte teachers working in regional and remote communities

It appears that often non-Aboriginal teachers are ill-equipped to establish themselves successfully in many Aboriginal communities and may need assistance in understanding the cultural and social context of which they are entering into. As well teachers need to be able to sustain and provide for themselves and understand how to live in environments that are identified as needing specialised skills such as learning to drive a four wheel drive vehicle especially in difficult conditions such as mud, rivers and mountainous terrain. That graduates have senior first aid qualifications as well as know how to handle volatile social situations to name a few real scenarios.

Chapter summary

Chapter 9 returned to the research questions and listed the final outcomes in terms of what the study found when it tracked a group of at risk students participating in a new venture known as the Girls' Academy Yorgas Program. It provided a brief testimony of my personal experiences as the researcher and how I felt after I had managed to continue with the study so to write up the findings in fulfilment of a PhD dissertation. It discussed the study in the light of the current literature and its possible application to Aboriginal education. In addition, I suggested if the Girls' Academy Yorgas Program attracts future funding a school to possibly emulate could be Djarragun College as it is further along in its emergent, culturally engaging educational program, boarding and sporting facilities. Finally I looked at the emergence of the concept of cultural competency and the development of its philosophy in mainstream organisations, in terms of applying strategies to embed the flexible transcultural paradigm and its attendant role into workplaces at all levels.

Concluding remarks: “I wish there were more like them”

In Chapter 4 I wrote of The Island Affair, which came to prominence in 1989 when a small number of teachers, in attendance with the union, blew the whistle on discriminatory practices ingrained in Aboriginal education on The Island. For five years a legal battle was waged as the Department of Education attempted to cover up the entrenched practices in a court of law, determined by lawyers who were concerned primarily about procedural fairness and not necessarily about the appalling conditions many Aboriginal parents, teachers, student and communities were highlighting. In the October 1994 edition of the *Territory Educator*, the Secretary of the Australian Education Union NT Branch wrote in an article titled “[The Island] Dispute Settled” that, “all teachers should be appreciative of the determination of the small group of teachers and especially the two central figures who suffered extreme personal anguish over a long period of time. I wish there were more like them” (Young, 1994, p. 2).

As one of those two central figures, my claim is, and I *know* I speak for the first defendant Jean Illingworth, had transcultural competence frameworks, neoteric schooling and emergent mythopoetic curriculums in educational practice been established in educator’s workplaces, much of the incongruity that has occurred throughout the decades in Aboriginal education by non-Aboriginal administrators and extraneous teachers could have most possibly been averted. When Jean Illingworth and I were being referred to on the *ABC 7:30 Report* in 1990, we were being charged with insubordination and then later defamation for claiming that there were gross inadequacies and entrenched racist and nepotistic behaviour within the Department of Education in the Northern Territory. In 2009 Jean Illingworth re-appeared on the *ABC 7:30 Report*, this time as Principal of an Aboriginal College, recognised for achieving unprecedented success, enough to inspire a multinational company to invest over a million dollars in information technology infrastructure. Nothing had changed, she was still advocating and performing comparable feats to those in the 1990’s, the only difference, then maliciously castigated now publically lauded.

We, like many others bared the brunt of castigation because we confronted the Department of Education and asked for equal outcomes for the disenfranchised Aboriginal children and parents we lived and worked amongst. This research is a testimony to Jara Amarda and all those teachers and parents, black and white, who continued to challenge and seek culturally appropriate neoteric ways, in an attempt to give their children at least a chance to have a choice.

As for me, I know that writing this PhD has transformed me because I feel changed. I lugged this story around in my heart for a long time and now having documented it; feel released from a sad and wretched burden. Like I said at the start of this dissertation I wanted to posit my small unremarkable story. I felt culpable for the inequities' that existed in the education of many young Indigenous girls. Now you have read my words, I ask it becomes your story too. I carry with me a deep and profound hope, that collectively we can take the next step to triumph over dysfunctional injustice by transubstantiating the dominant educational discourse with culturally-sensitive emergent curriculum frameworks. Anything less is akin to enmity.

Epilogue

If you stay too long in the third world

You learn to hawk and spit like an old woman
you become unfit for dinner parties in the lands of the well fed
having dropped out of your original country into this space
from which the coast with its oceans and gardens and the parties on the terrace
the splash of green water over the bow of the yacht
are images projected on a screen whose unreality you represent
the other side of the coin whose gain is the loss you see all around

if you stay too long in the third world
death becomes a fact of life, the old die quickly
the young cannot count on being old
this termite death hollows out the roots of endeavor
as children leave toys you abandon your previous explanations

if you stay too long in the third world
it will fill the space in your psyche with a different discourse
you will begin to recognise the unfamiliar in the unfamiliar
the outline of a landscape in a pattern of dots
the faces of relations in the tragic and violent repetition of a song
the patterns of daily living in the holy steps of dance

if you stay too long in the third world
you will become accustomed to silence and observation
leading to understanding
to abundance and malnutrition immutably hand in hand
when that eager rational voice whose creature you are
whose instrument you had volunteered to become
grates like the radio on a bad day
you switch it off

if you stay too long in the third world
you will be unable to leave.

(Cataldi, 1985, p. 85)

Appendices

Glossary

Anglo-Celtic - cultures native to Britain and Ireland resulting in a diasporas movement to Australia.

Amandangwa - an expression used by the speakers of The Island to confirm an affirmation such as, “really?” or, “truely?”.

Awiyemba - to fight or fighting.

Barlese - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean time out or not able to be caught out in a game while in hiatus. A truce or an amnesty.

Black Fella - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean Aboriginal person.

Bloke - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean male or man.

Big mobs - colloquial Standard Australian English expression meaning lots of something.

Dumangkadirra - proper noun to describe non-Aboriginal people on The Island.

Dunny - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean outside toilet.

Fish. - colloquial term on The Island for boyfriend.

Language - the vernacular of any given geographical location.

Noongar or Nyoongar - the Aboriginal people belonging to the south west of Western Australia.

Nulla-nulla - a hunting stick made of hard wood with tapered ends to assist with digging. Also used by women for fighting.

The Island - the name of the island in northern Australia from which some chapters of the dissertation are told.

Shame - used in Aboriginal English to mean feeling embarrassed or shy.

Yakki - an expression used by the speakers of The Island to confirm a surprise or a disclosure such as, “look out!” or, “Oh dear!”.

Yella fella - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean person of mixed racial descent such as Chinese, Malaysian or non-Aboriginal with Aboriginal heritage.

Unna - used in Aboriginal English to affirm or agree with.

Vernacular - everyday speech, the mother tongue, defined on the basis of locality.

Yorgas - Noongar expression to mean woman or female.

Wadjulla or Wadjella - Noongar expression to mean non-Aboriginal person.

Warnumamalya - proper noun to describe non-Aboriginal people on The Island.

Western - dominant mainstream cultural group of European origin, predominantly Judeo-Christian beliefs and values system.

White Fella - colloquial Standard Australian English expression to mean non-Aboriginal person.

Appendix A – Staff Interview Schedule



Staff Interview Schedule

MACRO

1. Can you tell me about the place(s) where you grew up?
2. Can you describe to me what your childhood school experience was like?
3. Can you tell me who influenced you when you were growing up?
4. Have you brought any of these influences you learnt as a youngster into your adult life?
5. Can you explain your role in this college?

MESO

6. How do you organise what the students have to learn?
7. What strategies do you use so that learning makes sense to the students?
8. How do you think the students learn what you are teaching them?
9. Could you identify as 'special Aboriginal ways' that you incorporate in your daily role that encourages the student to relate to your style of teaching?
10. Do you connect the knowledge that the student brings to school, their out-of-school knowledge with their school knowledge? If so, how?
11. What do you think it is that you do that helps the students remember what you have taught them?

MICRO

12. In your opinion is the present way of teaching Aboriginal students at Clontarf Aboriginal College effective? If so how and if not why not?
13. If you had the opportunity to change the current system what would you do?

Appendix B – Student Interview Schedule

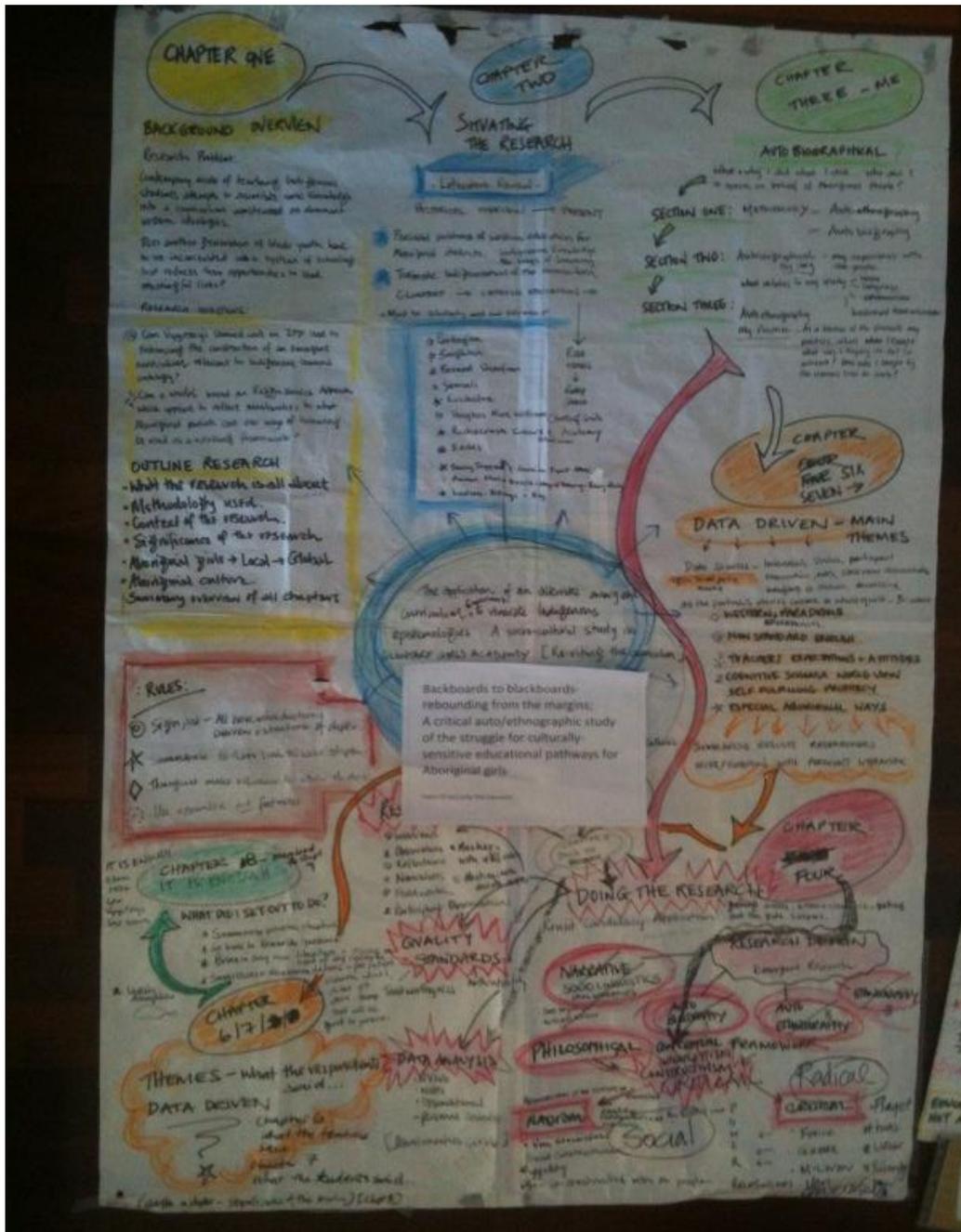


Interview Schedule for Students

Questions to the Students

1. Did you have favourite subjects at school and if so what made them your favourite subjects?
2. Did you have subjects you didn't like and if so what was it that you didn't like about them?
3. When you are learning new things how do you prefer to learn them?
4. Did you prefer some teachers styles of teaching compared to other teachers style? If so can you give me some examples of what you prefer?
5. If you were teaching someone something, how would you do it?
6. Do you think that teachers try and learn about your out-of-school knowledge so that they can use something you already know about to link it to your new in-school knowledge to help you learn and remember? If so can you give me some examples of this?
7. What do you do to help you remember things?
8. Did teachers questioning style help you or get in the way your learning?
9. When you felt like quitting school what made you stay?
10. Tell me about how you felt being apart of the Clontarf Girls (Basketball Foundation) Academy?

Appendix E – Conceptual Framework Map – Photo 3



(McCarthy, 2010)

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